A brief outline of the history and central ideas of Critical Theory and Critical Psychology

Most trends and issues in western philosophy were initiated by the Early Greek Enlightenment (600-400 BCE) and continued in Greek, Arabic, and Hebraic scholarship through to about 11-12th centuries while European scholarship was developing only slowly. At that time, Hebraic and Arabic scholars, mostly in Spain, started a period of awareness for other European scholars, mostly priests in France, with their translations of Greek and Arabic works into Latin. The glimmerings of humanism began to make inroads on the church's hegemonic hold on religion, philosophy, and society, so that by the end of the 16th century, the Enlightenment was in full swing. Humanism placed humans at the center of attention, and the earth no longer at the center of the cosmos. The philosophical emphasis on humans depicted and idealized humans as rational and comprised of a fixed, essential nature.

Enter Hegel who challenged this concept with his concepts of emergence of multiplicities of human nature as mentioned briefly in Abraham, *The Dynamics of Culture,* which were picked up in the social theories of Marx & Engels whose economic theories and concepts of social change fueled the Russian revolution. By the end of the 19th century these ideas were further developed by Nietzsche whom many consider one of the fathers of both existentialism and postmodern theory. Thus theories of the multidimensionality of human nature and the fluidity of social change were evolving

Fast forward now to later in the1930's when idealized concepts of humans and society led to rigid ideas of equality into a totalitarian communist state in Russia, and pseudo-scientific eugenics of racial superiority were used to justify totalitarian fascist states. These gave rise to a counter effort, first by mostly Jewish intellectuals at the University of Frankfort's Institute of Social Research, started by Horkheimer who founded Critical Theory. And later in France by Sartre, a principal founder of existentialism. Critical Theory mainly challenged the concept of reason as being at fault for creating idealistic social systems, and thus rejected rational thought as dangerous, a baby thrown out with-the-bath-water (Horkheimer & Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.) Habermas later brought the concept of communal-rationalism back into Critical Theory, at this point indistinguishable from neo-pragmatism.

Post-structuralism challenged the concept of having any idealized picture of society and human nature be the foundation for a political state, as it always became corrupted and did not allow for changing concepts of society or human nature, and they offered no particular program for achieving such a state beyond requiring that open discussion in a society was essential to its change and health. Thus they also emphasized that destabilizing concepts upon which social characteristics were decided to also be unstable and multiple, leading to what seemed like a paradox, their insistence of the importance of language, but their own use of obscure linguistic devices and words. You can see evidence of these in Bhabha.(e.g., p. 58). The importance of binary constructions, the tensions between them (the interstices for Bhabha), are useful to create an emergence of new ideas and social conditions.

Postmodern theories reject the traditional lineages of western philosophy that attempt to establish a final true vision of metaphysics, ontology, and cosmology (the essential nature of things) and epistemology (the essential methods of knowing things). Postmodern theories refer to these idealized goals of traditional philosophy as the 'grand narratives', as' totalizing', 'centering', 'logocentric', and in similar terms, and attempt to destabilize them, which began with Hegel, and continues today in

postmodern discourse and related philosophies. Postmodern theory is heavily based on Hegelian-Marxist dialectics, existentialism, and Freudian depth psychology, changing each in the process.

Chart of Postmodern Lineage

CRITICAL THEORY

Dialectical
  Materialism
    Hegel/Marx/Engels
Existentialism
  Nietzsche
Depth Psychology
  Freud

POST-STRUCTURALISM

POSTMODERNISM

Special Terms
grand narratives/metanarratives
Enlightenment subject/subject
totalizing, centering, logocentric

Philosophical Hermeneutics
Heidegger
Gadamer
Ricoeur

POST-COLONIAL THEORY

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY