

PHIL 26101-1: The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School

Department of Philosophy
The College of Wooster
Spring 2021

Professor: Sid Simpson
Teaching Apprentice: Ryan Curnow

Course Information:

TTh 7:30pm - 8:50pm in Ruth Williams 60 (*first two weeks on Zoom*)

Contact Information:

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Office Hours: TBA, meetings will be held over Zoom

Course Description:

In the early twentieth century, a group of intellectuals broadly known as the Frankfurt School sought to move beyond standard class-based (i.e. Marxist) approaches in social analysis to investigate the unique challenges posed by capitalism, modern bureaucracy and mass politics. Against the backdrop of Nazism, Stalinism and monopoly capitalism, the Frankfurt School asked two questions: How did we get here? And, Where does emancipation lie? Influenced by Hegel, Marx, Weber, Nietzsche and Freud, they drew from a wide array of intellectual disciplines and theoretical approaches in an effort to diagnose the ruined, pathological world of modernity. Their studies – which go under the general name of “Critical Theory” – were among the first that can be properly labeled interdisciplinary, encompassing insights from numerous intellectual approaches. By the time of their mature works the Frankfurt School no longer referred to their work as philosophy, politics, sociology, aesthetics or psychology; it was, simply, “Theory.” The course will consider the strengths and limitations of Critical Theory through close readings of the school’s seminal texts, including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason*, and Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* and *Essay on Liberation*, among other texts. Many of the readings assume familiarity with ‘modern’ social theory, particularly Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Weber, as well as ‘contemporary’ thought.

Course Policies:

Students are required to complete all assigned readings, participate actively during class meetings (see section B), submit weekly response papers, and write two essays.

A. COVID-19

We are currently living in the ominous shadow of the Coronavirus global pandemic (COVID-19). Given the circumstances, The College of Wooster is working to provide a rigorous and edifying college experience while implementing measures to reduce risk of infection and spread of the virus. *To this end, students will be expected to wear face*

masks, to practice (6') social distancing, to thoroughly sanitize one's hands, to remain vigilant for symptoms of viral infection, etc. If the threat of COVID-19 becomes too menacing, this course will retreat to online instruction. The course would then be held synchronously on the Zoom platform with assignment submissions via email.

B. Required Texts

The following texts can be found at the Wilson Bookstore or any number of online retailers. With a minimal amount of digging, enterprising individuals may find the PDFs of these books floating around on the internet.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Stanford, Stanford University Press. 2002.

Horkheimer, Max. *Eclipse of Reason*. Mansfield Centre, Martino Publishing. 2013.

Marcuse, Herbert. *An Essay on Liberation*. Boston, Beacon Press. 1969.

Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man*. Boston, Beacon Press. 1964.

All other remaining readings will be uploaded to Moodle.

C. Grading

Grades will be as follows:

Participation/Attendance	20%
Weekly Response Papers	30%
Paper One (4-5 pp)	20%
Paper Two (6-8 pp)	30%

The grading scale is standard:

A: 93-100	C+: 77-79
A-: 90-92	C: 73-76
B+: 87-89	C-: 70-72
B: 83-86	D: 60-69
B-: 80-82	F: 59 or below

Late assignments will be deducted one third of a letter grade (e.g., from a B+ to a B) for every 24 hours that the assignment is late.

Please note: This semester is unlike other semesters, and will inevitably present a number of challenges for us. If, for some reason, you know you will be unable to submit one of the essays on time, please let me know *before it is due*. If you would like to negotiate a reasonable extension (e.g. an extra day or two) please contact me *before the day that it is due*.

No incompletes will be given for this class.

Academic Honesty and the Code of Academic Integrity

The College's understanding and expectations in regard to issues of academic honesty are fully articulated in the Code of Academic Integrity as published in *The Scot's Key* and form an essential part of the implicit contract between the student and the College. The Code provides a framework at Wooster to help students develop and exhibit honesty in their academic work. You are expected to know and abide by the rules of the institution as described in *The Scot's Key* and the *Handbook of Selected College Policies*.

Learning Center: Academic Support and Disabilities.

The Learning Center (ext. 2595) offers services designed to help students improve their overall academic performance. Sessions are structured to promote principles of effective learning and academic management. Any student on campus may schedule sessions at the Learning Center. The Learning Center also offers a variety of services and accommodations to students with disabilities based on appropriate documentation, nature of disability, and academic need. In order to initiate services, students should meet with the director of the Learning Center, at the start of the semester to discuss reasonable accommodations.

Schedule of Readings:

January 19th (T): Introduction, no reading assigned.

January 21st (Th): Benhabib, Seyla. "Below the Asphalt Lies the Beach," *The Boston Review*. and Gordon, Peter E. "The Scars of Democracy: Theodor Adorno and the Crises of Liberalism," *The Nation*.

January 26th (T): Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "Preface" (all 3 versions), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

January 28th (Th): Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "The Concept of Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

February 2nd (T): Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

February 4th (Th): Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "Excursus II: Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

February 9th (T): Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

February 11th (Th): Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

February 16th (T): Debrief/flex day for *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

February 18th (Th): Debrief/flex day for *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

February 23rd (T): Horkheimer, Max. “The Revolt of Nature,” *Eclipse of Reason*.

February 25th (Th): Horkheimer, Max. “Rise and Decline of the Individual,” *Eclipse of Reason*.

March 2nd (T): Horkheimer, Max. “On the Concept of Philosophy,” *Eclipse of Reason*.

March 4th (Th): Adorno, Theodor. “Resignation,” *Essays on the Culture Industry*.

March 8th (M): **Midterm Paper due by email no later than 5pm Eastern to ssimpson@wooster.edu and rcurnow22@wooster.edu**

March 9th (T): *Rest Day – No Class*

March 11th (Th): Aronson, Ronald. “Marcuse Today,” *Boston Review*, and Marcuse, Herbert. “The New Forms of Control,” *One-Dimensional Man*.

March 16th (Th): Marcuse, Herbert. “The Closing of the Political Universe,” *One-Dimensional Man*.

March 18th (T): Marcuse, Herbert. “The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation,” *One-Dimensional Man*.

March 23rd (Th): Marcuse, Herbert. “The Closing of the Universe of Discourse,” *One-Dimensional Man*.

March 25th (Th): Marcuse, Herbert. “Negative Thinking: The Defeated Logic of Protest,” *One-Dimensional Man*.

March 30th (T): Marcuse, Herbert. “Preface,” “Introduction,” and “A Biological Foundation for Socialism?,” *An Essay on Liberation*.

April 1st (Th): Marcuse, Herbert. “The New Sensibility,” *An Essay on Liberation*.

April 6th (T): Marcuse, Herbert. “Subverting Forces – in Transition,” *An Essay on Liberation*.

April 8th (Th): Marcuse, Herbert. “Solidarity” *An Essay on Liberation*, and Fraser, Nancy. *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*.

April 13th (T): Arruzza, Cinzia, Tithi Bhattacharya and Nancy Fraser. *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*. Pp. 1-57.

April 15th (Th): Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Pp. 1-38.

April 20th (T): Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Pp. 39-81.

April 22nd (Th): *No Class*

April 27th (T): Wrap up

May 4th (T): *Final Paper due by email no later than 5pm Eastern to ssimpson@wooster.edu and rcurnow22@wooster.edu*