



COLLOQUIUM

Rahel Jaeggi - Humboldt University of Berlin



04/5/2024



3 pm-5 pm



HIB 55

Progress and Regression

My paper deals with a question which has repeatedly preoccupied contemporary philosophical discussion and which seems to me to be indispensable for a critical theory of society in the tradition of left-Hegelian critique in particular—namely, the question of progress and regression. So what does it mean to understand social change as a movement of progression, or, respectively, regression? How can the concept of progress help us to understand, as Wendy Brown says "where we have come from and where we are going", if where we are trying to go is towards emancipation – or at least away from the multi-crisis we are currently in? How can we (and can we?) distinguish regressive from progressive or emancipatory movements? It seems the concept of progress can only be defended if it can be reconstructed and understood anew in light of its most valid critique. Such a preserving or rescuing critique (“rettende Kritik”) must first address the implications and political-philosophical semantics of the concept and identify those elements of it that are up for reconstruction. This is what I intend to do in the first part of my lecture: I will outline four central features of the progress narrative and explain the respective problems they pose. I will then, in the second part of my lecture, present an alternative conceptualization of "progress", suited to deal with the previously formulated critique, while still able to make sense of social change as progress or regression. My aim is to lay the groundwork for a non-teleological, pragmatist-materialistic, and in this sense plural or multidimensional (hence, no longer ethnocentric), concept of progress.

If you have any questions, please contact philos@uci.edu

BIO

- Rahel Jaeggi is Professor of Philosophy with a focus on Social Philosophy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.
- Since 2018 she is also director of the University’s Centre for Social Critique. She has researched and taught as a visiting professor at Yale University, Fudan University, and as Theodor Heuss Professor at The New School for Social Research. Jaeggi was also a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton.
- She is a prominent representative of critical theory, has received numerous awards, and is the author and co-editor of numerous books, including Critique of Forms of Life (Harvard University Press, 2018) and Fortschritt und Regression, which is about to be translated and will appear in English in 2025. She is currently a fellow at the Thomas Mann Haus in Los Angeles.