

Advanced Introduction to Critical Social Theory

Description

This course is intended as an advanced introduction to critical social theory. As an introduction, the course attempts to bridge the demands of breadth (the attempt to cover the entire field) with the demands of coherence (the attempt to make the field understandable to the novice). At the same time, this is not a course in classical or contemporary social theory. While a degree of knowledge of both classical and contemporary social theory is presupposed, an introductory course cannot expect such knowledge. As a course in critical social theory, three separate objects must be kept in mind at all times; *viz.*, the changing meanings of ‘critical’, ‘social’, and ‘theory’. This suggests two claims: first, critical social theory is distinct from other forms of critical theory (philosophical, political, literary, etc), yet it remains in dialogue with them; and, second, that critical social theory must be cognizant of its foundations and critical reflect upon itself. A critical approach cannot leave itself unexamined. Thus, in addition to the substantive claims made by each theorist studied, we will also study these meta-theoretical categories.

The course is divided into four sections. The first section (“Preliminaries”) is intended as an orientation in critical theory, focusing upon its historical origins, its relation to modernity and its epistemological assumptions. The second section (“Classics”) re-examines the classic texts of social theory in light of critical social theory identifying the contributions made by each to critical social theory. This second section also serves as a crash-course for those who do not have a foundation in classical social theory. The third section (“Transitions”) acts as a hinge between classical and contemporary thought looking at, first, a moderately neglected figure in classical social theory (Georg Simmel) and, second, the feminist critique of social theory. The final section (“Contemporaries”) surveys recent trends and approaches within critical social theory.

Requirements

In addition to introducing critical social theory, this course introduces the student to the task of reading difficult theoretical texts. The best way to bring these three objectives together is through the practice of exegesis. An exegesis of about fifteen hundred words on a single reading is required in each of the second (“Classics”), third (“Transitions”) and fourth (“Contemporaries”) sections, which is to be handed in before the beginning of class no later than one week after the week in which that reading was done. The student may *not* choose readings from the final week of either semester. Because it is expected that the student will improve throughout the course, each assignment is weighed progressively more.

Beyond learning to read theoretical texts, the student is also expected to be able to compare, contrast and evaluate concepts, ideas, approaches and theories relative to one another. As such, each half of the course is capped-off with a take-home exam consisting of three questions, two of which the student is required to answer. Unlike the exegetical exercises, there is no minimum nor maximum length. The student is expected to answer the question to the fullest of their ability regardless of the length of the answer. (Within reason, of course!) The exam is to be handed in no later than noon on the last day of the exam period.

The grade breaks down as follows:

Exegesis I	15% (Lectures 6-11)
Exegesis II	20% (Lectures 12-15)
Exegesis III	25% (Lectures 16-24)
Take-Home I	20% (Lectures 1-11)
Take-Home II	20% (Lectures 12-24)

All written work is to be submitted in twelve-point Times New Roman on regular letter-sized paper with margins of one inch on all four sides.

Required Texts

All readings will be available on reserve in the library. Nonetheless, it is recommended that you obtain copies of the books which will we read in full and the coursepack, all of which are available in the bookstore.

- Hannah Arendt ([1958]1998) *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Seyla Benhabib *et al* (1994) *Feminist Contentions*. London: Routledge.
- Michel Foucault ([1966]1994) *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Karl Marx ([1867]1990) *Capital*, vol. 1. New York: Penguin.

Where they exist, other editions are permissible. However, it is the student's responsibility to ensure they are reading the correct pages.

Academic Offenses

Students are expected to be familiar with the relevant policies concerning academic conduct. Violations of these rules (for instance, plagiarism) shall be treated seriously. The source of much plagiarism is ignorance of proper citation practices. It is recommended that students familiarize themselves with a recognized style guide: for instance, the MLA (Modern Languages Association), Chicago, or the APA (American Psychological Association). *Students found plagiarizing will **fail** the course.*

Preliminaries

1. Introduction – Social Theory and Sociology

Jürgen Habermas ([1967]1988) “The Dualism of the Natural and Cultural Sciences” in *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences (1996) “The Historical Construction of the Social Sciences: From the Eighteenth Century to 1945” in *Open the Social Sciences*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Peter Wagner (1990) “Science of Society Lost: On the Failure to Establish Sociology in Europe During the ‘Classical’ Period” in *Discourses on Society* 15: 219-45.

