

# **CRITICAL THEORY**

FRANKFURT SCHOOL

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# WHAT IS THE CRITICAL THEORY ???

The term 'critical theory' describes the *neo-Marxist philosophy* of the Frankfurt School. Frankfurt theorists drew on the critical methods of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

The Frankfurt theorist **Max Horkheimer** described the critical theory as,

**“It seeks to liberate human beings from the circumstances that  
them.”**

( Max Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244. )

Critical theory aims to critique society, social structures, and systems of power, and in doing so, to foster egalitarian social change.



Too much mainstream ??

Okay... Let's make it simple !

# CONFLICT THEORY...

Critical theory is a social theory oriented toward...

**"CRITIQUING & CHANGING SOCIETY  
AS A WHOLE"**

# MMM.. YES !! KARL MARX !!

- Critical theory as it is known today can be traced to *Marx's critique of economy and society* put forth in his many works.
- Critical Theory inspired greatly by Marx's *theoretical formulation of the relationship between economic base and ideological superstructure*, and tends to focus on **how power and domination operate, in particular, in the realm of the superstructure.**

# FRANKFURT SCHOOL..

- Established in 1923, initially funded by Felix Weil, a young Marxist thinker.
- Aim of the institute was to bring together different strands of Marxist thinking into one interdisciplinary research center.
- Moved to New York in 1933.



# FRANKFURT SCHOOL.. THE TEACHERS!

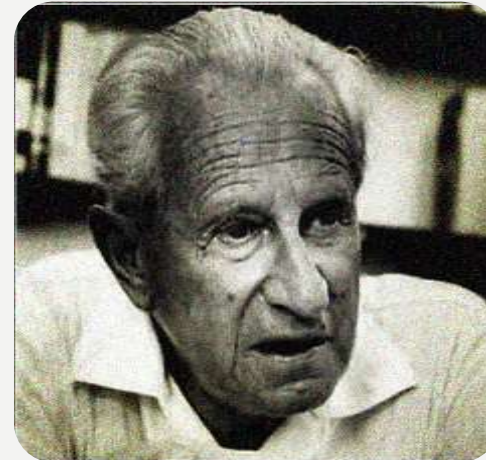
**Jurgen  
Habermas**



**Theodore  
Adorno**



**Herbert  
Marcuse**



**Max  
Horkheimer**



# MAX HORKHEIMER

- Horkheimer first developed the concept of “critical theory” in his book, *Traditional and Critical Theory (1937)*.
- In their book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno



# THEODORE ADORNO

- The book '*Minima Moralia*' is Adorno's critique of the amoral character of modern society, arguing through a short series of self-reflective essays that the ethical pursuit of living a good life is no longer possible under modern social conditions.

# HERBERT MARCUSE

- In his book *'One-Dimensional Man'* Marcus famously argues that modern persons are becoming almost thoroughly controlled by the rationalizing forces of mass media, advertising, science, and technology, and, as a result, becoming increasingly "one dimensional" in their thoughts and activities.

# JURGEN HABERMAS

- Student of **Horkheimer** and **Adorno**, **Jürgen Habermas** is one of the most important social theorists living today.
- In his work '***Toward a Rational Society (1967)***', Habermas critiques the instrumental rationality characterizing modern society and argues for a more truly rational society based on democratic politics.

# SO.. CRITICAL THEORY

Critical Theory is constructed by its positive utopianism...:

*“A vision of better reality, which overcomes the present oppressive  
This transformation of utopia becomes the arena of today’s praxis”*  
(Horkheimer, 1985)

**Its aim is to...**

*“Building a new world”*  
(Horkheimer, 1985)

# CRITICAL THEORY TODAY

- Over the years the goals and tenets of critical theory have been adopted by many social scientists and philosophers who have come after the Frankfurt School.
- We can recognize critical theory today in many **feminist theories** and **feminist approaches** to conducting social science, in **critical race theory, cultural theory**, in **gender and queer theory**, and in **media theory** and **media studies**.

# CRITICISM

- Although Frankfurt theorists delivered a number of criticisms against the theories and practices of their days, they did not present any positive alternatives.
- Another criticism, originating from the left, is that critical theory is a form of bourgeois idealism that has no inherent relation to political practice and is totally isolated from any ongoing revolutionary movement.



# THANK YOU

FOR HEARING THE  
BORING PRESENTATION WITH PATIENCE. ;)