

Critical Theories
Syllabus
1st semester 2020/21, block 2
MA Political and Social Philosophy

Online-Course (zoom-link on Canvas)

ECTS: 6

Professor: dr. Daniel Loick

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Time: Wednesdays, 9-12 h

First session November 4th, last session December 9th

Objectives

After successfully completing this course, you will

- have familiarized yourself with canonical classical and contemporary approaches in critical theory;
- be able to apply these approaches in order to analyze recent social and political developments;
- have improved your analytical and hermeneutical skills.

Content

The aim of this course is to introduce some central methods and motifs in critical theory. In this seminar, the term “critical theory” is not limited to particular traditions or philosophical schools (like the “Frankfurt School”) but has a broader meaning: a theory is to be called ‘critical’ if it understands itself as part of social or political struggles, thus reflecting on its own historical situatedness. We will focus on classical and contemporary texts on the topics capitalism, gender relations, and racism, and we will read canonical texts from Marxist, feminist, poststructuralist, and post- and decolonial traditions.

Recommended prior knowledge

- General basic knowledge about critical theory (basic ideas about Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial thought) is an advantage, but not required. You should bring enthusiasm and curiosity about contemporary social and political problems.
- To prepare for class, you can read Chad Kautzer, *Radical Philosophy: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2015).

Format

Due to the corona-crisis, this course will be an online course. The zoom link will be in the canvas course page. The seminar has the following structure: 1. Introduction by the teacher (30 min), 2. Group discussion in breakout rooms, led by student experts (see below) (30 min), 3. Break (15 min), 4. general class discussion (60 min), 5. official end of class, ‘hangout’ with teacher for further discussions & specific questions (30 min).

It is absolutely essential to read the assigned texts thoroughly. The background reading is not required (except for the experts), but useful. The texts will be made available through Canvas.

You are highly encouraged to form independent reading groups to continue the class discussion, as well as to present drafts of your papers to each other. You can find a board for contact ads under “pages” on canvas.

Examen

In order to successfully complete this course, you have to:

- Attend class regularly and well prepared. This includes working through the texts and be able to name central passages of each text in the class discussion.
- Actively participate in class discussion.
- Be an “expert” for one of the 6 sessions. Experts prepare for the particular session especially thoroughly (including the background texts) and moderate the sessions in the breakout rooms (there will be multiple experts for each session, one in each breakout room). On canvas, you can put your name in a list (under “pages”) for which of the sessions you would like to be an expert.
- Write a final paper (about 3000-4000 words). Deadline for submission of the paper (via email) is 31.12.2020. The final grade of the class will be based solely on the paper.
- Please take notice of UvA’s regulations on plagiarism and fraud.

Class climate

Creating a respectful, inclusive and attentive atmosphere in the (virtual) classroom is the shared responsibility of teacher and students. This includes reflecting on the different backgrounds, experiences and social positionings among the participants, a sensibility with regard to one’s own conduct in the classroom, and an openness towards other perspectives and opinions. The seminar aims at including all students and thus attempts to reduce structural disadvantages. Please contact me with any discomfort with regard to the class climate.

The corona-situation poses extraordinary challenges to teachers and students alike (health problems, care obligations, financial problems, access to university facilities, etc.). It cannot be expected to carry out “regular” education under these circumstances. Please let me know if you have special needs or problems with the online teaching situation. We will try to work out a solution together.

Program

4.11. *Capitalism*

Background Reading

- Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, “Bourgeois and Proletarians”, *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx Engels Collected Works (MECW) vol 7, London 1977: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 483-496

Primary Reading

- Moishe Postone, “Rethinking Marx’s critique of capitalism”, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, Cambridge 1993: Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-42

- Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, “Postmodernization, or the Informatization of Production”, “The Multitude Against Empire”, *Empire: The New World Order*, Cambridge 2000: Harvard University Press, pp. 280-304, 393-414

11.11. *Gender*

Background Reading

- Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction”, *The Second Sex*, London 1956: Jonathan Cape, pp. 13-28

Primary Reading

- Luce Irigaray, “The Sex Which Is Not One”, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, Ithaca 1985: Cornell University Press, pp. 23-33
- Nancy Fraser, “Struggle over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture”, *Unruly Practices*, Minneapolis 1989: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 161-188
- Judith Butler, “Subjects of sex/gender/desire”, *Gender Trouble*, London 1990: Routledge, pp. 3-44

18.11. *Race & (Post-) Colonialism*

Background Reading

- Frantz Fanon, “The Fact of Blackness”, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London 2008: Pluto, pp. 82-108

Primary Reading

- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Cary Nelson/Lawrence Grossberg (eds.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana 1988: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271–313, especially sections II & IV
- Achille Mbembe, “Of Commandment”, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley 2001: University of California Press, pp. 24-65

25.11. *Intersectional Entanglements*

Background Reading

- Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”, 43 *Stanford Law Review*, pp. 1241-1299 (1991)

Primary Reading

- The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement”, Linda Nicholson (ed.), *The Second Wave. A Reader in Feminist Theory*, New York 1997, pp. 63-70
- Cedric Robinson, “Racial Capitalism”, *Black Marxism*, London 1983: Zed, pp. 9-28
- Silvia Federici, “The Accumulation of Labor and the Degradation of Women”, *Caliban and the Witch*, New York 2004: Autonomedia, 61-132

2.12. *Fascism*

Background Reading

- Theodor W. Adorno et al, “Conclusions”, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York 1950: Harper & Brothers, pp. 971-977

Primary Reading

- Theodor W. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working-Through the Past”, *Critical Models*, New York 1998: Columbia University Press, pp. 89-103
- Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, “1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity”, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis 1987: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 208-231
- Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalism’s Frankenstein: Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-first-Century ‘Democracies’”, *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (together with Peter Gordon and Max Pensky), Chicago 2018: University of Chicago Press, pp. 7-44

9.12. *The State & Politics*

Background Reading

- Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”, part I, Marx Engels Collected Works (MECW) vol 3, London 1977: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 146-168

Primary Reading

- Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, “Hegemony & Radical Democracy”, *Hegemony & Socialist Strategy*, London 2001: Verso, pp. 149-194
- Jacques Rancière, “Wrong: Politics and Police”, *Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy*, Minneapolis 1999: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 21-42
- Giorgio Agamben, “Toward a Theory of Destituent Potential”, *The Use of Bodies*, Stanford 2016: Stanford University Press, pp. 263-280