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Critical Theory Since Plato

Third Edition

柏拉图以来的批评理论（第三版）（下册）

Hazard Adams
&
Leroy Searle

北京大学出版社
PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS

CRITICAL THEORY SINCE PLATO

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something under indictment, but as an indispensable imaginative process of reflection and discovery that by its very nature cannot be effectively confined within the scope of any current ideology.

The chief philosophical difficulty for literary speculation is that its primary traditions have taken shape in criticism as an extension of modes of dialectical argument that promise far more than they can deliver. If we begin from Aristotle's distinctly unflattering definition of dialectic as nothing like the inflated universal or "scientific" method of Hegel and Marx, but simply as that mode of argument that proceeds from commonplaces—what people already believe, what they are thought to believe, what the "best" believe, and so on—it is clear why dialectical argument is always inescapably problematic.[14] Whereas Plato had valorized dialectic in the *Phaedrus* as enabling thought itself (266b-c)—even though he himself invariably has recourse to stories when his arguments run into trouble—Aristotle saw more accurately that dialectic never did and never *could* arrive at unambiguous demonstrations because it was inherently bound by what participants already thought they knew. On that score, no invocation of Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* or learning as recollection would ever suffice to expunge errors or eliminate paradoxes and contradictions already embedded in the common understanding.

It is beyond any serious question that in this light, the apologetic tradition in literary criticism has always been—and remains, even in its currently more contentious and accusatory mode—dialectical to the core. The appropriate conclusion to draw, however, is that to be dialectical means to be in the profoundest sense *untheoretical*—a point we believe applies with no diminished force to current theory—and therefore remains, in all essential respects, entirely within the range of arguments that start and end with commonplaces. For precisely this reason, there is no point at which one cannot continue the examination of the rhetoric of any dialectical argument to make significant and typically distressing discoveries concerning the web of elements that are already and always embedded in the actual beliefs people may happen to hold. What thereby tends to escape notice is the very process by which such beliefs are established and communicated at the outset, including the very language within which such beliefs are framed. In making such an argument, we do not mean to suggest that criticism ought to become, in some way, a science, but that the framework of beliefs and assumptions that have been dominant in the great traditions of literary criticism and philosophy alike are undergoing significant changes that will transform the questions we ask.

Similar conclusions have been reached, though usually in very different terms, as one field after another in the twentieth century has taken the "linguistic turn," in the reflective and critical examination of the nature of language as a mediating instrumentality.[15] The very vividness of the form in which this problem emerged in literary study, however, has had a tendency to block the recognition of its generality. The appearance of deconstruction at what was imagined to be the triumphant ascension of structuralism, for example, seemed a very specific crisis pertaining mainly to literary critics and scholars.

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[14] See *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations*. It is germane in this context that Kant followed Aristotle in characterizing dialectic as a "logic of illusion."

[15] Though the phrase itself appears to have originated with Gustav Bergmann, the move it designates is unmistakable with such figures as Peirce, Frege, Wittgenstein, Russell, Carnap, Schlick, I. A. Richards and C.K. Ogden, Saussure, and others. See Richard Rorty, ed., *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967; 1992).

This overlooks, with what we take to be unfortunate consequences, the senses in which the admittedly dramatic "moment" of deconstruction in the mid-1960s, was a repetition and reflection of earlier episodes in the history of science, the formalization of symbolic logic and the development of analytical philosophy, all of which led to the disclosure of profound paradoxes lying at the heart of Western philosophy and metaphysics.[16]

In this light, what some may regard as the most unexpected selections in this volume, from such thinkers as Frege, Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, and Rudolph Carnap, are here because they show a sometimes astonishing similarity of argument on questions concerning language and representation as we find later in such critics and philosophers as Paul de Man or Jacques Derrida. In continuing along the path we took in *Critical Theory Since 1965,* we think the benefit of seeing philosophers who may have been regarded even as enemies facing the same problems along the sinuous path of the "linguistic turn" may serve as something more than a corrective of perspective concerning academic and field-specific antagonisms. It is, in this light, significant that Richard Rorty's influential anthology, *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (1967), marked for analytical philosophy, with scarcely any mention whatsoever of literary studies, the kind of turning point manifest for literary study in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato's *The Structuralist Controversy* (1967), itself with scarcely a mention of analytical philosophy.[17]

