

Critical Theory

Code: 100304
ECTS Credits: 6

2025/2026

Degree	Type	Year
Philosophy	OB	3

Contact

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Teaching groups languages

You can view this information at the [end](#) of this document.

Prerequisites

No prerequisites apply in order to enrol the course.

Objectives and Contextualisation

Critical Theory is a compulsory subject in the third year of the philosophy degree. This course offers an historical and systematic picture of the main philosophical problems addressed by the critical theory developed mainly by the so-called Frankfurt School. To this aim, we will study some of the main texts that have produced the three generations of philosophers and the current trends of the feminist critical theory.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Understanding the main problems and concepts used by critical theory.
- To identify, analyze and explain some concepts and arguments.
- To know the main theoretical approaches.
- To be familiar with the main texts of the critical tradition.
- To use the philosophical terminology appropriately.
- Developing the skills for the student's reasoning.
- To promote written and oral presentations of the acquired knowledge.
- To identify the conceptual, analytical and methodological potential offered by the critical theory.
- To establish a dialogue between the tradition of critical theory and other contemporary currents of social philosophy.

Competences

- Act within one's own area of knowledge, evaluating sex/gender-based inequalities.
- Analysing and summarising the main arguments of fundamental texts of philosophy in its various disciplines.
- Applying the knowledge of ethics to the moral problems of society, and assessing the implications about the human condition of changes in the world of contemporary techniques.
- Placing the most representative philosophical ideas and arguments of a period in their historical background and relating the most important authors of each period of any philosophical discipline.

- Recognising and interpreting topics and problems of philosophy in its various disciplines.
- Recognising the philosophical implications of the scientific knowledge.
- Students must be capable of applying their knowledge to their work or vocation in a professional way and they should have building arguments and problem resolution skills within their area of study.
- Students must be capable of collecting and interpreting relevant data (usually within their area of study) in order to make statements that reflect social, scientific or ethical relevant issues.
- Students must be capable of communicating information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialised and non-specialised audiences.
- Students must develop the necessary learning skills to undertake further training with a high degree of autonomy.
- Students must have and understand knowledge of an area of study built on the basis of general secondary education, and while it relies on some advanced textbooks it also includes some aspects coming from the forefront of its field of study.
- Thinking in a critical and independent manner on the basis of the specific topics, debates and problems of philosophy, both historically and conceptually.

Learning Outcomes

1. Analysing historical cases about scientific facts.
2. Applying philosophical rigour in a written text following the international quality standards.
3. Autonomously searching, selecting and processing information both from structured sources (databases, bibliographies, specialized magazines) and from across the network.
4. Carrying out oral presentations using an appropriate academic vocabulary and style.
5. Communicate by making non-sexist, non-discriminatory use of language.
6. Communicating in the studied language in oral and written form, properly using vocabulary and grammar.
7. Discriminating the features that define the writer's place in the context of a problem and reorganising them in a consistent diagram.
8. Distinguishing and analysing representative texts of the main genres of the philosophical literature.
9. Distinguishing the topics of philosophical relevance in current debates.
10. Documenting a philosophical issue and contrasting its sources.
11. Establishing relationships between science, philosophy, art, religion, politics, etc.
12. Explaining the philosophical importance of contemporary science and its implementation area.
13. Explaining the specific notions of the History of Philosophy.
14. Identifying the main ideas of a related text and drawing a diagram.
15. Indicating and discussing the main characteristics of the distinctive thought of a period and contextualizing them.
16. Indicating and summarising the common content of several manifestations of various fields of culture.
17. Organizing their own time and work resources: designing plans with priorities of objectives, calendars and action commitments.
18. Propose projects and actions that incorporate a gender perspective.
19. Reading basic philosophical text thoroughly.
20. Reading thoroughly philosophical texts of the History of Philosophy.
21. Recognising, with a critical eye, philosophical referents of the past and present and assessing its importance.
22. Relating several ideas of the current philosophical debates.
23. Respecting the diversity and plurality of ideas, people and situations.
24. Solving problems autonomously.
25. Submitting works in accordance with both individual and small group demands and personal styles.
26. Summarising the main arguments of the great contemporary texts of ethics and political philosophy.
27. Using suitable terminology when drawing up an academic text.

Content

Topic 1: The Frankfurt School and the idea of a Critical Theory

The appropriateness of the term "School" and the shared assumptions among its members. The distinctiveness of Critical Theory in contemporary philosophy.

