

PL287. Critical Thinking

Seminar Leader: Hans Stauffacher (h.stauffacher@berlin.bard.edu)

Course times: Tue & Thu 9:00-10:30

Course Description

Many institutions of higher education—Bard College Berlin among them—claim to teach “critical thinking.” But what does this mean? Does the phrase denote an analytic method? A scholarly attitude? An intellectual duty? Does critical thinking mean properly and thoroughly engaging with texts and materials, or does it entail finding their flaws and fallacies? Is it the commitment to a political point of view, or to an ideal of impartiality? Historically, critique denotes two distinct and possibly contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, the Kantian dedication to the self-limitation and self-examination of reason; on the other the pledge to question and even subvert existing assumptions and norms. Both of these orientations are essential to the kind of inquiry we pursue at Bard College Berlin: to consider the conditions under which it is possible for us to come to reasonable judgments, and to change our social, cultural and political environment. We will read key texts from the legacy of critique as a practice, and of course, critically reflect on our own position as readers.

Course Readings

All course readings will be provided through Google Classroom. You are expected to print the texts and come to class with paper copies.

Please note that the schedule and the readings are subject to change. All changes will be communicated in class and via email.

Requirements

Class preparation: Preparing for class means reading thoughtfully and engaging with the texts, for instance, by thinking through the argument of a particular section and taking notes while reading. The readings for this course will be difficult and challenging. You should give yourself enough time to read them more than once. You will be expected to regularly submit short written comments or questions about the readings. Details about this will be communicated in the first session.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and active participation is essential to the success of this course. Therefore, attendance at all sessions and participation in all discussions is expected. Missing more than two 90-minute sessions will significantly affect the participation grade. Missing more than 30% (more than 8 sessions) would mean failing the course. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Covid-19: The pandemic will most likely again disrupt the usual way of conducting classes this semester and will make it necessary to adjust teaching formats. Depending on the circumstances, class sessions will take place either in person or via Zoom. In case we will be able to meet in person, but you cannot attend class because of a COVID-19 related issue, there will always be the possibility to participate remotely.

Assignments: Students are required to complete the following assignments for this course: Two short critical writing exercises (about 1000 words each, due on March 6 and April 10) and a final essay (about 4000 words, due May 22). In addition to that, students are expected to regularly submit short written comments or questions about the readings. Details about all these assignments will be communicated in the first session.

Grade Breakdown:

Class participation (including written comments about readings): 50%

Critical writing exercises: 20%

Final essay: 30%

Deadlines:

1st Critical Writing Exercise: Saturday, March 6

2nd Critical Writing Exercise: Saturday, April 10

Final Essay: Saturday, May 22

(Submissions through Google Classroom)

Policy on Late Submission of Papers: Please note the following policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

Academic Integrity: Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Failing to meet the expected standards of academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating) will be reported and dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Schedule*

Tuesday, February 2 Introduction

0 – PRELUDE

Thursday, February 4 Plato: *Apology of Socrates* (excerpts)

Tuesday, February 9 Baruch Spinoza: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670, excerpts)

1 – CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON ITSELF

Thursday, February 11 Immanuel Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the First Edition (1781), Preface to the Second Edition (1787)

Tuesday, February 16 Immanuel Kant: “Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784)

2 – RUTHLESS CRITICISM OF EVERYTHING EXISTING

Thursday, February 18 Karl Marx: Letter to Ruge (1844)
Karl Marx: *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction* (1844)

Tuesday, February 23 Karl Marx: “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845)
Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels: *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)

3 – REVALUATION OF ALL VALUES

Thursday, February 25 Friedrich Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886, excerpts)

Tuesday, March 2 Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887, excerpts)

4 – CRITICAL THEORY

Thursday, March 4 Walter Benjamin: “Critique of Violence” (1921)

1st Critical Writing Exercise due on Saturday, March 6

Tuesday, March 9 &
Thursday, March 11 Max Horkheimer: “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1937)

Tuesday, March 16 Theodor W. Adorno: “Cultural Criticism and Society” (1951)

5 – THE ART OF BEING NOT QUITE SO GOVERNED

Thursday, March 18	Michel Foucault: “The Subject and Power” (1982)
Tuesday, March, 23	Michel Foucault: “What is Critique?” (1978)
Thursday, March 25	Michel Foucault: “What is Enlightenment?” (1984)

SPRING BREAK

2nd Critical Writing Exercise due on Saturday, April 10

6 – POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM

Tuesday, April 13 & Thursday, April 15	Paulo Freire: <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> (1968, excerpts)
Tuesday, Apr. 20 & Thursday, April 22	Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988)

7 – CRITICAL THINKING IN THE 21st CENTURY?

Tuesday, April 27	Bruno Latour: “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” (2004)
Thursday, April 29	Wendy Brown: “Untimeliness and Punctuality: Critical Theory in Dark Times” (2005)
Tuesday, May 4	Joan Wallach Scott: “History-Writing as Critique” (2007)
Thursday, May 6	Judith Butler: “Critique, Dissent, Disciplinarity” (2012)
Tuesday, May 11	Daniele Lorenzini/Martina Tazioli: “Critique Without Ontology” (2020)
[Thursday, May 13	Federal Holiday, no class]

May 17-21: Completion Week

Final Essay due on Saturday, May 22

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