

Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School

Fall Semester 2023/5784

Tuesday 12-3pm

Instructor

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Office hours: by email appointment

Please sign up for office hours using one of the following links

<https://calendly.com/abolafia/15min>

<https://calendly.com/abolafia/30min>

Course Description

Critical theory is a term that has reached wide use, from the philosophy of law to feminist and cultural studies. In this course we will study the origins of the term with the so-called Frankfurt School of German-Jewish materialist philosophers. We will begin with the intellectual foundations of critical theory in Marx, Weber, and Freud. Next, we will discuss the attempts of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer to combine dialectical philosophy with the empirical grounding of the modern social sciences, and Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm's attempts to do the same with Marx and Freud. We will continue with the contributions of Adorno and Walter Benjamin to aesthetic theory, and conclude with a reading of Adorno and Horkheimer's "Dialectic of Enlightenment" and Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, as well as relevant work by Jurgen Habermas.

פילוסופים משתמשים במונח "תאוריה ביקורתית" בהרבה קונטקסטים, מהפילוסופיה של משפט ועד לימודי מגדר ותרבות. בקורס הזה נתעסק בראשית המונח הזה, עם "אסכולת פרנקפורט", קבוצה של פילוסופים גרמנים יהודים שעבדו וחקרו מתוך המסורת המרקסיסטית. נתחיל בניסיונות של תאודור אדורנו ומקס הורקהיימר לתמרן בין פילוסופיה דיאלקטית נוסח מרקס והגל והיסודות האמפיריים של מדעי החברה כמו שניסח מקס וובר, והניסיונות של הרברט מרקוזה ואריק פרום לשלב את מרקס ופרייד באופן דומה. נמשיך בתרומות של אדורנו ווולטר בנימין לתאוריה אסתטית, ונסיים את הקורס בקריאה של "הדיאלקטיקה של הנאורות" של אדורנו והורקהיימר, והביקורת אליו, כולל זה של יורגן הברמס.

תאוריה ביקורתית, מרקסיזם, פרייד, אסתטיקה, תרבות, נאורות

Expectations

Attendance & Participation: This is a discussion-based class, and so regular attendance and participation are important. Participation can take a variety of forms: asking questions as well as answering them, responding to and furthering your classmates' points in constructive ways. Bringing in ideas from outside class, like insights from other courses, articles you've read, and your own experience, can also be excellent ways to contribute to our discussions. To prepare to participate, consider the title of the class and the key concepts in the syllabus. Jot down some of the points made in the reading about those ideas.

If you miss a session, you may be expected to do additional make-up work as well. Insufficient attendance will result in not passing the class (with exceptions for those serving in reserves or otherwise affected by the situation).

Accommodations: If you find yourself facing challenges that make it difficult for you to keep up with the coursework, please let us know and we can figure out a way to support you.

Recordings

In accordance with department policy, all classes will be recorded and uploaded to the Moodle.

Class norms on discussion

- Treat the ideas of our readings and discussions as open to debate, scrutiny, and new, potentially contradictory evidence;
- Assume good intentions on the part of others.
- **YOU MUST BRING THE READINGS TO CLASS**

Course Materials

All readings will be available as links to PDFs on the MOODLE. Do the readings in advance of class on the day they're listed.

Assignments

The written assignments for the course are as follows (detailed instructions for each assignment can be found in the "files" section of Canvas):

- Participation/Attendance assignments:
 - Each class will include a "check in" at the beginning of class where you will write a paragraph response to a prompt based on the reading, and may include a "check out" where you give me a question based on the lecture. These will be graded pass/fail, and you may miss one over the course of the semester without it affecting the grade.
- Midterm exam:
 - This will be a take-home exam the weekend of 11/2
- Final exam: Papers due by final day of Moed A'

Grading Policies

Participation / Attendance	20%
Homework assignments	
Midterm paper	30%
Final Exam	50%

Late work policy: There is a built-in two-day grace period on all deadlines. If you need more time to complete an assignment, please let me know in advance by email. Work turned in late without an extension may be marked down, and very late work may not receive credit.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of sentences, ideas, or direct phrases from a source (book, internet, another student's work, ChatGPT, Sydney etc.) without proper citation and attribution (i.e. footnotes/parenthetical citation). It is viewed very seriously by the university, because the purpose of the course and your degree is to give you the skills to analyze, interpret, and criticize ideas and texts. Using the work of others defeats the very purpose of why we're all here, which is to learn how to think. All work submitted in this class must be yours and yours alone. If there is a case of plagiarism, I will have to turn it over to the Disciplinary Committee of the University for investigation, a process which may result in failing the course.

In an example of proper citation, I have taken the following explanation of plagiarism from Dr. Andy German, the Chair of the philosophy department:

פלגיאט, כלומר העתקה של משפטים, ורעיונות, ו/או קטעים שלמים ממקור כלשהו (מספר, מהאינטרנט, מעבודתו של מישהו אחר) מבלי לציין זאת ומבלי הפניה כדין לאותו מקור בהערת שוליים, הינה העבירה החמורה ביותר באוניברסיטה. כנ"ל לגבי הגשת עבודה שנכתבה כולה או חלקה ע"י מישהו אחר (או נרכשה בכסף) כאילו היתה שלכם. אציין גם שלמרות שאינני מתנגד, כמובן, לסיעור מוחות ודיונים בצוותא, **את הכתיבה עליכם לעשות לבד**. כל חשד לפלגיאט יטופל במסגרת וועדת המשמעת של האוניברסיטה והרשעה בעבירה כזו גוררת עונשים כבדים ביותר שעשויים להשפיע על כל עתידכם האקדמי ואף מעבר לו.

Course Calendar

Week 1, January 2: Introduction to Dialectics (Hegel, Marx)

Week 2, January 9: Modern Reason and Unreason (Weber and Freud, Selections)

Week 3, January 16: Materialist Philosophy (Horkheimer)

Week 4, January 23: What is Critical Theory? (Horkheimer and Marcuse)

Week 5, January 30: LOCAL ELECTIONS, CLASS WILL BE RESCHEDULED - Philosophy and the Capitalist State (Pollack/Neumann)

Week 6, February 6: The Dialectic of Enlightenment (1, Myth and Enlightenment)

Week 7, February 13: The Dialectic of Enlightenment (2, Instrumental Reason)

Week 8, February 20 : Art and Enlightenment (Benjamin/Adorno) (BY ZOOM)

Week 9, February 27 : The Critique of Forms of Capitalist Life (Adorno)

Week 10, March 5: Repression (Marcuse)

Week 11, March 12: Science as Ideology (Habermas)

(March 20 – Workshop on the Frankfurt School at Bar-Ilan, Optional trip)