Readings:

- M. Horkheimer, *Teoría tradicional i teoría crítica*

Topic 2: The critique of instrumental Reason

The role of the critique of instrumental reason within Critical Theory and its relationship with domination, progress, and History.

Readings:

- Th. W. Adorno i M. Horkheimer, *La dialéctica de la Ilustración*
- M. Horkheimer, *Sobre el concepto de razón*
- M. Horkheimer, *Crítica de la razón instrumental*
- W. Benjamin, *El libro de los pasajes*

Topic 3: Negative Dialectics

Dialectics: neither method, nor methodology, nor reality? The transition from positive dialectics to negative dialectics. Constellations and critiques of positivism and ontology.

Readings:

- Th.W. Adorno, *Dialéctica Negativa*
- Th.W. Adorno, *Sobre la metacrítica de la teoría del conocimiento*
- Th.W. Adorno, *La disputa del positivismo en la sociología alemana*

Topic 4: The damaged Subject

The preeminence of the object and individuation as a model of contemporary socialization: from social atomization to internal division.

Readings:

- Th.W. Adorno, *Sobre sujeto y objeto*
- Th. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

Topic 5: The communicative Reason

The reformulation of the concept of communication by Jürgen Habermas and the impasse of the critique of instrumental reason.

Readings:

- J. Habermas, *Teoría de la acción comunicativa*

Topic 6: The reconnaissance and the critique of life forms

The most recent contributions to Critical Theory: from Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to Rahel Jaeggi's critique of forms of life.

Readings:

- A. Honneth, *La lucha por el reconocimiento*
- A. Honneth, *Reconocimiento y menosprecio*
- R. Jaeggi, *Hacia una crítica inmanente de las formas de vida*

Activities and Methodology

Title	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Type: Directed			
Class Activities	7	0.28	1, 10, 11, 13, 6, 4, 27, 17, 25, 21, 22, 26
Group discussions	10	0.4	4, 17, 25
Theoretical Classes	38	1.52	11, 13, 19, 21, 22
Type: Supervised			
Conducting works	12.5	0.5	12, 19, 20, 26
Tutorships	10	0.4	3, 7, 4, 14, 15, 19, 17, 25, 22, 24
Type: Autonomous			
Compulsory Readings	40	1.6	9, 8, 10, 14, 17, 22, 24, 26
Writing	25	1	6, 27, 14, 19, 25

Classes will help to introduce and present the content and compulsory readings, as well as recommended texts, following various methodologies: lectures, group work based on texts, and flipped classroom sessions.

We strongly recommend to read the compulsory readings before each lecture.

Follow-up will be provided during the preparation of written assignments in order to give feedback throughout the writing process. These follow-ups will take place during individual tutorials held during office hours, which will also guide students in choosing a personalized path for this task.

Regular communication between students and the teaching staff will take place via the Virtual Campus.

Annotation: Within the schedule set by the centre or degree programme, 15 minutes of one class will be reserved for students to evaluate their lecturers and their courses or modules through questionnaires.

Assessment

Continuous Assessment Activities

Title	Weighting	Hours	ECTS	Learning Outcomes
Mid-term Exam 1	35%	1.5	0.06	1, 2, 16, 5, 7, 9, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 6, 27, 14, 15, 19, 20, 18, 21, 22, 24, 23, 26
Mid-Term Exam 2	35%	2	0.08	1, 2, 16, 5, 7, 9, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 6, 27, 14, 15, 19, 20, 18, 21, 22, 24, 23, 26
Tutorships and participation	10%	2	0.08	5, 6, 4, 17, 25, 18, 24, 23

Writing a brief essay (2000 words)	20%	2	0.08	2, 3, 5, 27, 17, 25, 18, 23
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CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT

Continuous assessment will consist of three graded activities and assumes class attendance, active participation, and ongoing engagement with the course.

To pass the continuous assessment, all assessment activities must be completed, and the average grade must be at least 5 out of 10.

Assessment activities:

- a) Two midterm exams - 7 points total
 - a.1) Midterm 1 - 3.5 points
 - a.2) Midterm 2 - 3.5 points
- b) Written assignment - 2 points
- c) Assignment follow-up and class participation - 1 point

The Department of Philosophy may establish (as it has in the first semester) a concentrated assessment period. The teaching staff will inform students at the start of the course whether this will apply and provide the relevant dates.

There is no second call.

Recovery Exam

To be eligible for the recovery exam, students must have completed and been assessed on all the activities included in the continuous assessment.

