

History 1323: German Social Thought
from Nietzsche to Habermas

Prof. Peter E. Gordon
Department of History
Harvard University

Fall Semester, 2020

Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:45pm, on-line via ZOOM
Course-wide Discussion Session with Professor Gordon: Wednesdays 10:30-11:15am, on-line via ZOOM

Prof. Gordon's Individual Office Hours: Wednesdays 11:30am-12:30pm via ZOOM
This Wednesday time may very well be modified to accommodate students with scheduling conflicts.
Prof. Gordon's email: pgordon@fas.harvard.edu

Teaching Fellow: Michael Mango
mmango@g.harvard.edu

Course Description:

In the absence of conventional (religious-metaphysical) norms, by what grounds can we secure a non-coercive social consensus? This course provides a survey of major themes and debates in modern German social theory over the span of a century, from Nietzsche's anti-foundationalist critique of morality and truth to Habermas's attempt to rebuild a pragmatic-transcendentalist theory for ethical and discursive reason after the collapse of metaphysics. The lectures will briefly address contextual and historical background for understanding the tradition of German political and social thought, but our time will be devoted chiefly to an immanent theoretical reconstruction of major texts and arguments in this tradition. The chief focus of our attention will be the question of how German intellectuals after Nietzsche coped with the so-called "foundations-crisis" that seized epistemology, metaphysics, and social critique in the modern period, so as to address the "urgent question" of post-conventional normativity, as articulated above. The lectures are pitched toward an undergraduate audience who already feel some confidence addressing themselves to matters of philosophy or social theory. It is assumed that that all students are at least of sophomore standing. Major texts for the course are by the following authors: Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger, Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, and Habermas.

Course requirements and grade breakdown:

Three required papers: two short (5 pages each), and one long (9 pages): 15%, 15% and 30%.

Section Attendance and Participation: comprises 40% of the course grade.

Late Policy: Papers turned in late without prior discussion with the TF will be marked down ½ grade per day.

Readings available for purchase:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Cambridge; 2nd edition, 2006)
ISBN-10: 052169163X; ISBN-13: 978-0521691635.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Penguin, 2002);
ISBN-10: 0140439218; ISBN-13: 978-0140439212.

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Macquarrie and Robinson, trans. (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008); ISBN-10: 0061575593; ISBN-13: 978-0061575594.

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford, 2002);
ISBN-10: 0804736332; ISBN-13: 978-0804736336.

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*
(MIT Press, 1991); ISBN-10: 0262581086; ISBN-13: 978-0262581080

Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (MIT Press, 1990); ISBN-10: 0262581027; ISBN-13: 978-0262581028.

Also in print, and useful, but not required:

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge; 2nd edition; 1997); ISBN-10: 0521585848; ISBN-13: 978-0521585842

Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. (Beacon Press, 1985); ISBN-10: 0807015075; ISBN-13: 978-0807015070

Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume II: Lifeworld and System*. (Beacon Press, 1985); ISBN-10: 080701401X; ISBN-13: 978-0807014011

Weekly Syllabus:

PART I: NIETZSCHE: FROM SOCIAL MYTH TO INDIVIDUALIST METAPHYSICS

Lecture 1: Introduction: The End of Foundationalism and the Problem of Normativity

(Thurs, 3 Sept.)

reading: none

Lecture 2: Nietzsche between Historicism and Social Critique

(Tues, 8 Sept.)

reading: Nietzsche, “On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life”*

Lecture 3: Nietzsche and the Task of a Genealogy of Morality

(Tues, 10 Sept.)

reading: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, parts I and II.

Lecture 4: Nietzsche from the Genealogy of Christianity to Anti-Foundationalism

(Tues, 15 Sept.)

reading: Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, part III.
Nietzsche, “How the Real World Became a Myth”*
Nietzsche, “The Heaviest Burden”*
Nietzsche, “The Madman”*

PART II: WEBER: FROM THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION TO MODERN DISENCHANTMENT

Lecture 5: Weber on Religion and Early-Modern Capitalism

(Thurs, 17 Sept.)

reading: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, all.

Lecture 6: Weber on Religion and Modernity

(Tues, 22 Sept.)

reading: Weber, "Science as a Vocation"*

Lecture 7: Weber on Objectivity and Value-Pluralism

(Thurs, 24 Sept.)

reading: Weber, "Objectivity in the Social Sciences and Social Policy"*

Lecture 8: Weber on Politics, Value-Pluralism, and Decisionism

(Tues, 29 Sept.)

reading: Weber, "Politics as a Vocation"*

First Paper due, Monday, October 5, 4pm.

PART III: HEIDEGGER, FROM AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE TO THE HISTORY OF BEING

Lecture 9: Heidegger and the Phenomenology of Existence

(Thurs, 1 Oct)

reading: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Frontispiece, I: "Being and Time," Introduction I (pp.21-35); Ch. 1: "Exposition of the Task of a Preparatory Analysis of Dasein" (pp.67-77); Ch. 3: "The Worldhood of the World," ¶14-16 only (pp.91-107).

