Critical Theory

Ideology Perspective

Roddy Williams
# Table of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Themes of Critical Theory</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrasting Ideas to Critical Theory</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Thinkers of Critical Theory</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Theory

Critical theory as a concept of international relations and political nature of knowledge claims highlights and analysis as conditions of human society and possibilities for improvement and implementation of equity, just and emancipation within the framework of international world structure. It is usually opposed to traditional theories that analyze events and effects without taking into account social influences, objectively estimating the investigated issue without proper consideration of social factors and system the event exists in. Thus, critical theory demonstrates political nature of knowledge within the framework of society and state and “examines between and across them” (Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit and Jacqui True. 2005, p. 140).

Critical theory is rooted in the Enlightenment and it can be traced in Greek philosophy, besides, “it is connected to the writings of Kant, Hegel, Marx” (Scott Burchill et al. 2005, p. 137). Though the critical theorists’ main concept is analysis of political life through criticism the theory can function and contribute beyond a state level and strives to extend to international influence on the prevailing world order. Critical theory is often opposed to idealism as it suggests employing the method of immanent critique (Scott Burchill et al. 2005, p. 144).

The essence of the critical theory is critique of the structure of the international system in order to analyze possible transformations to overcome unjust and inequality and promote democracy through the borderless cooperation. The international world order is viewed by the critical theorists as a sovereign state that is considered a ‘limited moral community’ and promotes exclusion, generating estrangement, injustice, insecurity and violent conflict between self-regarding states by imposing rigid boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Scott Burchill et al. 2005, p. 148)
CRITICAL THEORY

The possible solution for transforming the inconsistent global structure is extended cosmopolitan citizenship in the form of cosmopolitan democracy or radical democracy as an alternative form of political community. This concept “demands the recognition of difference and maximum pluralism without destroying the community” (Baaz, n. d., sec. Democracy). Critical theorists suggest transforming current political system with extended democratic community where along with states as the main actors of the political scene, nations, individuals and non-governmental organizations and minorities could be main players thus achieving the main purpose of critical theory “to improve human existence by abolishing injustice” (Scott Burchill et al. 2005, p. 139). The current international structure of the prevailing order contributs to unjust and inequality domination, and the sovereign state plays a role of one of the foremost modern forms of social exclusion and therefore as a considerable barrier to universal justice and emancipation (Scott Burchill et al. 2005, p. 149).

Critical theory promotes emancipation following its concept of equity and just. The term is best determined by Ashley (Scott Burchill et al. 2005) as freedom from unacknowledged constraints, relations of domination, and conditions of distorted communication and understanding that deny humans the capacity to make their own future through full will and consciousness’. This statement complies with the whole concept of critical thinking and its attempt to create a free individual community eliminating prevailing state’s domination over minority.

Critical theorist do not only provide theoretical analysis of state of political knowledge, it seeks possibilities for transforming imperfect international structure of prevailing dominance by introducing fresh look at the new extended system of relations based on freedom from socially created constrains, equity, just and democracy considering rights and interests of both majority
and minority without prevailing dominance of the former and derogating from rights of the latter. Furthermore, critical thinkers identify the core need “to develop more sophisticated understandings of community as a means of identifying and eliminating global constraints on humanity’s potential for freedom, equality and self-determination (Scott Burchill et al. 2005).

The contrasting ideas to critical theory are represented in realism. Whereas critical theorists promote cosmopolitan form of democratic community thus aiming to reduce and eliminate power domination and promote emancipation, realism concept argues that states are the main actors in the international relation, which are based on anarchy and are “concerned with their own security, act in pursuit of their own national interests, and struggle for power” (Korab-Karpowicz, W. Julian, 2010, para 1). According to realism theory human beings are “inherently egoistic and self-interested to the extent that self-interest overcomes moral principles” (Korab-Karpowicz, W. Julian, 2010, sec. 1.3 Hobbes's Anarchic State of Nature). People are considered egoistic, though not selfish and self-centred pursuing only their interest disregarding possible harmful effects on the others and are featured by lack of morality. Security is the main concern of realism, to attain which states increase their power and launch war against another country in the fear of its possible dominance.

The difference in views between the critical theory and realism underlies in the main consumptions the theories pursue of the causes of war. Thus, according to Kant as a representative of critical theory, war is undeniably related to the separation of humankind into separate, it is an opportunity to perfect the global world order (Scott Burchill et al. 2005). Whereas realism theorists argue that war is caused by the concerns of security and fear along with uncontrolled desire for more power (Korab-Karpowicz, W. Julian, 2011).
CRITICAL THEORY

Another significant contrast between critical theory and realism is revealed in their approach to the international structure. Realism considers main player in the international relationship sovereign states that in their striving for security justify war and do not pay much attention of morality and ethics and presuppose double ethic – public and private. Critical theory form the other hand promotes emancipation, just and equity in the global structure. In contrast to realism, critical thinking suggests states as separate units that contribute to inequity and unjust and are barriers for the more extended democracy in the form of cosmopolitan community.