The teaching staff will inform students of the procedure and date for the review of assessment grades, both for the continuous assessment and the resit.

SINGLE ASSESSMENT

Single assessment will consist of three parts, weighted as follows:

- a) Exam with two theoretical questions - 40%
- b) Commentary on an excerpt from the course bibliography - 30%
- c) One comparative question relating authors studied during the course - 30%

Recovery Exam

The same assessment method as continuous assessment will be used.

A student will receive a "Non-assessable" grade if they have submitted less than 30% of the assessment activities. Therefore, if the student has completed one of the two exams, they cannot be considered "Non-assessable."

Erasmus students who request to take an exam in advance must present the teaching staff with an official document from their home university justifying the request.

In cases where a student commits any irregularity that could significantly alter the grade of an assessment activity, that activity will be graded with 0, regardless of any disciplinary action taken. If multiple irregularities occur in a single course, the final grade for that course will be 0.

This course allows the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools exclusively for bibliographic or information searches, text correction, or translations. The student must clearly identify the parts generated using AI, specify the tools used, and include a critical reflection on how these tools influenced the process and the final result. Failure to transparently declare AI use in any assessed activity in this course will be considered academic dishonesty and will result in a grade of 0 for the activity, which cannot be recovered, or more serious sanctions in severe cases.

Bibliography

References

Adorno, Th. W. (2012). *Sobre la metacrítica de la teoría del conocimiento*. Madrid: Akal

Adorno, Th. W. (2005). *Dialectica Negativa*. Madrid: Akal

Adorno, Th. W. (2022). *Minima Moralia*. Madrid: Akal

Adorno, Th. (2003). Sobre sujeto y objeto. A *Consignas*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu editores

Adorno, Th. (2008). La disputa del positivismo en la sociología alemana. A *Escritos sociológicos I*. Madrid: Akal

Adorno, Th. y Horkheimer, M. (2022). *Dialéctica de la Ilustración*. Madrid: Akal

Benjamin, W. (2005). *El libro de los pasajes*. Madrid: Akal

Benjamin, W. (2007). *Tesis sobre la filosofía de la Història*. València: Ateneu de Benimaclet

Habermas, J. (2010). *Teoría de la acción comunicativa*. Madrid: Trotta

Honneth, A. (1997). *La lucha por el reconocimiento: por una gramática moral de los conflictos sociales*. Barcelona: Crítica

Honneth, A. (2010). *Reconocimiento y menosprecio: sobre la fundamentación normativa de una teoría social*. Buenos Aires: Katz

Horkheimer, M. (2000). *Teoría tradicional y teoría critica*. Barcelona: Paidós

Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Critica de la razon instrumental*. Madrid: Trotta

Horkheimer, M. (1989). Sobre el concepto de la razón. A *Sociológica*. Madrid: Taurus

Jaeggi, R. (2018). *Critique of forms of life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

The lecturer will provide the specific bibliography for each subject.

Further Readings

Benhabib, S. (2006). *El Ser y el otro en la ética contemporánea: feminismo, comunitarismo y posmodernismo*. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Buck-Morss, S. (2011). *Origen de la dialéctica negativa*. Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia

Habermas, J. (1989). *El discurso filosófico de la modernidad*. Madrid: Taurus.

Habermas, J. (2023). *Conocimiento e interés*. Madrid: Taurus.

Honneth, A., et al. (2019), *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, Routledge.

Jameson, F. (2010). *Marxismo tardío. Adorno y la persistencia de la dialéctica*. Madrid: FCE

Jay, M. (1988). *La imaginación dialéctica*. Madrid: Taurus

Maiso, J. (2022). *Desde la vida dañada. La teoría crítica de Theodor W. Adorno*. Madrid: Siglo XXI

Rius, M. (1985). *T.W. Adorno. Del sufrimiento a la verdad*. Barcelona: Laia

Rush, F. (ed.) (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*. Cambridge: CUP

Wellmer, A. (1992). *Sobre la dialéctica de modernidad y postmodernidad*. Madrid: La balsa de la medusa

Wiggershaus, R. (2012). *La escuela de Fráncfort*. Madrid: FCE

Software

No specific program is used in this course.

Groups and Languages

Please note that this information is provisional until 30 November 2025. You can check it through this [link](#). To consult the language you will need to enter the CODE of the subject.

Name	Group	Language	Semester	Turn
(PAUL) Classroom practices	1	Catalan	second semester	morning-mixed
(TE) Theory	1	Catalan	second semester	morning-mixed