

# Emancipation by Theory?

## Topics from Frankfurt School

### Critical Theory

Summer Term 2025

*Syllabus from 29 March 2025*

#### Instructor

Prof Dr. Frieder Vogelmann – [frieder.vogelmann@ucf.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:frieder.vogelmann@ucf.uni-freiburg.de)

Office hours: Wednesdays, 16–17h, Bertoldstr. 17, Room 01.071.

Please make an appointment with Silvia Stößer ([silvia.stoesser@ucf.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:silvia.stoesser@ucf.uni-freiburg.de)).

#### Times and Rooms

Tuesdays, 10–12h, AU 01.036a

Thursdays, 10–12h, Peterhof Room 2

#### Course Description

This seminar will introduce students to early Frankfurt School Critical Theory and its subsequent developments. While a comprehensive overview is impossible in just one semester, we will cover a mixture of canonical and less well-known topics relevant for the contemporary debates in critical theory. The seminar will focus four core aspects:

- (1) We will begin with the most famous inaugural texts by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno in which they set out the shape and ambition of critical theory in the 1930s and 1940s.

- (2) Since critical theory aims to intertwine philosophy and the social sciences, we will investigate a few topics and concepts particularly important to critical theory's interdisciplinary social theory and the resulting critical diagnosis, especially authority, ideology, and emancipation.
- (3) We will discuss more recent developments of Frankfurt School Critical Theory since the 1970s, in particular the communicative turn advanced by Jürgen Habermas and the theory of recognition put forward by Axel Honneth. In addition, we will briefly look at the work of some contemporary representatives of Frankfurt School critical theory like Rahel Jaeggi, Robin Celikates or Nancy Fraser.
- (4) In the last weeks of the seminar, we will turn to the topics of authoritarianism, right-wing extremism and fascism to explore the relevance of critical theory for today.

Although the seminar is aimed at beginners, reading and comprehending the texts will require patience and effort. While quick success is not guaranteed, a lasting loss of naiveté certainly is—enlightenment and partial emancipation by theory might follow.

## General Reading

- Adorno, Theodor W. (2020): *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*. Translated by Wieland Hoban. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bronner, Stephen Eric (2017): *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fraser, Nancy and Rahel Jaeggi (2018): *Capitalism. A Conversation in Critical Theory*. Ed. by Brian Milstein. Cambridge/Medford, MA: Polity.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2024): »*Es musste etwas besser werden ...*« *Gespräche mit Stefan Müller-Doohm und Roman Yos*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Horkheimer, Max (2002 [1937]): Traditional and Critical Theory. In: idem., *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 188–243.

## Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- understand the basic ideas and arguments of Frankfurt School critical theory, and
- use different critical concepts like “ideology”, “ideal speech situation” or “recognition” for analysing contemporary societies.

## Attendance

Standard LAS attendance policies apply. Generally, students should inform the instructor about their absence ahead of time, if possible. Students can miss **3 sessions** without having to give specific reasons. Students may miss another **3 sessions** if they hand in the necessary proof defined in the general LAS attendance guidelines (cf. [LIAS Info Board](#)). In this case, instructors may ask students to prepare make-up work.

## Assessment and Assignments

*Pass/Fail Exam:* Regular and active attendance. Furthermore, students must participate in the moderation of two sessions, prepared in small groups. Details will be discussed in the first week of the seminar.

*Graded Exam:* The final assessment is a term paper (3.000–4.000 words) due by **15 September 2025** (as an electronic copy). Students must discuss the topic with the instructor before they start writing. – For philosophy students who need more than 6 ECTS, the term paper becomes 1,000 words longer for every ECTS point (e.g. 5.000–6.000 words for 8 ECTS).

Exam registration takes place in HISinOne during the first two weeks of the semester/the block. For semester-long courses, there is a withdrawal period in the third week of the semester.

## Declaration of Originality

Students have to submit the following declaration with all written assignments:

I hereby declare that I am the sole author and composer of this assignment and that no sources or learning aids, other than those listed, have been used. The use of generative AI, e.g. ChatGPT, has been restricted to peripheral tasks in formulating the text and has been explained in footnotes in all instances. Furthermore, I declare that I have acknowledged the work of others by providing detailed references of said work.

