

EC295

Making Value and Using Resources

Seminar Leader: Anthony Quickel
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Office Hours: by appointment
Course Meeting: Friday, 15:45-19:00

Course Description

Critical to the study and history of economics are theories about value. This course will look at how value has been historically “made” and presently theorized. Drawing on anthropological theory and economic histories, we will examine the ways in which value was constructed and explore other connected issues like debt and credit. Important to these understandings, the course will connect with issues in the histories of resource use and management, monetary history and numismatic studies, as well as land-use and taxation. Resources especially—metals, minerals, and other raw materials—will be an important topic, alongside issues of currency, trade, and taxation. The course offers a historical background into the development of critical concepts that inform our contemporary understandings of life and the economy. Furthermore, in examining the ways in which other societies—past and present, especially in the Global South and in indigenous communities—understand issues of value, the course will offer alternative perspectives allowing students to question and rethink current prevailing paradigms. With the transformations of the present moment, from digitization to the AI-revolution, students will also be offered an opportunity to consider how knowledge, data, and labor are commodified and valued in the present, and then situate this moment in the context of the course material regarding the past.

Requirements

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.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement. If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to:

- James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu)
- Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, one absence does not affect the participation grade or require documentation. This is the general policy of Bard College Berlin for all once-per-week courses.

Bard College Berlin may 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.

If you must miss more than one class, due to extenuating circumstance, you must discuss this with the instructor. Depending on the circumstance, the instructor reserves the right to make a judgment regarding participation grade and/or course credit.

Assessment

As the course is an intensive seminar, students will be heavily assessed based on their preparation for and participation in weekly discussions. The course is reading intensive, and students are expected to read the assigned weekly readings and come to class prepared. Additionally, there will be one reflection required for the first three thematic modules. Students will be required to submit a midterm and final paper. All assignments will be submitted through

Google Classroom. While students may consult writing tutors/use the Learning Commons, all writing should be original.

Readings

All readings will be provided to students online through Google Classroom.

Assignments

Beyond readings and preparation for class, there are five graded assignments: three (3) module reflections; one (1) midterm paper; and one (1) final paper. All assessments are submitted through Google Classroom.

Module reflections – the instructor will post prompts on Google Classroom. Reflections do not require research, but should show engagement with class discussions, readings, and original thought. Students are encouraged to respond to and engage with their fellow classmates' responses. Although not required, doing so will result in a higher grade for the reflection. All reflections must be submitted before the seminar meets for the first session of the next module, i.e. one week after the module ends. Reflections should be 400-600 words.

Midterm paper – midterm papers will be written in response to a prompt provided by the instructor. Papers should be well-researched, using peer-reviewed and academic sources, and appropriate citations. Prompts and more detailed information about the paper's format and other requirements will be posted on Google Classroom. Midterm papers should be between 1250-1500 words.

Final paper – final papers offer the student an opportunity to explore one of the course's topics in greater depth. The student may pick any topic of relevance to the course content. Before beginning the final paper, students should discuss their proposed topic with the instructor. Papers should be well-researched, using peer-reviewed and academic sources, and appropriate citations. More detailed information about the paper's format and other requirements will be posted on Google Classroom. Final papers should be between 2500-3000 words.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Midterm and final papers that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). After three (3) late days, the paper will not be accepted, and the student will thereafter receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during the instructor's office hours or virtually.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of AI or large language models is strictly prohibited in coursework. Students are expected to submit their own original thinking. Students are also expected to express

themselves in their own words, regardless of errors. Any use of AI tools for writing, including for rewording and cleaning-up texts, will result in a zero for the assignment.

*** See a recent study from MIT on the cumulative cognitive debt caused by the use of AI in academic tasks: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2506.08872>.

Grade Breakdown

30%	Preparation and Participation (12 seminars x 2.5% each)
15%	Module Reflections (3 reflections x 5% each)
20%	Midterm Paper
35%	Final Paper

Key Dates

26 September	Module 1 Reflection Due
17 October	Last Day to Withdraw
19 October	Midterm Paper Due
7 November	Module 2 Reflection Due
5 December	Module 3 Reflection Due
19 December*	Final Paper Due***

*** Graduating students must submit their final paper before 10 December to meet grade submissions deadline. Effectuated students should speak to the instructor about setting final paper deadline.

Schedule

Module 1: What is Value?

05 September – Course Introduction and “What is value?”

12 September – Understanding Value

- **Readings:**
 - Graeber, “Introduction and Chapters 1-3,” in *Towards an Anthropological Theory of Value*.

19 September – Economic Theories of Value

- **Readings:**
 - Aspers and Beckert, “Value in Markets,” in *The Worth of Goods: Valuation & Pricing in the Economy*, pp. 3-38.
 - Harvey, “Marx’s Refusal of the Labour Theory of Value.”
 - Garnett, “Postmodernism and Theories of Value: New Grounds for Institutional/Marxist Dialogue?,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 33/4 (1999): pp. 817-834.
- **Take a look at:** Marx, “Chapters 1-3, 24, 25, 31,” in *Capital, Volume I*.