If as we are inclined to think, we may be at the threshold of a new era in critical thought, it is evident that a more balanced and productive concourse between literary study and philosophy is necessary, as both fields share a profoundly intertwined history and a common lineage traceable back to Plato's *Republic,* the source not only of his severe strictures against poetry in Book Ten, but also his first full elaboration of his theory of *eidos* or Form in Books Six and Seven. The immediate difficulty is that there is, at present, no convenient way for literary critics and philosophers particularly in the English-speaking world, to carry out such conversations, when the two fields more resemble two bundles of splinters than two branches of the same historical tree, where philosophy no more appears as a unified or coherent field than does literary criticism.

For many reasons, perhaps the most important and problematic figure in this connection is Jacques Derrida, who came to the attention of literary scholars and critics primarily through his rhetorically dramatic and ingenious demonstrations that it is all but impossible ever to explain the idea of structure without already invoking it, thereby calling into question a considerable string of concepts, from "representation" to "meaning." While early on this provided a way to problematize radically the critical expectation that close attention to poetic form and structure would disclose the meaning of a poem as the direct product of a precise, possibly *sui generis* verbal artifact, it presented a more intractable problem itself, not dissimilar to the notorious problems of verification in the modern history of logical positivism, or to the problems Plato faced 2,400 years earlier

[16] It should be noted, moreover, that, as Rorty's anthology makes evident, the "linguistic turn" in analytical philosophy provoked very much the same kind of surprised and localized reaction among professional philosophers. See especially work by Rudolph Carnap (below, page 978).

[17] We note and register, however, our dissent from Rorty's later suggestion in his 1992 retrospective postscript, "Twenty-five Years After," that the "linguistic turn" was just "one more tempest in an academic teapot," a gesture with all the appearance of a no-longer "thirty-three-year-old philosopher" trying perhaps to convince himself that collective failures to solve the problem are equally unimportant.

in his *Parmenides* and *Sophist.* In all instances, the critical discovery is that signification turns out to be an infinite chain of differences with no definitive termination in a positive term.

For the New Critics, the idea of literary form had seemed to anchor claims about interpretation as capable of providing truth and value that could not be attained in any other way than by the nuanced use of metaphor, but in practice had not only degenerated into what Robert Scholes once encapsulated in the image of "a clever graduate student 'interpreting' the daylights out of a poem before thirty stupified freshmen"[18] but had broken out into surprisingly inept but nevertheless spirited quarrels over the determinacy or indeterminacy of interpretation.[19]

The case against Structuralism was in some ways more stunning, particularly because of the philosophical analyses by Jacques Derrida, beginning with his brilliant critique of Edmund Husserl in *Speech and Phenomenon,* but with a little more flash in his "Structure, Sign and Play," which by our incomplete survey appears to be the most widely anthologized critical essay of the last fifty years, matched only by T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" of 1919. It is in this case that a disquieting feature of Anglo-American speculative criticism becomes obvious: its pervasive, even appalling lack of cogent philosophical support or argument. No small part of the reason is that academic philosophy, in both the United States and the United Kingdom, had followed different but largely parallel trajectories to refocus the mission of philosophy as immediately tied to the clarification of scientific theory (following Russell, Carnap, and other analytical philosophers) or the clarification of logic, language, and concepts (following Wittgenstein, Quine, Austin, and other philosophers attending particularly to language). In both cases, the traditional subjects of aesthetics and ethics were sometimes very frankly and openly relegated to the philosopher's idle time, or treated institutionally as academic classes to assign to faculty members and graduate students who were not up to the demands of "real" logical analysis or the philosophy of science.

