*PHL 325: Marx’s Social and Political Thought*

Instructor: Justin Evans (call me Justin, please)

Office Hours: By appointment, online or in person

Email: send questions to [evansjustindavid@gmail.com](mailto:evansjustindavid@gmail.com); submit work to [jevans26@gmu.edu](mailto:jevans26@gmu.edu)

*Course Description*

In this course, we’ll look at some important intellectual context for Marx’s social and political thought, as well as his early writings. Then, our major focus will be on his *Capital: Volume I*. In addition to reading that text, we’ll consider how Marx’s ideas have been understood and used throughout the twentieth century, by revolutionaries, critical theorists, environmentalists, post-colonial thinkers, and cultural theorists. Although we’ll be informed by those interpretations, our major aim will be to work out our own understanding of *Capital* and its place in Marx’s work, in social theory, and in political practice.

*Required Texts*

Just the one: Karl Marx, *Capital* volume I (Penguin) ISBN: 9780140445688

But! There will be plenty of other readings on the blackboard site, listed under ‘Readings.’ Please make sure you have access to the readings in class, whether that be on an e-reader or a printed version.

Here are some texts you may find helpful or useful (in no particular order). I’m very happy to suggest other things you might find interesting!

* Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (Norton)
* Mandel, *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx: 1843 to* *Capital* (Verso)
* Thompson, *The Left in History* (Pluto)
* Stedman-Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (Harvard)
* Robinson, *Why You Should Be A Socialist* (All Points Books)
* Sunkara, *The Socialist Manifesto* (Basic Books)
* Claeys, *Marx and Marxism* (Bold Type Books)
* Liedman, *A World to Win* (Verso)
* Heinrich, *How to Read Marx’s Capital* (Monthly Review)
* Heinrich, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society* (Monthly Review)
* Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx’s Capital* (Monthly Review)
* Fraser & Jaeggi, *Capitalism* (Polity)

*Rhythm of the Course*

Each week we’ll look at a chunk of *Capital*, and an important response to *Capital* or Marx’s work more generally. Our first task will be to understand what on earth Marx is talking about in the part we’re discussing that week. Our second task will be to understand the response, and what is at stake in different interpretations of Marx’s work. Ultimately, I hope each of you will come up with interpretations of your own of this gigantic, sprawling book.

*Grading*

Let’s be honest: grading a course on Marx is a bit ridiculous, but here we are. By far the most important part of your grade (50%) will be based on class participation. That means doing the reading, preparing questions, and then speaking up in class—volunteering to ask, or answer questions, or just to read. In addition to that, each student will be our assigned leader-presenter for one session. That student will be responsible for briefly summarizing the reading, and then offering their thoughts and questions at the start of class. You may choose to do one or two presentations (25% each). For each presentation, you must submit four pages of the notes you used to create the presentation itself. If you choose one presentation, rather than two, you will also need to write an argumentative paper on a topic of your own choice (8-10 pages). That will be due at the end of semester (25%). Don’t worry, I’ll help you come up with a good topic, and answer questions about outlines and so on—though I won’t have time to read drafts. Late papers lose half a grade per day. If you don’t complete these three assignments, you will fail the class.

*Attendance*

Since so much of your grade is based on participation, it should be pretty obvious that you have to come to class! If you miss three or more classes, your overall grade will suffer by up to one grade. And also, I will miss you and be sad.

*Class Policies*

This is a seminar course, which means we’ll be spending most of our time talking to each other. It is fine to say controversial or hypothetical things. It is not fine to be offensive, thoughtless, or unclear. Practice common sense and good manners.

Part of good manners is paying attention to other people, including me, and for that reason, **laptops and cell phones must be turned off or put on silent, and left in your bags, not on the desk.**

It is university policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities. Students are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services to discuss their individualized needs for accommodation. If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance in this course you should make sure this documentation is on file with the Office of Disability Services (SUB I, Room 2500; 993-2474, ods.gmu.edu) to determine the accommodations you will need; and talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

Should you need counselling, Mason’s counselling and psychological services can help you <https://caps.gmu.edu>. If you just feel overwhelmed with this course, let me know, and we’ll work out a way through the mess. There’s always a way.

Through the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education (ODIME), Mason seeks to create and sustain inclusive learning environments where all are welcomed, valued, and supported. For more information, see: <https://odime.gmu.edu/>

FERPA rights: <https://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/annual-notification-of-rights/>

You can find help with online education services here: <https://library.gmu.edu/for/online>

The Writing Center is a wonderful resource: <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

Tech support?: [support@gmu.edu](mailto:support@gmu.edu) or 703) 993 8870

*Plagiarism*

For the purposes of this course, plagiarism is using “words, opinion, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit. Writers [must] give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books and articles is not sufficient” (General Education Course Guidebook, slightly modified). Should you ever be tempted to plagiarize, remember two things: first, if you’re caught, you’ll fail the assignment and in all likelihood the course, and you might very well have to go before the Academic Integrity Council. Second, I read tens of thousands of pages every year, and I infallibly know when you’re using someone else’s words. And, thanks to the wonders of the internet, I can prove it. *And,* if you do research and tell me that you’ve done the research, I’ll think “wow, student x did research, good for her!” Research with citation = impressive; research without citation = plagiarism. So, if you’re considering plagiarizing, do yourself a favor, and email me to ask what you might be able to do instead. For further information, see the Mason Honor Code, oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2

## **Course Schedule**

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| **Session Date** | **Topic** | **Reading(s) to be discussed on this day** | **Presenter(s)** |
| Session 1  Tue, Jan 24 | *Introduction* | None |  |
| Session 2  Thu, Jan 26 | *Political Economy* | Smith, *Wealth of Nations* 12-15; 17-19; 25-34; 50-54; 344-349; 589-594 | Jad and Joe |
| Session 3  Tue, Jan 31 | *Philosophical idealism and early socialisms* | Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, pp 67-78; 82-83 | Jad |
| Session 4  Thus, Feb 2 | *Philosophical idealism and early socialisms* | Tristan, *The Worker’s Union* pp 99-125; 128. You can skip paragraphs 25-34. Maurice, *Christian Socialism* pp 196-206 | Alessandro |
| Session 5  Tue, Feb 7 | *Marx’s early writings* | *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* pp 70-78; *Theses on Feuerbach*; *German Ideology* 148-163. | Erick |
| Session 6  Thus, Feb 9 | *Marx’s early writings* | *Communist Manifesto* parts I and II | Freya |
| Session 7  Tue, Feb 12 | *Capital and its most influential reader* | *Capital* 125-163 |  |
| Session 8  Thus, Feb 16 | *Capital and its most influential reader* | Engels, *Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, pp 683-6; 697-704; 708-717. | Gabriel G |
| Session 9  Tue, Feb 21 | *The theory of value* | *Capital* 163-209 | Andrew |
| Session 10  Thus, Feb 23 | *The theory of value* | Isaak Rubin, *Fundamental Features* 536-540; 559-564; *Towards a History of the Text of the First Chapter of Marx’s Capital* 583-585; 602-606; 611-614. | Liam |
| Session 11  Tue, Feb 28 | *Subjectivity* | *Capital* 247-280 |  |
| Session 12  Thus, Mar 2 | *Subjectivity* | Lukacs, *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat* 83-92; 163-172. | Joe |
| Session 13  Tue, Mar 7 | *Revision or Revolution?* | *Capital* 283-319 |  |
| Session 14  Thus, Mar 9 | *Revision or Revolution?* | Bernstein and Luxemburg, 173-198. | Alessandro |
| Tue, Mar 14 | Spring Break | Depressing bourgeois decadence? |  |
| Thus, Mar 18 | Spring Break | Or glorious revolutionary joy? (Both?) |  |
| Session 15  Tue, Mar 21 | *Marxism and Humanism* | *Capital* 320-328; 340-353; 367-374; 380-383; 411-426 | Patrick |
| Session 16  Thus, Mar 23 | *Marxism and Humanism* | *Socialist Humanism:* Dunayevskaya (68-80) and Senghor (53-55; 59-67) | Anna |
| Session 17  Tue, Mar 28 | *The Environment* | *Capital* 429-454; 470-491 | Bryce |
| Session 18  Thus, Mar 30 | *The Environment* | Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* 288-298; 320-326 | Andreas |
| Session 19  Tue, Apr 4 | *Culture* | *Capital* 492-517; 526-533 | Gabriel Y |
| Session 20  Thus, Apr 6 | *Culture* | Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 75-89; 95-100; 108-114; Gramsci, *The Intellectuals* 92-102. | Kim |
| Session 21  Tue, Apr 11 | *History and Historians* | *Capital* 544-579; 610-621; 635 | Sean |
| Session 22  Thus, Apr 13 | *History and Historians* | Hobsbawm, *What do historians owe to Karl Marx?* 141-156 | Nauran |
| Session 23  Tue, Apr 18 | *Subsumption* | *Capital* 643-672; 709-724 |  |
| Session 24  Thus, Apr 20 | *Subsumption* | *Capital* 1019-1028 | Khaled |
| Session 25  Tue, Apr 25 | *Racism* | *Capital* 725-757; 762-777 | Abby |
| Session 26  Thus, Apr 27 | *Racism* | Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* 45-68 | Isabelle |
| Session 27  Tue, May 2 | *Empire* | *Capital* 781-799; 873-876; 914-940 | Kip |
| Session 28  Thu, May 4 | *Empire* | James, *Imperialism in Africa* 131-140; Mariategui, *Selected Essays* 28-31; 35-41; 94-101; 130-135 | Sean |
| Session 29  Tue, May 9 | Conclusion | None |  |
| Exam Period |  |  | Final papers due May 15 |