Parenthetical Definition:

Marx was one of the early contributors to the discipline of critical theory (political theory used to critique other theories).

Sentence Definition:

Critical theory is a school of political thought that aims to critically analyze other existing theoretical frameworks.

Expanded Definition:

Critical theory is a branch of political theory that emerged predominantly from the writings of nineteenth century German philosophers, particularly the work of Karl Marx (“Critical Theory”). The name “critical theory” is derived from its distinctive emphasis upon its critical approach towards political philosophy. Critical theory is distinguishable from other schools of political thought in that it does not necessarily provide a prescriptive approach to solving political problems, but rather aims to provide a critical analysis of other political theories (Rasmussen). This is to say that critical theory’s function is primarily to identify problems raised by other schools of political thought, rather than offer concrete solutions to these problems.

*Karl Marx, critical theorist and* *inventor of Communism.*

Critical theory is often centred on ideas of liberation and emancipation for all humans from the constraints that are placed upon them by current political systems (Horkheimer 246). For example, proponents of critical theory often criticise the school of realism, which focuses on military power and a “winner take all” approach to politics, for the “enslaving” effect it has upon citizens of less powerful political entities. Critical theorists tend look at other theories and political systems as sources of oppression, and often call for major changes or total dissolution of these systems in order to bring about change.

Due to this approach, critical theory is often considered to have quite radical implications for the world system. For example, Marx famously used critical theory to analyze the structure and consequences of capitalism, and to demonstrate the constraints that the system placed upon ordinary workers (Marx, Engels, and Hobsbawm). Marx’s work on this topic led to the conceptualization of Communism, a political model that seeks to demolish existing class structures to bring about universal prosperity and equality.

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