



Critical Theory
Lecture and Seminar Course

Spring 2015 (Semester IIb)
BA Philosophy (third year)
University of Groningen, Faculty of Philosophy

Tuesdays, 15-18, Room Omega

INSTRUCTOR

Dr Titus Stahl

E-mail: u.t.r.stahl@rug.nl (PGP Key ID: 5A51 42B4 2251 5C07)

Phone: +31503636152

Office Hours: Wednesday, 10-11 am., Philosophy Building, Room 1.21 (*Please e-mail me in advance as I occasionally might be out of office due to other commitments. We can also arrange an appointment for a different time if required.*)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on the critical social theory of the “Frankfurt School” and its subsequent development. Building on the work of Marx, Freud and Lukács, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School was conceived in the 1920s as a research program that aimed to explain the persistence of social unfreedom in modern societies by drawing on insights from ideology theory, cultural theory, psychoanalysis and philosophy. Its main representatives, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, subsequently developed a radical philosophical critique of modern society and modern thought which they see as fundamentally determined by an imperative of domination which encompasses social and personal relations as well as the relation of humans to nature. According to this view, the rise of totalitarianism in the 20th century is essentially connected to the conceptions of subjectivity, nature and reason on which not only liberal societies draw but which are also part of modern philosophy. These premises entail considerable consequences not only for political thought, but also for moral philosophy, ethics and aesthetics.

The claims of the Frankfurt School have subsequently been fundamentally revised by other theorists especially in regard to the normative foundations of critical theory. In the course, we will discuss in particular Jürgen Habermas’s proposal to describe the potential for non-oppressive social rationalization in terms of the practice of communication and Axel Honneth’s critical theory that is based on a reconstruction of intersubjective relations of recognition. The course will focus on getting a clear understanding of the main claims of historical and contemporary critical theories, on their normative impact on our contemporary thinking about justice and the good life and on whether they can contribute insights to current debates in philosophy.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Topic specific objectives:

- knowledge about the tradition of critical theory as one of the major currents of 20th century social and cultural thought
- the ability to critically examine arguments in social and political philosophy and in cultural theory from the perspective of critical theories
- the ability to reason about current social and cultural issues philosophically with the help of critical theories

General philosophical objectives:

- to improve skills in identifying and evaluating philosophical arguments
- to improve skills in finding relevant literature and to critically evaluate the arguments of different theories
- to improve skills in communicating philosophical arguments in written form
- to apply philosophical theories to issues of political relevance

COURSE FORMAT AND GENERAL RULES

This course will have the format of a weekly 80-minute lecture, followed by an 80-minute seminar. This is an intensive course that requires you to read a lot of literature, both during the course and while preparing your essay.

I expect to enjoy this course very much and I hope that you will, too. To maximize the chances of this happening, there are a few ground rules in terms of obligations that we have towards each other: I accept the obligation to arrive on time and well-prepared to each session. I will do my utmost to design the course material and my contributions in a way which leads your learning as much as possible and to structure the discussion according to your interests. You can approach me about all questions of an academic or administrative nature in person and (to a reasonable extent) via e-mail. I will communicate expectations clearly and will evaluate you fairly. My goal is to prepare you all for finishing the course with an excellent result.

In return, I expect from you to regularly attend all sessions, to excuse yourself in person or via e-mail in case you cannot attend a session, to arrive on time, to read all the required material, to come prepared with relevant questions and objections and to participate in the discussion with your fellow students. I also expect you to refrain from any kind of academic dishonesty and from any behavior which makes it more difficult for fellow students to learn or which makes them feel uncomfortable.

I am aware that students have different requirements that have to be met in order for them to be able to learn efficiently, that they face different challenges in relation to disability and educational needs and that the general rules of this course might therefore not be best designed to ensure everyone's success. If you think you may have reason to ask for a modification of the course rules for your specific case, please do not hesitate to talk to me in private.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXAMINATION

In order to earn credit points, you will have to fulfill **all** the following three requirements:

- Answer five reading questions (ungraded): Prior to each session, I will put up a number of questions regarding the literature **on Nestor** to which you should pay particular attention while preparing the text. You will have to answer one of these questions online before the start of the Tuesdays lecture. Usually, one sentence will be enough to answer the question, so that this is no extra work for you beyond preparing the text (**maximum 50 words**). You will have to do this at least for five of the seven sessions.

