

PL343 Marxist Social and Political Thought

Seminar Leader: Riaz P Khan
Course Times: Wednesdays 15:45-19:00
Office Hours: By appointment
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Course Description

This course offers an introduction to Marxist social theory as a distinct tradition of political thought and action. Given the breadth of the subject matter, the course is organized around two overarching themes: (a) the relations of state, society, and individual as seen through (b) the link between theory and praxis in this tradition. The first part of the course explores the conceptual origins of Marx's political thought in light of its encounters with German Idealism, French Revolution, and British political economy. We begin with the early critique of Enlightenment and Hegelian thought in order to trace the origins of the materialist conception of history that grounds Marx's political economy after 1857 in response to political and industrial revolutions. The second part constitutes the bulk of the course as we explore the diverse traditions and dialogues in Marxist thought and politics. We begin with the forms and critiques of organized Marxist-Leninist systems by sampling the works of different schools of emerging Marxist thought in early twentieth century. Next, we examine the conceptions of society, state, law, ideology, class, and individual in Critical Theory of Frankfurt School and Structural Marxism, respectively, as well as post-Marxist thought. In the final part of the course, we turn to critical dialogues in Marxist theories of race, imperialism, feminism, postcolonialism, and culture.

Course Texts

All readings are available in the following texts:

1. Course Reader
2. Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (W.W. Norton, 1978)
3. Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx* (Columbia University Press, 2015)

Copies of the Course Reader and *The Marx-Engels Reader* are available at the library.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to complete the main readings, attend class sessions, participate in discussions, and submit timely assignments. Performance will be assessed on the basis of *class participation*, familiarity with *assigned readings*, and *writing assignments*.

(1) **Active Participation** in class discussions and group projects constitute an important component of the course. Please complete the primary readings prior to each class session. You will be well-prepared to further explore specific texts, passages, and themes, seek clarifications, express your views, and engage in peer discussions. This course is designed as a collaborative and shared enterprise.

(2) The course is **reading-intensive**. Students will demonstrate familiarity with the readings by means of (a) **two written comments** on weekly readings, (b) **in-class presentation** on selected reading, and (c) **group discussions**. It is expected that students will complete the required readings, while the recommended texts will be of use to students focusing on specific topics.

(3) The course is **writing-intensive**. Students will write short reflections, individual profiles, and essay on selected topic. Please arrange to meet with me at the earliest opportunity to discuss your research interests and writing assignments. You are encouraged to utilize the tutorial services at the Learning Center for assistance with your essays.

Course Assessment & Grade Components and Dates

Student performance and final grades are evaluated on the basis of timely and satisfactory completion of course requirements. The main components of assessments are listed below:

Participation in Discussions (including Reading Comments (100-150 words))	- 20%
Presentation: (Individual dates to be determined in first class)	- 20%
Essay Proposal (1,000 words): First draft Due on Sunday, April 6, 2025	- 20%
Final Essay (3,500 – 4,000 words): Due on Sunday, May 18, 2024	- 40%

Attendance Policy

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. A maximum of two excused absences during the semester may be granted to account for minor circumstances. Further absences are granted under exceptional circumstances, and require supporting documentation. No unexcused absences are permitted. Unexcused absences will adversely affect participation grade in the course. In case of authorized absences, students are responsible for making up any missed work.

Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Late submission of essays are accepted only in exceptional circumstances. However, late essays must be submitted within a maximum of four weeks in order to receive a passing grade in the course. Please note that essays submitted 24 hours after the deadline may be downgraded up to one full grade (e.g., B+ to C+).

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

11. April 9 Black Marxism

Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Ch. 6 & 9
C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in US," 85-99.

Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism Without Guarantee," in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, pp. 24-44.

Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, pp. 411-440.

12. April 16 Spring Break (April 14-22)

13. April 23 Marxism and Patriarchy

Session One

Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, pp. 44-77.

Session Two

Silvia Federici, *Patriarchy of the Wage: Notes on Marx, Gender and Feminism*, pp. 25-50, 76-95.

14. April 30 Neoliberalism and Political Economy

Session One

Wendy Brown, "Undoing Democracy: Neoliberalism's Remaking of State and Society," in *Undoing Demos*, 17-35.

Wolfgang Streeck, "Taking Back Control: The Future of Western Democratic Capitalism," 30-47.

Antonio Delgado, "Democrats, It's Time to Say Goodbye to Our Neoliberal Era," *New York Times* 2024.

Session Two

Moishe Postone, "Critique and Historical Transformation," *Historical Materialism*, 53-71.

Duncan Foley, "The Political Economy of Postcrisis Global Capitalism," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* (Spring 2012), 251-263.

Jamie Peck et. al., "Neoliberalism Resurgent: Market Rule after the Great Recession," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* (Spring 2012), 265-286.

Recommended

Moishe Postone, "Capitalism, Temporality, and the Crisis of Labor," American Academy in Berlin
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgMvTGOij-k&t=779s>

Joyce Liu et. al., "Temporality of Capital: Interview with Harry Harootunian and Moishe Postone." *Concentric* (2012).

15. May 7 Neoliberalism and the Anthropocene

Session One

Elizabeth Povinelli, "Introduction" & "Toxic Late Liberalism," in *Between Gaia and Ground: Four Axioms of Existence and the Ancestral Catastrophe of Late Liberalism*, pp. 1-11, 36-59.

Wolfgang Streeck, "How Will Capitalism End," *New Left Review* (2014), 35-64.

Session Two

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 2009, 197-222.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Climate and Capital: On Conjoined History," *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 2014, 1-23.

Benjamin L. Robinson, "Climate Justice: Walter Benjamin and the Anthropocene," *The Germanic Review*, 2021, 124-142.

16. May 14 Completion Week (May 12-16)