The more or less open enmity between faculty in English departments and philosophy departments meant, among other things, that the ordinary curriculum of professional training in literature throughout most of the twentieth century did not include *any* formal study of philosophy—and vice versa. Thus, for example, when Cleanth Brooks, in his very influential book, *The Well-Wrought Urn,* came to the end of his lucid essays on texts and, as it were, discovered the need for philosophical support, he turned to Suzanne Langer for logic and Wilbur Urban for ethics. While both are thinkers of interest, their own interests and orientation appear far removed from the prevailing patterns among their philosophical contemporaries. The problem, of course, is that the prevailing discussion in academic philosophy was uncongenial if not positively hostile to the idea that poetry presented any genuine problems for philosophy. What is entirely missing among Anglo-American critics attending to problems of poetic language and form is any acknowledgment (except in the deeply ironic case of R. S. Crane at Chicago)[20] that the dominant tendency in Anglo-American philosophy had foregrounded the im-

[18] 1975 MLA convention forum address, Semiotics and Literature.

[19] See especially E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (1967), and Jonathan Culler, "Beyond Interpretation" in *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981).

[20] The irony in this case is that Crane is virtually alone in citing Rudolph Carnap's classic essay "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" as support for his idea of critical pluralism. For a brief account, see Leroy Searle, "The New Criticism" in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Criticism and Theory.*

portance of both topics even more strikingly. The difference, following Carnap's claim from the 1930s, was that only statements that could be confirmed by empirical reference had any cognitive content, leaving statements in poetry and metaphysics as expressive but essentially "meaningless."

The appearance on the scene of such a thinker as Derrida had a perhaps exaggerated impact precisely because he was writing and thinking from within a European academic context where this kind of virtual divorce between literary and philosophical education might have seemed strange if not positively barbaric. By the same token, however, the introduction of contemporary continental philosophical practice by way of literary criticism only made the divide between continental and Anglo-American analytical philosophy appear all the more stark—while doing very little to heal the deep rift between literary critics and philosophers in Anglo-American universities.[21] For an American trained philosopher, for example, the study of Hegel would perhaps have appeared a waste of time and the tradition of Hegelian idealism itself a kind of bad joke, whereas a French or German trained philosopher would find such a dismissive attitude incomprehensible. The point here is that the divide between literary and philosophical education in Anglo-American universities around mid-century had already been played out in philosophy itself. In the continental tradition, following Husserl, Heidegger, Kojéve, and Sartre, for example, professional discourse had long since diverged from a tradition of logical analysis and the philosophy of science following Frege, Wittgenstein, Carnap, and other members of the Vienna Circle that exerted a much more pronounced influence on Anglo-American traditions. Conversely, analytic philosophy since Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein, had largely abandoned the sweeping post-Hegelian dialectical projects from Husserl to Heidegger and Sartre as unproductive.

In the training of American literary critics, on the other hand, philosophy of any description hardly appeared in the curriculum at all. Accordingly, the appeal of continental philosophy was surely enhanced by the fact that it was not so overtly hostile to literary study as local analytical philosophy. Thus, as a new generation of American literary critics pursued their interests in continental philosophy, it was frequently at the expense of any engagement with the kind of rigorous analysis of logic and science at which Anglo-American philosophy excelled.

It would be the continuation of a grave mistake to assume that this was no loss, for it has had the effect of insulating and marginalizing a good deal of the speculative thinking in literary study and the humanities from what is, by any account, one of the most massively important intellectual adventures of the twentieth century, the developments in natural science and technology. This has not meant that thinkers in the humanities have therefore relinquished their congenial, almost hereditary role as critics where science and technology are concerned, but such criticism has been pursued in many cases with an embarrassing ignorance of what scientists and their philosophical advocates have thought science was about, together with the propounding of arguments that would earn one a failing grade in any elementary course on logical reasoning. This has

[21] Typical of these problems was a high degree of uncertainty, when analytically oriented philosophy departments conceded the possible value of hiring someone to teach "continental" philosophy found themselves at a loss because all the candidates seemed in their eyes to be vaguely (if not blatantly) fraudulent. A similar but more focused and notorious case arose in England in the 1990s, when Jacques Derrida was proposed as a recipient of an honorary degree from Oxford, only to have the nomination met with vitriolic opposition and contempt.

been manifest not merely in the "bad writing" contests staged every year by such journals as *Philosophy and Literature,* or in such mischievous episodes as the now notorious Alan Sokal affair, where an obviously fraudulent essay, adapting the rhetoric and the terms of fashionable postmodern criticism to the problem of "quantum gravity" was submitted to a critical journal for the explicit purpose of showing quite effectively that where scientific arguments were concerned, the purveyors of such criticism could not tell, as Hamlet puts it, "a hawk from a handsaw" no matter the quarter from which the wind were blowing.[22] The deeper problem is that the relation of science to criticism has been more or less systematically distorted. The commonplace from C. P. Snow that scientists and humanists occupy "two cultures" prevails not because it reflects some fundamental or necessary truth but because there has been no mediating critical discourse to clarify what is, after all, a common matrix of problems that are all set within one common culture of advanced study and inquiry.

