

# **GLOBALIZATION, CRITIQUE, AND SOCIAL THEORY**

***Navigating the Divide between  
Theory and Practice***

**An Interdisciplinary Conference**

**May 15-17, 2014 – Deadline Extended!**



**13th Annual Conference of the  
*International Social Theory Consortium (ISTC)*  
and  
*Inaugural Conference of the Committee on Social Theory*  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

## **Call for Papers**

In recent years, under the impression and the burden of globalization and neoliberalism, debates about the relationship between theory and practice of progress—including especially the theory and practice of social critique—have gone through an unexpected and momentous revival, renewal and rejuvenation. This is due in large part to the proliferation of manifest crises in the early years of the twenty-first century. The terrorist attacks in September of 2001, the financial crisis of 2008 that spawned the Great Recession, the Euro crisis that began in fall 2010, the NSA revelations of 2013—these events provided glimpses of the actually existing system of political economy, and opportunities to begin to grasp and reveal the ongoing reconstruction of business-labor-government relations in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Rather than inducing heightened efforts to identify and address the underlying causes of these and other crises, the system of political economy taking shape appears to employ economic crises to promote public policies, via a philosophy of austerity, that perpetuate the present state of affairs, rather than seizing upon opportunities to attain and disseminate a better public understanding of present and future challenges. In a throw-back to the 1970s' pattern of "crisis management", the current condition is a combination of engrained conceptions of the role of government and state institutions in relation to business and the remnants of "labor", and entirely novel and unprecedented constructions of reality. Beyond material and institutional crises, the imminence of numerous other crises has begun to be acknowledged, including climate change, depletion of the oceans and of natural resources ("peak oil", etc.). Yet there is also the deepening resistance to accepting science-based assessments of the urgency of crises on the part of segments of the political establishment and sizable populations in a growing number of countries, and to consider that crises reflect negatively on our conduct of life, while also providing a lens for examining the multitude of costs that humanity's ways of doing business inflict on all creatures on our planet, and the planet itself.

The collapse of Eastern European socialism in the early 1990s seemed to signal the waning relevance of social critique in light of real events (the "end" of history). In addition, social theorists

became increasingly reluctant to relate critically *and* constructively to the future of western societies, modern democracy, and human civilization—along with related meta-narratives—for fear of being seen as condoning or promoting forms and systems of power contrary to their stated standards and normative positions, or of suggesting that theory should be directed at reducing or eliminating power from social life. Yet, in a variety of ways, the notions that theories and practices of rigorous social critique in and of modern societies could become “outdated”, or that they were based on a categorical misunderstanding of the nature of social, economic, political and cultural life in the modern world, were symptomatic of an ongoing reconfiguration of the system of political economy itself.

On the one hand, social theorists rooted in and pursuing further diverse critical traditions, such as neo-Marxism, feminism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, and more recent approaches, have drawn attention to the widening gap between prevailing constructions of the character of modern societies—and their actual character. On the other hand, social theorists in the social sciences/humanities are not immune to subscribing and to promulgating constructions that *de facto* help conceal the tensions between the explicitly stated, shared, and continuously reaffirmed norms and values in whose absence modern societies could not operate, and the real workings of the latter.

The conference continues the tradition of ISTC conferences of inviting and including the entire range of topics under the general heading of social theory. In addition, as this year’s conference theme is oriented towards facilitating exchanges between scholars focused on the terrain of globalization and critique, the conference will be centered on the two distinct yet closely related discourses. One discourse will focus on theories dedicated to illuminating and scrutinizing trends and conditions in the contemporary world, the other will emphasize practices of applying and examining theories with regard to practical efficacy. Thus, in the interest of taking account of the relationship between theories and practices of examining and critiquing “globalization”, discussions will include efforts to address how people have and may continue to influence, alter, and re-direct the trajectory of globalization with single-state policy, multi-state action, social movement action, novel forms of protest, and the like—to spell out theoretically informed perspectives on practices that promise to engender new ways of relating to the new system of political economy in all of its manifestations, with clear theoretical implications both grounded and abstract.

In the interest of revisiting the range of linkages between theory and practice—analytically, critically, and politically—both within and outside of modern western societies, the orienting theme can be formulated as follows. Are there opportunities for cross-fertilization between theoretical and practical critiques of the modern condition as it developed in Europe and North America over the course of the last two centuries, and critiques that have been conceived and formulated in recent decades in societies that have been drawn into the process of globalization? How does work in literary and cultural studies contribute to these practical critiques? Does it differ from work in the social sciences and the humanities more broadly, including especially philosophy?

### *Organizers:*

Harry F. Dahms (Sociology)  
Jon Shefner (Sociology)  
Allen R. Dunn (English)

The organizers welcome proposals on any topic in social theory, which may take the form of **any (not all!) of the following:**

- abstracts (between 150-250 words),
- 5-page outlines,
- papers,
- proposals for panels.

For a list of possible session themes, the submission deadline, and the registration fee, see the following page.

**12th Annual Conference of the  
International Social Theory Consortium (ISTC)  
University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

May 15-17, 2014

*List of possible session topics:*

1. Theorizing Modern Societies
2. Theory and Practice of Social Critique
3. Theorizing Globalization as Today's System of Political Economy
4. Indigenous Critiques of Globalization
5. The Future of Critical Theory
6. Public Policy and the Welfare State Today
7. Combining Critiques: Feminism, Marxism, Postmodernism
8. Civil Society: Real or Imagined?
9. Critical Theories: Race, Class, Gender
10. The Global Financial Crisis and the Role of the State Today
11. Social Justice and Social Movements
12. Environmental Destruction and Social Theory
13. Utopia or Dystopia: Who Decides?
14. The Purpose and Place of Postmodernism
15. Individual and Society Today
16. Functions of Democratic Government Redefined
17. The Future of Democracy
18. Agency in the Age of Corporate Political Economy
19. Surveillance, Freedom, and Civil Rights
20. The Future of Critique
21. Literary Studies and Postcolonial Critique
22. Responsibilities of Philosophy and Ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
23. The Past and Future of the University

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE:  
March 15, 2014**

Papers accepted for inclusion in the program will be considered for publication in

***Current Perspectives in Social Theory* (ed. Harry F. Dahms)**

For submission of proposals and inquiries, please contact:

Harry F. Dahms  
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Information about registration, location, lodging, etc., will be forthcoming.