Lynn McDonald (1997) “Classical Social Theory With the Women Founders Included” in *Reclaiming the Sociological Classics*, C. Camic (ed). Malden, Mass: Blackwell.

Recommended

C. Wright Mills ([1959]2000) “The Promise”, “Grand Theory” and “Abstracted Empiricism” in *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

R.W. Connell (1997) “Why is Classical Theory Classical?” in *American Journal of Sociology* 102(6): 1511-1557.

2. Enlightenment, Modernity and Autonomy

Immanuel Kant ([1784]1991) “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” in *Political Writings*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP.

Michel Foucault (1984) “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon.

Cornelius Castoriadis ([1964-5]1991) “Power, Politics, Autonomy” in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Claude Lefort ([1983]1988) “The Question of Democracy” in *Democracy and Political Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Recommended

Johann P. Arnason (1989) “The Imaginary Constitution of Modernity” in *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 86: 323-37.

Jean L. Cohen (2005) “The Self-Institution of Society and Representative Government” in *Thesis Eleven* 80: 9-37.

Brian C.J. Singer (1986) “History and The Revolutionary Imaginary” and “Secularization and Representation: The Discovery of Society” in *Society, Theory and the French Revolution*. London: MacMillan.

3. Traditional and Critical Theory

Talcott Parsons (1964) “The Present Position and Prospects of Systemic Theory in Sociology” and “The Prospects of Social Theory” in *Essays in Sociological Theory*. New York: The Free Press.

Max Horkheimer ([1968]1999) “What is Critical Theory?” in *Critical Theory*. New York: Continuum.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno ([1944]2002) “The Concept of Enlightenment” in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New York: Continuum.

Recommended

Roland Robertson and Bryan S. Turner (1989) “Talcott Parsons and Modern Social Theory – An Appreciation” in *Theory, Culture & Society* 6: 539-58.

Martin Jay (1973) *The Dialectical Imagination*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

4. Epistemology I – Realism and the Dialectic

Louis Althusser ([1965]1969) “Contradiction and Overdetermination” and “On the Materialist Dialectic” in *For Marx*. London: Penguin.

Nicos Poulantzas ([1968]1978) “Introduction” in *Political Power & Social Classes*. London: Verso.

Roy Bhaskar (1989) “What is Critical Realism?” and “Dialectics, Materialism and Theory of Knowledge” in *Reclaiming Reality*. London: Verso.

Recommended

Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio, eds. (1996) *Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory*. Hanover: Westlayan University Press.

Gregory Elliott (1987) *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*. London: Verso.

Jose Lopez and Gary Potter, eds. (2001) *After Postmodernism: An Introduction to Critical Realism*. London: Athlone.

Warren Montag (2003) *Louis Althusser*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

5. Epistemology II – Nominalism and Perspectivism

Friedrich Nietzsche ([1873]1999) “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP.

Michel Foucault ([1971]1984) “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon.

Georges Canguilhem (1988) “The Role of Epistemology in the Contemporary History of Science” in *Ideology and Rationality in the History of the Life Sciences*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) “Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment” in *Black Feminist Thought*. London: Routledge.

Recommended

Friedrich Nietzsche ([1874]1980) *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History of Life*. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Thomas Osborn and Nikolas Rose, eds. (1998) “Special Issue on Georges Canguilhem” in *Economy and Society* 27(2/3).

Classics

6. Karl Marx I – The ‘Younger’ Marx

Karl Marx ([1843]1964) “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” in *Early Writings*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Karl Marx ([1844]1964) “Alienated Labour”, “The Relationship of Private Property”, “Private Property and Labour”, “Private Property and Communism”, “Critique of Hegel’s

Dialectic and General Philosophy” from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in Early Writings*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Karl Marx ([1845]1998) “Feurbach” in *The German Ideology*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Karl Marx ([1857-8]1993) “Introduction” in *Grundrisse*. New York: Penguin.