There are no wrong answers here, but I will check whether you made a serious attempt to answer the question in your own words. Please no answers consisting only of quotations!

- Prepare one introduction to a text (30% of the final grade) in advance of the session where that text is discussed. It should be one page (**maximum 450 words**). An introduction should make clear:
 - what you consider to be the main claim of the text
 - what you consider the main arguments the author advances for this claim and a short summary of them
 - if applicable, how this claim relates to other literature we've read in the course
 - if applicable, what points you did not understand in the text
 - if applicable, how the arguments of the author could be applied to social phenomena today
 - if applicable, objections you have against the author's claims

We will distribute the introductions among the course members in the first session so that for each text, there is roughly an equal number of students. During the session in which we discuss the text, you will serve as an expert and be expected to play an active role in class discussion.

Please submit your introduction **via e-mail** by **2pm** at the latest on the day of class.

- Write a final essay (70% of the grade). This is a 2,500 word (maximum) essay to be written during weeks 8 to 10 of the quarter, with a **final submission date of June 23, 2015**. You will have to choose from a list of essay questions which I will hand out in advance, together with guidelines on how to write the essay. While writing the essay, I will be available for you to discuss the structure of your essay and to help you with finding relevant literature.

The resit date is July 10, 2015. Participating in the resit presupposes that you submitted an essay for the original deadline.

CREDIT POINTS

The course has 5 EC. The resulting 140 hours are allocated as follows:

21h	Course attendance
85h	Readings (332 pages) of medium to high difficulty
4h	Preparing one introduction
30h	Writing the final essay

READINGS

Due to regulations on copyright, I cannot provide a course reader nor put the texts for the course online on Nestor. You will therefore have to acquire all necessary texts yourself. In the first session, we will discuss how to best do this so that it is not too much work. I strongly recommend buying the Stanford edition of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as we will read two chapters from that book.

The readings for the first session will be made available on Nestor.

The mandatory readings in the course will focus on primary texts from the history of critical theory. However, I strongly advise you to voluntarily do some more reading.

- An excellent introduction into critical theory until the 1970's is David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Polity, 1980.
- For Adorno's thought, I recommend Brian O'Connor, *Adorno*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.
- There are also *Cambridge Companions* to Critical Theory, Adorno, and Habermas which are worth looking into.
- A great independent account of critical theory is Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

On the syllabus, I have indicated which chapters of Held's book can be read in parallel to the lectures.

SYLLABUS

14 April 2015: Session I – The Origins of Critical Theory

Mandatory reading for the seminar: Lukács, György. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. London: Merlin Press, 1971, pp. 83-110 and 134-148.

(Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm> and <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/lukacs2.htm> (Read the latter document only beginning from “As everywhere in classical philosophy it would be a mistake...”))

Suggested reading for the lecture: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, chapters 1 and 2.

Further literature connected to the topics of the lecture:

- Marx, Karl, Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology with Selections from Parts Two and Three, Together with Marx’s “Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy” Part One*. New York: International Publishers, 1970.
- Marx, Karl. “On the Jewish Question”, in *Early Writings*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Marx, Karl. “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof” in Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Harmondsworth [etc.]; London: Penguin ; New Left Review, 1976, volume I.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1976.
- Korsch, Karl. *Marxism and Philosophy*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Bronner, Stephen. *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists*. Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1994.
- Horkheimer, Max: “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research”, in *Between Philosophy and Social Science Selected Early Writings*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993.

Further literature connected to the seminar:

- Arato, Andrew, and Paul Breines. *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1979.
- Löwy, Michael. *Georg Lukacs - From Romanticism to Bolshevism*. Translated by P. Camiller, London: Verso Books, 1979.
- Jay, Martin. *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*. Cambridge (MA): University of California Press, 1984, chap. 2.
- Larrain, J. “Lukács’ Concept of Ideology.” In *Lukács Today*, edited by Tom Rockmore, 52–69. *Sovietica* 51. Springer Netherlands, 1988. http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-009-2897-8_5.

