



Increasingly in our culture, the individual experience of those deemed to be 'oppressed' settles every argument and overrides objective evidence. Their perception is seen as all important. An 'oppressed' person's feelings cannot be questioned. Feelings are more important than facts.

For example, a man cannot give birth. But if you state that simple truth, you may be accused of hate speech. A transgender person may have 'felt hurt'.

Our culture is not only hostile to biblical truth but to the very concepts of truth and reality.

Lie 1: No Creator God

Lie 2: No absolute morality

Lie 3: No ultimate truth

Several lies are behind this, which are hardwired into Critical Theory. It is a fusion of Marxism and postmodernism, and is the ideology behind woke activism and 'cancel culture'.

Your daughter may come home from school saying that she is really a boy. Blame critical gender theory.

You may get mugged, but because you are not in a minority group, your attacker may get a lighter sentence than if you were. That would reflect critical legal theory.

You may be the best-qualified person applying for a job, but the company has to meet Diversity, Equity and Inclusion targets. You do not even get an interview. That is the reach of critical race theory.

These are the outworkings of just three of the various 'critical theories' that have emerged from Critical Theory. Christians must be equipped to stand against these challenges to biblical truth.



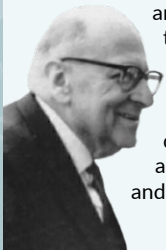
What Critical Theory is



Critical Theory was a school of thought pioneered by a Marxist study centre founded in Germany in 1923, known as the Frankfurt School. Its first director, Max Horkheimer (pictured), distinguished between

traditional theory and what he termed 'critical theory'.

Traditional theory refers to disciplines such as science, history and philosophy



that seek to understand the world as it is. They are about looking for truth and knowledge, and passing that knowledge on.

Critical Theory is not interested in understanding the world, only in changing it. It's about achieving equal outcomes, i.e. 'Social Justice'. To do this, all the institutions that prop up the status quo must be overturned.

The overthrow of society was conceived in ideological rather than physical terms. Don't kill the powerful,

instead persuade ordinary people of the terrible oppression they endure. They will then start the revolution!

Critical Theory was designed to 'enlighten' people, especially those in minority groups, to see the way that power structures exploit them. The aim is action. Encourage people to view all authority as oppressive and all truth claims as suspicious. Overthrow the structures by spreading suspicion, mistrust and division.

Terms you may hear:

Intersectionality – An individual may experience the **oppression** of living within multiple oppressed groups (such as minority race, sexual orientation or religion).

Woke – Critical Theory seeks to awaken us to the oppression endemic in the institutions of society and to move us towards activism to liberate oppressed groups. Those who are awakened

and who engage in activism may be referred to as 'woke'.

Social justice – Aims for a society characterised by equal outcomes, rather than equal opportunities.

Hegemony – All institutions which serve to 'prop up' a society in which there are unequal outcomes.



Where Critical Theory came from: Key thinkers

A VIRUS OF RADICAL DOUBT

During the twentieth century, first universities, then all the institutions of Western society, were invaded by a virus of radical doubt. This was a deliberate attempt by some to break down confidence in absolute morality, ultimate truth and objective reality.

Karl Marx (1818-1883): Religion is a false consciousness

Marx argued that religion exists because we are unhappy and alienated in our economic lives. It drugs people into acceptance of their lot. The first generation of Marxists pushed for *violent* revolution. Those associated with the Frankfurt School promoted *cultural* revolution. But a common motif recurs: religion is a false consciousness that puts a brake on the revolution that's needed to liberate oppressed groups. Religion must not be tolerated.



Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937): Overturn common sense!



Gramsci saw that values were passed on through the cultural institutions that preserved the status quo: schools, colleges, churches, the family, the workplace, governments and law courts. Gramsci described all this as the hegemony, from the Greek verb 'to lead'.

He argued that the hegemony keeps ordinary people trapped in a false consciousness. The values are so embedded in Western culture that people think of them as common sense. He believed that the dominance of common sense could ultimately be toppled. A few determined people can achieve revolution if they succeed in changing ideas.

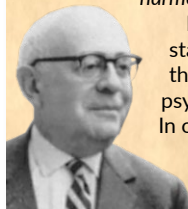
Max Horkheimer (1895-1973): We make our own reality

Underlying every aspect of thinking at the Frankfurt School was Horkheimer's conviction that there is no transcendent reality, no God. We make our own reality. Horkheimer coined the term Critical Theory, and hostility to Christianity is hardwired into this way of thinking. Humans constructed ideals such as 'universal rights' or 'free speech'. We can deconstruct them too.

Theodor Adorno (1903-1969): Freedom is dangerous

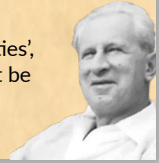
Adorno believed that the influence wielded by the hegemony in propping up the capitalist establishment could be undermined by Critical Theory. The problem with liberalism (free societies) was that people were free to sort themselves into hierarchies. Adorno viewed all hierarchies with suspicion, describing them as *illusory harmonies*.

In reality, he insisted, the pseudo-stability of Western capitalism disguises the rotten reality. Multitudes are psychologically oppressed by inequality. In order to end the oppression, the stability of society must be shaken.



Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979): Tolerance must be challenged

Marcuse argued that when people in power talk about 'free speech' or 'civil liberties', it's simply a ploy to protect their privilege. Minorities are powerless, so they must be given special privileges. This re-balancing is more important than civil liberties.



Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980): No forbidding allowed!