In this section of this anthology, accordingly, we have tried to provide not only a representative sampling of crucial arguments that are a continuation of the apologetic tradition, and essays that have exerted a profound shaping effect on the development of contemporary academic institutions in literary study, but a number of pivotal essays and selections that suggest a provisional outline or survey of problems that have occupied many other disciplines over the past century. On the one hand, we have included a number of essays concerning logic, language, and metaphysics, all with an important bearing on thinking about problems of meaning and interpretation. In the same vein, we have included some selections that may, at least initially, strike the reader as very challenging indeed, because they take up, in various ways, what we believe is a core metaphysical problem concerning the very idea of truth, not as something that can be grasped directly by intellectual intuition but must, on the contrary, be constructed.

While this idea may already be reasonably well domesticated, the forms of reasoning by which to pursue a conception of reality as *not* fixed and determined in advance, but open to novelty, to evolution, and to what Charles Sanders Peirce characterized as "habit-taking," are by no means yet settled or familiar. One speculative claim we would wish to introduce is that the very reason imaginative literature has been problematic in Western philosophy lies in a dominant theory of reason that has proved systematically prone to contradictions and paradoxes especially in the effort to explain dynamic, changing systems. It follows that Plato's original charge against poetry reflects less on some fault to be guarded against in works of the poets than on a fundamental insufficiency in the primary traditions of Western metaphysics that posits as necessary and sufficient an impoverished binary conception of reality, whether it takes as paradigmatic *form* and *matter,* or *subject* and *object.*

The view that truth can be understood as a direct representation of "objective" realities fundamentally misrepresents the logical complexity of mediation, and tends to trade upon a correspondingly inadequate dogma concerning the nature of reasoning. Literature, in this light, should not be viewed merely as an object about which to reason, but rather as a primary form of reasoning in its own right, a system of civilizing media-

[22]For a comprehensive review of this case, including a republication of Sokal's original essay, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" (1996), see *The Sokal Hoax: The Sham that Shook the Academy,* ed. by Jeffrey Kittay and the Editors of *Lingua Franca* (Lincoln, Neb.: The University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

tion by which commonplace opinion makes its first genuine moves toward self-conscious reflective thought.[23]

In the plan of this revised edition, we are staking a great deal on this conjecture, since if it is sound, the history of criticism since the late nineteenth century looks very different indeed. Instead of an accelerating proliferation of approaches, theories, schools, ideologies, and agendas, both intellectual and political, having less and less common ground, one can see this process as the symptom of a much more coherent set of problems that can be traced in virtually all disciplines and fields. At the outset, the overriding issue in theoretical terms is the problem of symbolic mediation that accompanies any expression, assertion, or claim. Whether the point of departure is Plato or Descartes, Hume or Kant, the project of reason has assumed on the one hand a fully determinable structure in the universe and on the other, specific mental powers that enable (or circumscribe) our knowledge. It is within the framework of these problematic assumptions that the "linguistic turn" is important, not because it provides any resolution for older oppositions or immediate answers to ancient questions, but precisely because it changes the questions. From Coleridge's overly ambitious and ill-fated project to construct a "Logosophia" or "Dynamical Philosophy" that rejected the dialectical illusions of Hegel and other "Doctors of the Absolute," or Charles Sanders Peirce's equally ambitious and ill-fated project to develop his "Pragmaticism" along interestingly similar lines as a post-Kantian critical realism, the turn to the language and, more broadly, to the logic of mediation, has been and remains irresistible.