The foregoing arguments demonstrate an outstanding contrast between two theories of global world structure within the framework of international relations. According to realism theory, states as the main actors are in permanent state of enmity to other structural units to sustain its security and pursuit their national interest often neglecting norms of morally and ethics in relations with other countries. Critical theory views states as main barriers on the way to the improved form of society, and consider them exclusive units that separated the humankind, thus presupposed them to enmity due to high level of particularism in relation to non-citizens that in a consequence leads to inequality and unjust.

Whereas the main vision of realism of international structure underlies in inevitable pursuit for power and egocentrism self-interest of states that interact with one another without a universal government in the framework of anarchy, critical theorists strive to destroy formal borders among countries with the aim to promote an alternative form of international structure expanding rights and roles of minorities and non-governmental institutions thus providing international equity, just and higher form of democracy applied to both major and minor actors in the global scene to provide emancipation along with higher sense of morality.
CRITICAL THEORY

Though critical theory thoughts are traced in Greek philosophy of autonomy and democracy and are often referred to Enlightenment and connected with the works of Kant, Hegel and Marx it was shaped into a different scholar of theory of international relations in 1980s by the Frankfurt School headed by Max Horkheimer, who along with Theodor Adorno, Walter Bejamin, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal and Jurgen Habermas identified critical theory among other concepts of world system and its role in the international relations and opposed it to traditional theories of global structure (Scott Burchill et al. 2005). The main objective of the Frankfurt School is to analyse contemporary society and point out its possible ways for development and change. This feature significantly differentiates critical theory from traditional ones in individual, cultural and political areas.

The disappointment of Marx’s beliefs that knowledge and theory can transform society, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno viewed Enlightenment as promising freedom and progress through reason and knowledge, reason and knowledge have instead become instruments of domination, enabling more efficient and extensive control not only over the natural environment, but also human beings (Powell, 2003). Erich Fromm’s main contribute to critical theory is the consumption of Freud and Marx works can be integrated. He argues that there are basic instincts of motive forces for human behaviour, but that these are adapted, both actively and passively, to social reality (Kellner, n.d.). Furthermore, critical theory is reviewed by a German philosopher as he tries to re-construct and develop emancipatory theory of society (Powell, 2003).

Thus, critical theory was determined by a group of prominent philosophers united by the common idea of applying knowledge and theory in changing international structure, the transformation of which would extend democracy and eliminate inequality and domination.
Critical theory as a concept of analysis of contemporary society does not expire its social and political significance of identifying current problem and finding opportunities to improve situation. It does not lose its importance in view of the fact of promoting democracy as it provides resources for a democratic politics (Keller, n. d.).

Kellner (n.d.) maintains that within the framework of globalization and its unpredictability critical theory exposes existing social and political problems and provides early concerns of decline of freedom. This concept usually contradicted with traditional ones, as it produces not only theoretical analysis of a contemporary world structure but also provides possibilities for change and transformation to extend democracy and emancipation.

Critical theory acquired a new curve of development in the works of Habermas in his attempt to reconstruct critical theory out of the shadow of Marx (Powell, 2003). It is obvious that critical theory continues arising interest and controversy, thus it develops and changes with the social and political needs for transformation it promotes.

Taking everything into account, the obvious conclusion to be drawn is the fact, that critical theory singles out of the traditional theories of international structure and contradicts commonly accepted concepts that an object of knowledge can be carefully studied in isolation of influencing factors. It views political knowledge in the framework of social environment and points out abuses in order to overcome and eliminate them. The very essence critical theory is the struggle for a better society, without injustice and inequality. Critical theorists claim that transformation of current world system can result in extending of emancipation and democracy and reduction of domination and unnecessary social constrains individuals suffer from. Its main concern of people’s freedom in the prevailing world order generated new idea of international structure that suggests creating democratic cosmopolitan communities.
References


Kant, for whom war was undeniably related to the separation of humankind into separate, self-regarding political units, Rousseau, who caustically remarked that in joining a particular community individual citizens necessarily made themselves enemies of the rest of humanity, and Marx who saw in the modern state a contradiction between general and private interests. In Kant’s definition war is “a nature’s will for humanity”, “a nature’s will for humanity”, it is an opportunity to perfect the global world order and “serves as the means for civilization progress” (Kant, Hegel and Deluze on war, n. d.).

Though, Max Horkheimer followed some Marxial concerns, critical theory “integrated the thought of scholars such as Max Weber, Immanuel Kant, Georg W.F. Hegel, and Sigmund Freud to extend Marxist inquiry far beyond its traditional concern with economic production relations to consider the influence of capitalism on personality, family, art, and mass culture, among other areas” (World of Sociology on Max Horkheimer (n. d.).