

# **Introduction to Western Philosophy**

**The road to “critical theory”**

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**K09**

# Game Plan

- Branches of Western Philosophy
- Critical Theory
- Rhetoric, Dialectic and Logic
- Fundamental Dichotomies
- Timeline of Western Philosophy
- Some Ancient Dialectics
- Conceptual Refinement via Dialectically Evolving Dichotomies

# Branches of Western Philosophy

- The fundamentals:
  - Epistemology - the theory of knowledge
  - Logic - how to reason
  - Metaphysics - ontology (what there is), the “a priori”
  - Philosophy of Language
- Philosophy of:
  - math, science, morality, politics, aesthetics, religion, mind...
- How to live! (Practical philosophy the others were “Theoretical”)

# Critical Theory (Horkheimer)

*A forebear of Critical Social Justice*

- Classical separates, Critical combines:
  - Logical/Empirical/Value knowledge
  - Objective/Subjective judgements
  - Theoretical, Practical, Active
  - philosophy, sociology, ethics, politics, activism
- Critical theory derives from Marxism which comes from Hegel
- Hegelian dialectic/logic:
  - Ideas (history/spirit) evolve via Thesis, Antithesis then Synthesis
- Further radicalised via Post-modernism
  - rejects modernism (classical theory) in more fundamental ways,  
denying meaning and objective truth

# Rhetoric, Dialectic and Logic

- **Rhetoric:** aims to persuade by appeal to the emotions
- **Dialectic:** is reasoned argumentation, considering different sides or aspects of the problem reconciling them into “final” conclusion:
  - Thesis -> antithesis -> synthesis
- **Logic:**
  - is a formally rigorous derivation from premises to conclusions by means guaranteed to preserve truth.
    - This is strictly “deductive” reasoning, some other “logics” are less conclusive, and the term is also often use in a much broader (almost meaningless) way (as in “the logic of ...”).

# Fundamental Dichotomies

- **Logical v Empirical -**

Logical = knowledge obtainable by pure reason

Empirical = knowledge obtained by observation

- **Descriptive v Evaluative**

Descriptive = stating how things are (Logical + Empirical)

Evaluative = concerning merits

- *Objective v Subjective*

- Objective = Having the same truth value for all (Descriptive)

- Subjective = Varying in truth value, preferential, cultural, relative

# Western Philosophy Timeline

## Broad-brush

- **Greek/Roman (ancient)**
  - Pre-socratic - 600-400 BCE (Thales, Heraclitus, Parmenides, sophists)
  - Classical - 450-322 BCE (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle)
  - Hellenic - 323-146 BCE - 476 CE  
(scepticism, stoicism, epicurianism, hedonism...)
- **Middle (dark?) Ages** - 476-1300 (christianity - scholasticism)
- **Modern**
  - Renaissance - 1300-1700 (new science v scepticism, empiricism v rationalism)
  - Enlightenment; Romanticism - 1700-1800 (scientific utopianism?, head v heart)
  - Anglo-Saxon v. Continental - 1800-2020  
(liberal/democratic/analytic v marxism/existentialism/critical theory)

# Some ancient “Dialectics”

- **Thesis: Thales** thought the whole universe was composed of different forms of **water**
- **Antithesis 1: Anaximenes** concluded it was made of **air**
- **Antithesis 2: Heraclitus** thought it was **fire**
- **Synthesis: Empedocles** - **earth, air, fire** and **water**
  
- **Thesis: Heraclitus** believed in an on-going process of **perpetual change**
- **Antithesis: Parmenides** believed that everything is **permanent, indestructible** and **unchanging**
- **Synthesis 1: Democritus** world built from indestructible **atoms**
- **Synthesis 2: Plato** posited **two worlds**, the unchanging **ideal forms** and chaotic **appearances**
  
- **Thesis: Plato's two worlds**
- **Antithesis: Aristotle** demonstrative science, essentialism
- **Synthesis: Leibniz?**

**Plato** and **Aristotle** are sometimes regarded as precursors for **Rationalism** and **Empiricism**



# **Conceptual Refinement** via **Dialectically Evolving Dichotomies**

Stability v Change (Heracilus v Parmenides)

Eternal Ideals v Fleeting Appearances (Plato)

Necessity v Contingency (Aristotle)

Logical truth v Empirical truth

Rationalism v Empiricism

(Decartes, Spinoza, Leibniz v Locke, Berkeley, Hume)

Enlightenment v Romanticism

(Head v Heart, Hume v Kant v Rousseau)

Analytic v Continental

(Classical v Critical)

# Logical v Empirical

- Precursors
  - Plato: knowledge of forms by reason v opinion from appearances
  - Aristotle: Necessary v Contingent, Essential v. Accidental
- Rationalism v Empiricism dialectic
- Humean and Kantian syntheses
- Three (coinciding?) characterisations:
  - *a priori* / *a posteriori* (epistemic)
  - Necessary/Contingent (metaphysical?)
  - Analytic/Synthetic (semantic)