We have endeavored, accordingly, to focus attention on different traditions from the late nineteenth through the twentieth century by selecting essays and excerpts that can function as a schematic overview of developments that we believe are relevant to the current state of critical theory, by acknowledging explicitly the need for a broader and more encompassing perspective. The problem outlined above of divergences between literary criticism and philosophy are equally evident in other areas as well. In the formal study of language, for example, contemporary literary criticism has been remarkably fixated on the early work of Ferdinand de Saussure, in large measure because other critics and philosophers (such as Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and de Man) have turned their attention there. But Saussure's account of language, for all its historical importance, is scarcely a model for theorizing about language, or even, for that matter, about the linguistic sign. What is missing is any sense of what happened to "structuralism" in subsequent linguistic theory, following Bloomfield, Whorf and Sapir, and especially Chomsky. The point of interest here is not that one will find any satisfactory general theory of language, whether in Saussure or any subsequent linguist, since the persistent frustration of just such a search is an intrinsic part of the broad intellectual and cultural climate that pervades the Humanities and Social Sciences. It is, moreover, an additional point of interest that any attempt to formulate a theory of language that leaves the poetic out of account is fundamentally flawed by that fact alone.

[23] For a further exposition of this idea, see Leroy F. Searle, "The Conscience of the King: Oedipus, Hamlet, and the Problem of Reading" *Comparative Literature* 49 (1997). See also Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963) and *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), for very suggestive illustrations of the antiquity of this point of view as a shaping force in the development of literate traditions.

We take it as already sufficiently clear that any coherent theory of poetry would require other theories—of language, of persons, of societies, of history, and some intelligible account of value—that are not to be found by turning to contemporary linguistics, psychology, anthropology, history, or philosophy, since all of these areas of intellectual concern find their theorizing activities in just the same plight as literary criticism. In looking for essential argument in many fields, however, it is not merely our intent to make this an interdisciplinary anthology, but rather to foreground sets of problems that seem to us to be fundamental. Taken together, these problems, beleaguering many different disciplines, show a significant pattern of convergence not toward a comprehensive theory in the old sense, but what amounts to a metaphysical change, affecting our conceptions of reality and thereby changing our understanding of what theories are for and what they ought to do.

Virtually all twentieth-century disciplines have experienced something like the "linguistic turn," in large measure a turning away from the prevailing account of representation that treats a word as if it were in some way a "picture" of a thing (or, following early Wittgenstein, a fact or state of affairs) always presumed to exist prior to the representation. But every attempt to establish this seemingly obvious principle has led to paradoxes and contradictions—and not merely by defect of logical cleverness or acuity of mind. What is still required is a much subtler theory of mediation, not the pseudojouissance of looking at language and finding, gleefully, paradox and aporias everywhere. We should not minimize the difficulty of moving beyond what have now become predictable insights concerning indeterminacy or the insufficiency of traditional "essentialist" modes of thought, but neither should the necessity of doing so be ignored. Some among the entries included here do point in this direction, particularly selections from Charles Sanders Peirce, who formulated the problem as a link between logic and metaphysics, based on his own intense critique of Kant, as early as 1867. Peirce's approach to semiotics (a word he was among the first to use) is in this respect dramatically different from semiology following Saussure, since it departs in a fundamental way from the binary opposition between signifier and signified to present a much fuller and more coherent account of mediation, not as a barrier to the determination of meaning, but as a fundamental process. While there is no question that this way of thinking is not well domesticated, it at least suggests that in examining problems of representation, we should note that the classic model in which a word represents a preexisting concept or thing is a theory of language that has never yet failed to fail, arguably because it is radically inadequate to account for the processes by which our thinking, as well as nature itself, unfolds and develops.

In the same vein, it is the unfolding of disciplinary and institutional lines of inquiry that we have tried to sample, not necessarily because they are connected directly to literature, but because they have initiated inquiry and speculation that continues to influence our collective thinking. The picture we wish to sketch is of the possibility of a genuinely philosophical poetics, a possibility that depends fundamentally on changing (as we manifestly *are* changing) our notions of what *philosophy* and *poetics* might be. The selections here begin with Taine, whose work can be taken as the beginning of the modern writing of literary history. They continue with Peirce and Walt Whitman, who bring together the two metathemes that have served provisionally to organize our work on this project. The first, as already indicated, is the problem of mediation, leading to a