## Course Outline/Schedule

| # | Date       | Required Reading  | Optional Reading   |
|---|------------|---|--|
| 1 | 22.04.2025 | Overview  |  |
| 2 | 24.04.2025 | Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels(1978 [1848]): "Manifesto of the Communist Party", 471–491.         | Karl Marx (1978 [1852]): "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (excerpts)"   |
| 3 | 29.04.2025 | Theodor W. Adorno Adorno (1977 [1973]): "The Actuality of Philosophy"                             | Theodor W. Adorno (1973 [1966]): <i>Negative Dialectics</i> .  |
|   | 01.05.2025 | <b>LABOUR DAY – NO CLASS</b>  |  |
| 4 | 06.05.2025 | Max Horkheimer (2002a [1937]): "Traditional and Critical Theory"                                  | Max Horkheimer (2002b [1937]): "Notes on Science and the Crisis"   |
| 5 | 08.05.2025 | Max Horkheimer (2002a [1937]): "Traditional and Critical Theory"                                  | John Abromeit (2011): <i>Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School</i> .  |
| 6 | 13.05.2025 | Taking Stock (no text)  |  |
|   | 15.05.2025 | <b>NO CLASS</b>   |  |
| 7 | 20.05.2025 | Max Horkheimer (2002 [1936]): "Authority and the Family"  | Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonß and John McCole (eds.) (1993): <i>On Max Horkheimer. New Perspectives</i> .                            |
| 8 | 22.05.2025 | Max Horkheimer (2002 [1936]): "Authority and the Family"  | Max Horkheimer (2004 [1947]): <i>Eclipse of Reason</i> .   |
| 9 | 27.05.2025 | Barbara Umrath (2018): "A Feminist Reading of the Frankfurt School's Studies on Authoritarianism" | Christina Engelmann et al. (eds.) (2025): <i>Im Schatten der Tradition: Eine Geschichte des IfS aus feministischer Perspektive</i> . |
|   | 29.05.2025 | <b>ASCENSION DAY – NO CLASS</b>   |  |

| #  | Date       | Required Reading  | Optional Reading   |
|----|------------|---|--|
| 10 | 03.06.2025 | Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford (1950): <i>The Authoritarian Personality</i> , 1–11 and 971–976. | Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon and Max Pensky (2018): <i>Authoritarianism. Three Inquiries in Critical Theory</i> .                      |
| 11 | 05.06.2025 | Theodor W. Adorno (2020): <i>Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism</i> .  | Otto Kirchheimer (1941): “The Legal Order of National Socialism”<br><br>Frederick Pollock (1941): “Is National Socialism a New Order?” |
|    | 10.06.2025 | <b>PENTECOST HOLIDAYS – No CLASS</b>  |  |
|    | 12.06.2025 | <b>PENTECOST HOLIDAYS – No CLASS</b>  |  |
| 12 | 17.06.2025 | Jürgen Habermas (1971 [1965]): “Knowledge and Human Interests”  | Jürgen Habermas (1971 [1968]): <i>Knowledge and Human Interests</i> .  |
|    | 19.06.2025 | <b>CORPUS CHRISTI – No CLASS</b>  |  |
| 13 | 24.06.2025 | Jürgen Habermas (1985): “Remarks on the Concept of Communicative Action”  | Jürgen Habermas (2001): “From Kant’s ‘Ideas’ of Pure Reason to the ‘Idealizing’ Presuppositions of Communicative Action”               |
| 14 | 26.06.2025 | Axel Honneth (2008a [1994]): “The Social Dynamics of Disrespect. On the Location of Critical Theory Today”  | Axel Honneth (1996 [1992]): <i>The Struggle for Recognition</i> .  |
| 15 | 01.07.2025 | Axel Honneth (2008b [1994]): “Between Aristotle and Kant: Recognition and Moral Obligation”   | Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth (2003): <i>Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange</i> .                       |
| 16 | 03.07.2025 | Axel Honneth (2008): “Pathologies of the Social. The Past and Present of Social Philosophy”   | Robin Celikates (2006): “From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique”   |
| 17 | 08.07.2025 | Taking stock (no text)  |  |
| 18 | 10.07.2025 | Rahel Jaeggi (2022): “Modes of Regression”  | Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi (2018): <i>Capitalism. A Conversation in Critical Theory</i> .   |

| #  | Date       | Required Reading  | Optional Reading   |
|----|------------|---|--|
| 19 | 15.07.2025 | Wendy Brown (2018):<br>“Neoliberalism’s Frankenstein.<br>Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-<br>First Century ‘Democracies’” | Wendy Brown (2019): <i>In the Ruins of<br/>Neoliberalism</i> .   |
| 20 | 17.07.2025 | Eva von Redecker (2020):<br>“Ownership’s Shadow:<br>Neoauthoritarianism as Defense of<br>Phantom Possession”              | Daniel Loick (2014): “Juridification and<br>Politics: From the Dilemma of<br>Juridification to the Paradoxes of<br>Rights” |
| 21 | 22.07.2025 | Open Session  |  |
| 22 | 24.07.2025 | Final Discussion/Discuss Term Paper<br>Topics   |  |

## Course Evaluation

All UCF courses are evaluated by the Central Evaluation Service. At the end of the semester, every student will receive a personalized link to a questionnaire. This evaluation is very important for the instructor and for the development of learning and teaching at UCF. Please submit your evaluation in time!