21 April 2015: Session II – The Philosophy of Critical Theories I (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse)

Mandatory reading for the seminar: Horkheimer, Max. "Traditional and Critical Theory." In *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, 1st edition., New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1975, 188-243.

Suggested reading for the lecture: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Further literature for the lecture:

- Horkheimer, Max. "Materialism and Metaphysics." In *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell, 1st edition., 10–46. New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1975.
- Horkheimer, Max. *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995.
- Berendzen, J.C. "Max Horkheimer." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2013., 2013. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/horkheimer/>.
- Adorno, Theodor. *Negative Dialectics*. London: Routledge, 1973.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. New York: University Press, 2005.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*. London: Ashgate Pub Co, 1981.
- O'Connor, Brian. *Adorno*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.
- Zuidervaart, Lambert. "Theodor W. Adorno." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2011., 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/adorno/>.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. Anv edition. Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1999.

28 April 2015: Session III – Modernity, History and Progress

Mandatory reading for the seminar:

- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken, 1969, 253–264.
- "The Concept of Enlightenment" in Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. 1st ed. Stanford University Press, 2002, 1-34.

Suggested reading for the lecture: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, chapters 5 and 8.

Further literature for the lecture:

- Löwy, Michael. *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History."* Translated by Chris Turner. London ; New York: Verso, 2006.
- Horkheimer, Max. *Critique of Instrumental Reason*. Translated by Matthew O'Connell. Reprint. London ; New York: Verso, 2013.
- Benjamin, Andrew. *Walter Benjamin and History*. Annotated edition edition. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. New Ed. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2002.

12 May 2015: Session IV – The Philosophy of Critical Theories II - Habermas

Mandatory reading for the seminar:

- Habermas, Jürgen. “Knowledge and Human Interests - A General Perspective.” In *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro, 2nd Printing October 1972 edition., 301–317. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972.
- Habermas, Jürgen. “An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason.” In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Translated by Frederick G. Lawrence. Reprint edition. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1990., 294-326.

Suggested reading for the lecture: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, chapters 9, 10 and 11.

Further literature for the lecture:

- Cooke, Maeve. *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas’s Pragmatics*. MIT Press, 1997.
- Finlayson, James G. *Habermas. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Habermas, Jürgen. “Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures.” In *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy, 95–129. Cambridge: Polity, 1979.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
- McCarthy, Thomas. *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. Boston: MIT Press, 1978.
- Outwaite, William. *Habermas. A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity, 1994.

19 May 2015: Session V – Culture and Art

Mandatory reading for the seminar: “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. 1st ed. Stanford University Press, 2002, 94-137

Suggested reading for the lecture: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, chapter 3.

Further literature for the lecture:

- Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 217–52. New York: Schocken, 1969.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Edited by Robert Hullot-Kentor. 1 edition. Minneapolis, Minn.: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991.
- Menke, Christoph. *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999.
- Bowie, Andrew. *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*. 1 edition. Polity, 2013.
- Zuidervaart, Lambert. *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993.

26 May 2015: Session VI – Society

Mandatory reading for the seminar: Habermas, Jürgen. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, Volume II, pages 119–148, 312–331 373–378, 391–403.

Suggested reading for the lecture: Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, chapter 9 and 10.

Further literature for the lecture:

- Adorno, Theodor W. “Is Marx Obsolete?” *Diogenes* 16, no. 64 (1968): 1–16.
- Adorno, Theodor. *Introduction to Sociology*. 1 edition. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Legitimation Crisis*. Translated by Thomas Mccarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.
- Habermas, Jürgen. “Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures.” In *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity, 1979.
- Honneth, Axel. *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*. Translated by Kenneth Baynes. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1993.
- Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1995.

2 June: Session VII – Morality and Recognition

Mandatory reading for the seminar:

- Honneth, Axel. “Recognition and Moral Obligation.” *Social Research* 64, no. 1 (1997): 16–35.
- Honneth, Axel. “Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition.” *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 187–201.
doi:10.1177/0090591792020002001.

Further literature for the lecture:

- Adorno, Theodor. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. London ; New York: Verso, 2006.
- Freyenhagen, Fabian. *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Habermas, Jürgen. “Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification.” In *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 43–115. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 1990.