Lecture 10: Heidegger's Theory of Social Being

(Tues, 6 Oct.)

reading: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Ch. 4: "Being-in-the-World as Being-with and Being-one's Self. The They", all (pp.149-168); Ch. 5: B and ¶35-38 only (pp.210-224); and Ch. 6: "Care as the Being of Dasein" ¶39-41 only (pp.225-241); and Part II, Ch. 1, ¶51-53 only (pp.296-311).

Lecture 11: Heidegger's Existential Ethic: Authenticity and Historical Existence

(Thurs, 8 Oct.)

reading: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Part II, Ch. 2: "Dasein's Attestation of an Authentic Potentiality-for-Being, and Resoluteness" ¶54-57 (pp. 312-325) and ¶60 (pp.341-348); and Part II, Ch. 5, ¶74-75 (pp.434-444).

Lecture 12: Heidegger's Critique of Modernity: Technology, Representation, and Art

(Tues, 13 Oct.)

reading: Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art"*
Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture"*

Lecture 13: Heidegger and Politics: From the Rectoral Address to the *Spiegel* Interview
(Thurs, 15 Oct.)

reading: Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, trans. (Yale, 2000), selections as follows: Chapter One: The Fundamental Questions of Metaphysics, all (pp.1-54), and Chapter Four: The Restriction of Being (pp. 185-221 only).
Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University"*
Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us" Spiegel Interview.*

PART IV: THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL: MARXISM & THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Lecture 14: Horkheimer and the Foundations of Critical Theory
(Tues, 20 Oct.)

reading: Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory"*

Lecture 15: Benjamin: Theology and Marxism, Progress as Regression
(Thurs, 22 Oct.)

reading: Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History"*

Lecture 16: Adorno, Horkheimer: The Idea of a Dialectic of Enlightenment
(Tues, 27 Oct.)

reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Chs. 1 and 2.

Lecture 17: Adorno, Horkheimer: The Genealogy of Instrumental Reason
(Thurs, 29 Oct.)

reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Ch. 3.

Lecture 18: Benjamin and Adorno in Debate: Aesthetics and Politics
(Tues, 3 Nov.)

reading: Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility"*
Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and Regression in Hearing"*
Adorno, Letter to Benjamin, 18 March 1936*

Lecture 19: Adorno, Horkheimer: On the Culture Industry and Bourgeois Negativity
(Thurs, 5 Nov.)

reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Ch 4.
Adorno, "The Late Style [on Beethoven]"*

Lecture 20: Theology and the Persistence of Negativity
(Tues, 10 Nov.)

reading: Adorno, "Meditations on Metaphysics"*
Horkheimer, "Theism and Atheism"*
Adorno and Bloch, "Something's Missing: a Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing"*
Adorno, "Finale" in *Minima Moralia**

Second Paper due, Monday, 15 November, 4pm.

PART V: HABERMAS: PUBLICITY AND THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE REASON

Lecture 21: Habermas on the Tradition: Weber, Heidegger, Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer
(Thurs, 12 Nov.)

reading: Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Ch. 1, “Modernity’s Consciousness of Time and its Need for Self-Assurance,” Ch. 5, “The Mutual Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno,” and Ch. 6, “The Undermining of Western Rationalism through the Critique of Metaphysics: Martin Heidegger”

Lecture 22: Habermas and the Postmetaphysical Retrieval of the Enlightenment
(Tues, 17 Nov.)

reading: Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*, selections, as follows:
Author’s Preface, and Ch. 1 (skip 2); Chs. 3-5 (skip 6); Chs. 7-9 (skip 10); Chs. 11-12 (skip 13-17); Chs. 18-23 (skip remaining chapters).

Lecture 23: Habermas and the Theory of Communicative Reason, I.
(Thurs 19 Nov.)

reading: Habermas, “‘Rationality’—A Preliminary Specification” in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, pp.8-42.

Lecture on Tuesday 24 November cancelled.

Official University Thanksgiving Recess: Wednesday 25st November through Sunday, 29th November)

Lecture 24: Habermas and the Theory of Communicative Reason, II.
(Tues, 1 Dec.)

reading: Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II, selections:
Ch. VI, “Intermediate Reflections: System and Lifeworld,” (pp.113-197),
and Ch. VII, “Concluding Reflections: From Parsons via Weber to Marx”
pp.301-403.*

Lecture 25: Habermas and Recent Reflections on Religion.
(Thurs, 3 Dec.)

reading: Habermas, “An Awareness of What is Missing.”*
Habermas, “Faith and Knowledge.”*

Final Paper due first day of exams, Thurs, Dec. 10th, 4pm.