Karl Marx ([1859]1996) “‘Preface’ to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*” in *Later Political Writings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP.

7. Karl Marx II – The ‘Older’ Marx

Karl Marx ([1867]1990) “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret”, “The General Formula for Capital”, “Contradictions in the General Formula”, “The Labour Process and the Valorization Process”, “The Concept of Relative Surplus-Value”, “Co-Operation”, “The Factory”, “The Struggle Between Worker and Machine”, “Absolute and Relative Surplus Value”, “Simple Reproduction”, “The Progressive Production of a Relative Surplus Population or Industrial Reserve Army”, “Different Forms of Existence of the Relative Surplus Population. The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”, “So-Called Primitive Accumulation” in *Capital*, vol. 1. New York: Penguin.

Karl Marx ([1863-1866?]1990) “Results of the Immediate Process of Production” in *Capital*, vol. 1. New York: Penguin. (Pages 1019-1049)

Recommended

Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar ([1968]1970) *Reading Capital*. London: New Left Books.

Antonio Negri (1989) *Marx Beyond Marx*. New York: Autonomedia.

Anthony Cutler *et al* (1977-8) *Marx’s Capital and Capitalism Today*, 2 vols. London: Routledge.

G.A. Cohen ([1978]2000) *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, expanded ed. Princeton: Princeton UP.

8. Ferdinand Tönnies – Romanticism and Culture

Ferdinand Tönnies ([1887]1955) “General Statement of the Main Concepts” in *Community and Association*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ferdinand Tönnies ([1931]1955) “Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft” in *Community and Association*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

9. Emile Durkheim I – Sociocentrism

Emile Durkheim ([1893]1984) “The Method of Determining This Function”, “Mechanical Solidarity, or Solidarity by Similarities” and “Solidarity by Similarities” in *The Division of Labour in Society*. New York: The Free Press.

Emile Durkheim ([1902]1984) “Preface to the Second Edition” in *The Division of Labour in Society*. New York: The Free Press.

Emile Durkheim ([1895]1964) “What is a Social Fact?” and “Rules for the Observation of Social Facts” in *The Rules of the Sociological Method*. New York: The Free Press.

10. Emile Durkheim II – Sociology of the Sacred

Emile Durkheim ([1912]1995) “Subject of the Study: Religious Sociology and the Theory of Knowledge”, “Origin of the Notion of Totemic Principle, or Mana”, “The Negative Cult and Its Functions”, “The Piacular Rites and the Ambiguity of the Notion of the Sacred” and “Conclusion” in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. New York: The Free Press.

Recommended

Steven Lukes (1975) *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Works*. London: Penguin.

Frank Pearce (2001) *The Radical Durkheim*, 2nd ed. Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press.

11. Max Weber – Interpretative Sociology

Max Weber (1949) “The Meaning of ‘Ethical Neutrality’ in Sociology and Economics” and “‘Objectivity’ in Social Science and Social Policy” in *Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: The Free Press.

Max Weber (1978) “Basic Sociological Concepts” in *Economy and Society*, vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Recommended

Wolfgang J. Mommsen (1989) *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber: Collected Essays*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Charles Turner (1992) *Modernity and Politics in the Work of Max Weber*. London: Routledge

Transitions

12. Georg Simmel I – Sociology of Culture

Georg Simmel ([1917]1950) “The Field of Sociology” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: The Free Press.

Georg Simmel (1971) “Conflict”, “The Stranger”, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” and “The Conflict of Modern Culture” in *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Georg Simmel (1991) “Money in Modern Culture” in *Theory, Culture and Society* 8: 17-31.