## Full Bibliography

- Abromeit, John (2011): *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1973 [1966]): *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E.B. Ashton. London/New York: Routledge.
- (1977 [1973]): The Actuality of Philosophy. In: *Telos* 31, 120–133.
- (2020): *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*. Translated by Wieland Hoban. Cambridge: Polity.
- Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford (1950): *The Authoritarian Personality*. Studies in Prejudice Series. New York: Harper & Brothers.
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- Brown, Wendy (2018): Neoliberalism’s Frankenstein. Authoritarian Freedom in Twenty-First Century “Democracies”. In: Wendy Brown, Peter E. Gordon and Max Pensky (eds.), *Authoritarianism. Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 7–43.
- (2019): *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism. The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Brown, Wendy, Peter E. Gordon and Max Pensky (2018): *Authoritarianism. Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Celikates, Robin (2006): From Critical Social Theory to a Social Theory of Critique: On the Critique of Ideology after the Pragmatic Turn. In: *Constellations* 13 (1), 21–40.

- Engelmann, Christina, Lena Reichardt, Bea S. Ricke, Sarah Speck and Stephan Voswinkel (eds.) (2025): *Im Schatten der Tradition. Eine Geschichte des IfS aus feministischer Perspektive*. Berlin: Bertz + Fischer.
- Fraser, Nancy and Axel Honneth (2003): *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London: Verso.
- Fraser, Nancy and Rahel Jaeggi (2018): *Capitalism. A Conversation in Critical Theory*. Ed. by Brian Milstein. Cambridge/Medford, MA: Polity.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1971 [1965]): Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective. In: idem., *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Boston: Beacon Press, 301–317.
- (1971 [1968]): *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press.
- (1985): Remarks on the Concept of Communicative Action. In: Gottfried Seebass and Raimo Tuomela (eds.), *Social Action*. D. Reidel: Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster, 151–178.
- (2001): From Kant's "Ideas" of Pure Reason to the "Idealizing" Presuppositions of Communicative Action: Reflections on the Detranscendentalized "Use of Reason". In: William Rehg and James Bohman (eds.), *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn. The Transformation of Critical Theory. Essays in honor of Thomas McCarthy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 11–39.
- Honneth, Axel (1996 [1992]): *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Translated by Joel Anderson. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- (2008a [1994]): The Social Dynamics of Disrespect. On the Location of Critical Theory Today. In: Axel Honneth, *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 63–79.
- (2008b [1997]): Between Aristotle and Kant: Recognition and Moral Obligation. In: Axel Honneth, *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 129–143.
- (2008): Pathologies of the Social. The Past and Present of Social Philosophy. In: Axel Honneth, *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 3–48.
- Horkheimer, Max (2002a [1937]): Traditional and Critical Theory. In: idem., *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 188–243.
- (2002b [1937]): Notes on Science and the Crisis. In: idem., *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 3–9.
- (2002 [1936]): Authority and the Family. In: idem., *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 47–128.
- (2004 [1947]): *Eclipse of Reason*. London/New York: Continuum.
- Jaeggi, Rahel (2022): Modes of Regression. In: *Critical Times* 5 (3), 501–537.
- Kirchheimer, Otto (1941): The Legal Order of National Socialism. In: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 9 (3), 456–475.
- Loick, Daniel (2014): Juridification and Politics: From the Dilemma of Juridification to the Paradoxes of Rights. In: *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 40 (8), 757–778.
- Marx, Karl (1978 [1852]): The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. In: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 594–617.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels (1978 [1848]): Manifesto of the Communist Party. In: idem., *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 496–500.
- Pollock, Frederick (1941): Is National Socialism a New Order? In: *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 9 (3), 440–455.
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- Umrath, Barbara (2018): A Feminist Reading of the Frankfurt School's Studies on Authoritarianism and Its Relevance for Understanding Authoritarian Tendencies in Germany Today. In: *South Atlantic Quarterly* 117 (4), 861–878.