Sartre insisted that individuals shouldn't have to conform to the rules and expectations of anything or anyone outside themselves. We make our own rules and define our own existence. We don't have to conform to the ideals of those around us, conveyed by church, family or other authorities.



Michel Foucault (1926–1984): Truth is a social construct

Foucault concluded that ideas about key issues, such as sexuality, insanity and criminal justice have varied so much through history that everything is relative. Foucault's legacy is the idea that knowledge is a ploy, used to keep the privileged in positions of power. Truth itself is a cultural construct.



Rudi Dutschke (1940-1979): The Long March

Rudi Dutschke realised that violent activism had little chance of pulling down the establishment. In 1967 he came up with a powerful new slogan, calling for *Der Lange Marsch* (The Long March) through the cultural institutions of Western society - undermining from within.



Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998): Bin the big stories!

Lyotard wrote a book entitled *The Postmodern Condition*. It promoted the idea that universal explanations, or 'metanarratives' are ways of legitimising institutions of power. Instead, we should consult individual stories, especially non-privileged stories. Never mind that the multiplicity of these experiences can create multiple (contradictory) truths.



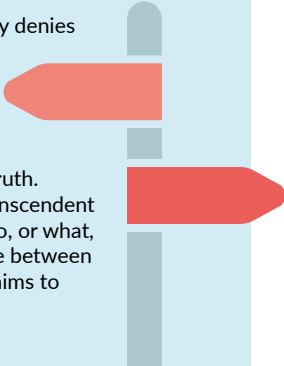
THE DEATH OF COMMON SENSE

The pioneers of Critical Theory set out to destroy common sense. Their progress is evident. Common-sense assumptions, like the idea that a boy can't be a girl, can today be dismissed as hateful. That represents a triumph for Critical Theory.

Five pillars of Critical Theory

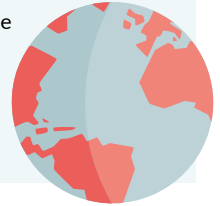
1. TRUTH CLAIMS ARE POWER GRABS

Critical Theory denies the existence of God. If there is no God, there is no ground for ultimate truth. Without a transcendent authority, who, or what, is left to judge between competing claims to truth?



2. UNIVERSAL EXPLANATIONS ARE SUSPECT

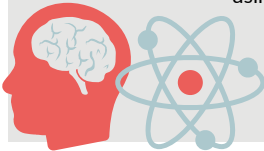
The founders of Critical Theory denied any higher authority: we are left with the lived experience of each individual. Authentic knowledge is only achieved *within* different communities. People outside those groups do not have access to that knowledge.



3. REASON, LOGIC AND SCIENCE ARE TOOLS OF OPPRESSION

Some say that science is a metanarrative that upholds the establishment. They believe that straight white men from privileged Western societies invented logical methods of legitimising knowledge, in order to oppress other people. Asking to test truth claims using science or evidence is playing by rules set by the oppressors.

Their tools (which could include science, rational argument and evidence) should be replaced with the lived experience of people in oppressed groups.



4. DON'T QUESTION MY EXPERIENCE!

No-one's personal experience can be challenged, because this is deemed 'oppressive' and 'hateful'. Since an individual's perception of being in the wrong body prevails over the objective truth of biology, many young people have been irreversibly damaged by gender reassignment medications and surgeries.



5. ALL AUTHORITY STRUCTURES ARE REPRESSIVE

Critical Theory aims at action to achieve equal outcomes. To get there, the institutions propping up the hegemony must be destabilised. Trust in authority has to be undermined.



Impact of Critical Theory on the Church

Under the cover of the deceptive phrase 'Social Justice', Critical Theory is being smuggled into Western institutions, including the Church.



1. Many believe Christianity has oppressed minority groups

This view rests on a re-writing of history. It ignores the positive and transformative effect that the biblical worldview has had, not only on countries in the West, but worldwide.

2. Claims to absolute morality are 'offensive'

Biblical morality is regarded as violent and hateful. Teaching on biblical repentance can offend people. Causing offence is viewed as inflicting harm at least as severe as physical violence.

3. Presentation of a false gospel

Critical Theory has a false view of humanity, of sin and of salvation. It sees people in terms of group identity, with some groups labelled as evil oppressors who bear a sin that can never be atoned for, and others as innocent victims with no need to repent.

Confronting Critical Theory today

Elevating individual perception over objective truth is bearing bitter fruit. How should we respond?

1. Don't be taken in by the claim that we should use Critical Theory as a 'useful tool'

We must challenge injustice, but we don't need Critical Theory to help us. The architects of Critical Theory cleverly hijacked the word 'justice', and subverted its true meaning. True justice is defined by the God of justice and his eternal moral law.

2. Teach biblical ethics and live out Christ-like care

It is not loving to affirm people in whatever they claim about their identity or desires. But as we oppose lies, we must show compassion for those who have been deceived. We are to love them, pray for them and treat them with gentleness and respect.

3. Be confident in God's good purposes

Living according to God's truth leads to individual and societal flourishing. The Creator God is the ground of truth, reality, justice and morality. The only firm foundation for the defence of human rights and dignity is the truth that we are all created in God's image.

To find out more, read Sharon James's booklet 'Critical Theory: Challenging Truth and Reality'  the.ci/ChallengingTruth



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Tel: 0191 281 5664 | Email: info@christian.org.uk | Web: christian.org.uk | Published in June 2023

Registered in England as a charity Charity No. 100 4774 Company No. 263 4440. A charity registered in Scotland Charity No. SC039220