13. Georg Simmel II – Philosophy of Money

Georg Simmel ([1907]2004) “Individual Freedom” and “The Style of Life” in *The Philosophy of Money*, 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

14. Feminism I – Subjugation, Sex and Gender

Simone de Beauvoir ([1949]1952) “The Data of Biology”, “The Psychoanalytic Point of View”, “The Point of View of Historical Materialism” and “The Independent Woman” in *The Second Sex*. New York: Bantam Books

Denise Riley (2003) “Does Sex Have a History” and “Bodies, Identities, Feminisms” in *Am I That Name?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Recommended

- G.W.F. Hegel ([1807]1977) “The Truth of Self-Certainty” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Alexandre Kojève ([1947]1980) “In Place of An Introduction” in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

15. Feminism II – From Bourgeois to Radical

- Betty Friedan ([1963]2001) “The Problem That Has No Name” and “A New Life Plan For Women” in *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Kate Millet (1969) “Instances of Sexual Politics” and “Theory of Sexual Politics” in *Sexual Politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Shulamith Firestone ([1970]2003) “The Dialectic of Sex”, “On American Feminism” and “The Ultimate Revolution: Demands, Speculations” in *The Dialectic of Sex*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- bell hooks (1981) “Racism and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability” and “Black Women and Feminism” in *Ain't I A Woman?* Boston: South End Press.

Contemporaries

16. Hannah Arendt I – Public and Private, Labor and Work

- Hannah Arendt ([1958]1998) “Parts I-IV” in *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

17. Hannah Arendt II – Action and the Modern Age

- Hannah Arendt ([1958]1998) “Parts V-VI” in *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

18. Michel Foucault I – Knowledge and Representation

- Michel Foucault ([1966]1994) “Part I” in *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books.

19. Michel Foucault II – Beyond Representation?

- Michel Foucault ([1966]1994) “Part II” in *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books.

Recommended

- Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beatrice Han ([1998]2002) *Foucault's Critical Project*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

20. Jürgen Habermas – Critical Theory of Democracy

- Jürgen Habermas ([1981]1987) “The Uncoupling of System and Lifeworld” and “The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society” in *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Jürgen Habermas ([1988]1996) “Popular Sovereignty as Procedure” and “Citizenship and National Identity” in *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT.

Jürgen Habermas ([1992]1996) “A Model of the Circulation of Political Power” and “Civil Society, Public Opinion, and Communicative Power” in *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT.

Jürgen Habermas ([1994]1996) “Postscript” in *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT.

21. Slavoj Zizek and Gilles Deleuze – Post-Marxist Marxisms

Slavoj Zizek “Foreword to the Second Edition” in *For They Know Not What They Do*, 2nd ed. London: Verso.

Kojin Karatani (2003) “What is Transcritique?” in *Transcritique*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Slavoj Zizek “Dialectical Materialism at the Gates” in *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari ([1972]1983) “The Desiring-Machines” in *Anti-Oedipus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Recommended

Jodi Dean (2006) *Zizek’s Politics*. London: Routledge.

Slavoj Zizek (2004) *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. London: Routledge.

Eugene W. Holland (1999) *Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus*. London: Routledge.

Brian Massumi (1992) *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT.

22. Pierre Bourdieu I – Introduction: Habitus, Capital and Field

Pierre Bourdieu ([1980]1990) “Critique of Theoretical Reason” in *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Pierre Bourdieu ([1987]1990) “Fieldwork in Philosophy” in *In Other Words*. Stanford: Stanford UP.

Pierre Bourdieu ([1983]1993) Extract from “The Field of Cultural Production” in *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia UP. (Pages 29-46)

Pierre Bourdieu (2005) “Introduction” in *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

23. Pierre Bourdieu II – The Sociology of Sociology

Pierre Bourdieu (1991) “Symbolic Power and the Political Field” in *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP.

Pierre Bourdieu ([1997]2000) “The Historicity of Reason” and “Symbolic Violence and Political Struggles” in *Pascalian Meditations*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Pierre Bourdieu (2004) “A World Apart” and “Objectivating the Subject of Objectivation” in *Science of Science and Reflexivity*.

Recommended

Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J.D. Wacquant (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

24. Feminism III – Postmodern and Beyond

Seyla Benhabib *et al* (1994) *Feminist Contentions*. London: Routledge.

25. Conclusion – Critical Social Theory

David Couzens Hoy (2004) “Introduction” and “Postscript: On Deconstructive Genealogy” in *Critical Resistance*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Steven Seidman (1991) “The End of Sociological Theory” *Sociological Theory* 9(2): 131-45.

Steven Seidman (1991) “Postmodern Anxiety: The Politics of Epistemology” in *Sociological Theory* 9(2): 180-90.