

Reason, Consciousness, and Praxis: German Social Thought Hegel & Habermas

Week One: Grounding Hegel
September 22

Reading: Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, Robert Tucker (3rd Edition, Transaction Press, 2001) Parts I & II [pp. 1-122]

Why read Hegel? Without Hegel the writings of Marx and Engels might not exist, but to better understand Marx it is necessary to better understand Hegel. To transcend the Marxist project is also to transcend the Hegelian one. This week's reading situates the relationship between Hegel and Marx, and suggests many considerations to mind while reading Hegel, and particularly the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Week Two: Outlining Marx
September 29

Reading: Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, Robert Tucker (3rd Edition, Transaction Press, 2001) Parts III & IV [pp. 123-243]

Tucker completes his thoughts on Marx as we complete his book. The themes presented by Tucker will be especially useful frameworks when we read Lukács. This week's reading explores the notions of alienation and exploitation in Marx and relates them to Feuerbach and German phenomenology.

Week Three: Tackling Hegel
October 6

Reading: Phenomenology of Spirit, G.W.F. Hegel, A.V. Miller, translator (Oxford 1977) Preface, Introduction, Parts A & B [pp. 1-139]

Absolute, Truth, Consciousness: these are the subjects that Hegel explicates throughout this important text. Hegel gives the reader a primer of terms in his Preface, where he explains that "Absolute is Subject" and offers insight into his own philosophical orientation. In parts A & B he deals with Consciousness and Self-Consciousness, these sections will greatly influence Marx, and subsequently Lukács, in the development on the notion of collective/class consciousness.

Week Four: Break
October 13

Week Five: Reason
October 20

Reading: Phenomenology of Spirit, G.W.F. Hegel, A.V. Miller, translator (Oxford 1977) Part C (AA) [pp. 139-263]

The conundrum of modern Western philosophy and its *raison d'être* – reason – is the focus of this week's reading. Hegel relates reason to consciousness and to being.

Week Six: Alienation and Terror
October 27

Reading: Phenomenology of Spirit, G.W.F. Hegel, A.V. Miller, translator (Oxford 1977) Part C (BB) [pp. 263-410]

Under the heading of "Spirit" Hegel relates the Enlightenment and the splits within the human identity to terror and alienation. He also explores the processes of developing self-consciousness to morality, ethics and culture.

Week Seven: Art, Knowing and God
November 3

Reading: Phenomenology of Spirit, G.W.F. Hegel, A.V. Miller, translator (Oxford 1977) Parts C (CC) and (DD) [pp. 410-495]

Knowledge versus Truth, Spirit versus God: Hegel slays Kantian constructions of Reason and praxis in these last sections. The philosophy of praxis that will characterize Marx's thought is articulated by Hegel here. Yet, it is not identical. It is important to explore the role Hegel assigns to aesthetics and how he deals with religion.

Week Eight: Lukács as Bridge: Reification
November 10

Reading: History and Class Consciousness, Georg Lukács, (Merlin Press 1971) [pp. 1-222 with a focus on pp. 83-222]

Is there only one way to read Marx? Lukács takes on the very concept of *Marxism* and explores its impact on the development of thought on reason and consciousness. In particular Lukács develops his notion of "reification": the transformation of the proletariat into a mystified fetish onto itself. Lukács entreats reader to see the proletariat as subjects, and examines the consequences of treating them as objects.

Week Nine: Lukács as Bridge: Historical Materialism and Violence
November 17

Reading: History and Class Consciousness, Georg Lukács, (Merlin Press 1971)
[pp. 223-342]

Lukács examines vulgar interpretations of Historical Materialism, and discusses the importance of this historical method. In this, he explores the role of violence in social relations beyond the crude measures of production. He also explores the relationship between violence and being, and how violence shapes consciousness and the narrative of that consciousness: history.

Week Ten: Rationality and Consciousness: Habermas
November 24

Reading: The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: "Reason and the Rationalization of Society," Jürgen Habermas, (Beacon Press 1984)
Preface and Part I (pp. 1-142)

Habermas suggests that rationality as a praxis of understanding can facilitate emancipation from the fetters of domination through reification and instrumentality. In this first section Habermas offers various modes of understanding rationality.

Week Ten: Weber and Rationalization
December 1

Reading: The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: "Reason and the Rationalization of Society," Jürgen Habermas, (Beacon Press 1984)
Part II (pp. 143-272)

Habermas suggests that much can be gleaned from a close consideration of Max Weber's analysis of rationality and modernity.

Week Eleven: Life Activities: Praxis and Communication
December 8

Reading: The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: "Reason and the Rationalization of Society," Jürgen Habermas, (Beacon Press 1984)
Parts III & IV (pp. 273-403)

Habermas explains how communicative action, ingenuous praxis of asserting truth claims, can become a life activity, transcending what he asserts to be the inherent reification associated with labour as life activity. The final chapter of this book may be one of the most eloquent critiques of instrumental rationality written.