Module 2: Objects and Commodities

26 September – Commodities

- **Module 1 Reflection** – due before class
- **Readings:**
 - Appadurai, “Introduction: commodities and the politics of value,” in *The Social Life of Things*, pp. 3-63.
 - Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as process,” in *The Social Life of Things*, pp. 64-91.
 - Dant, “Fetishism and the social value of objects,” *The Sociological Review* 44 (1996): pp. 495-516.

3 October – Tag der Deutschen Einheit – NO CLASS

10 October – Gifts and Exchange

- **Readings:**
 - Strathern and Stewart, “Ceremonial Exchange,” in *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*, pp. 230-245.
 - Yan, “The Gift and Gift Economy,” *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*, pp. 246-261.
 - Polanyi, “The Economy as Instituted Process,” in *Economic Anthropology: Readings in Theory and Analysis*, pp. 122-166.
 - Mauss, “Chapter 1,” *The Gift*.
 - Benedini Brusadin, “The Gift Theory of Marcel Mauss and the Potlatch Ritual: A Triad of Hospitality,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Hospitality Studies*, pp. 298-310.

17 October – Money: always a commodity?

- **Readings:**
 - Hart, "Money: One Anthropologist's View," in *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*, pp. 160-175.
 - Guyer, "Chapter I, Introduction: Diversity, Bewilderment, and the Multiplicity of African Money," in *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa*.
 - High, "Polluted Money, Polluted Wealth: Emerging Regimes of Value in the Mongolia Gold Rush," *American Ethnologist* 40/4 (2013): pp. 676-88.
 - Kuroda, "Old Chinese Coins in Medieval Japan," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 84/1&2 (2024): pp. 1-38.
 - Inger, "Money in the Mattress and Bodies in the Market: Reflections on the Material," In *Who's Cashing In?: Contemporary Perspectives on New Monies and Global Cashlessness*, pp. 156-164.
- **Note:** last day to withdraw from class

19 October – Midterm Paper Due

24 October – NO CLASS - Fall Break (20 October to 26 October)

31 October — Debt

- **Readings:**
 - Peebles, "The Anthropology of Credit and Debt," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010): pp. 225-240.
 - Graeber, "Chapter 5: A Brief Treatise on the Moral Grounds of Economic Relations," in *Debt, the first 5000 years*, pp. 89-126.
 - James, "'Deeper into a Hole?' Borrowing and Lending in South Africa," *Current Anthropology* 55/9 (2014): pp. S17-S29.
 - Killick, "The Debts that Bind Us: A Comparison of Amazonian Debt-Peonage and US Mortgage Practices," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53/2 (2011): pp. 344-370.
 - Elyachar, "Chapter 7: Empowering Debt," in *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*, pp. 191-212.

Module 3: Making and Using Resources

7 November – Resources in History

- **Module 2 Reflection** – due before class
- **Readings**
 - Pyne, *World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth* (1995), pp. 3-26, 299-327.
 - Lane, "Introduction," "Chapter 4: An Improbable Global City," in *Potosi: The Silver City That Changed the World*, pp. 1-19, 92-116.
 - Cushman, "Chapter 2: The Guano Age," in *Guano and the Opening of the Pacific World: A Global Ecological History*, pp. 23-74.
 - Evenden, "Aluminum, Commodity Chains, and the Environmental History of the Second World War," *Environmental History* 16/1 (2011): pp. 69-93.

14 November – Extraction and Mining

- **Readings:**

- Penna, "Chapter 6: Mining, Making, Manufacturing," in *The Human Footprint: A Global Environmental History*, pp. 163-195.
- Dunbar Moodie (with Ndatshe and Sibuye), "Migrancy and male sexuality on the South African gold mines," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14 (1988): pp. 228-256.
- D'Avignon, "Spirited Geobodies: Producing Subterranean Property in Nineteenth-Century Bambuk, West Africa," *Technology and Culture*, 61/2 (2020): S20-S48.
- Norris, "Early theories of aqueous mineral genesis in the sixteenth century," *Ambix* 54/1 (2007): pp. 69-86.
- Felten, "Managing Mineral Growth in Early Modern Mining," *Isis* 114/3 (2023): pp. 626-630.
- Asmussen, "Spirited Metals and the Oeconomy of Resources in Early Modern European Mining," *Earth Sciences History* 39/2 (2020): pp. 371–388.

21 November – Industry and Transformation

- **Readings:**

- Penna, "Chapter 7: Industrial Work," in *The Human Footprint: A Global Environmental History*, pp. 196-234.
- Malm, "The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry," *Historical Materialism* 21/1 (2013): pp. 15-68
- Chirikure, "The Metalworker, the Potter, and the Pre-European African 'Laboratory'," in *What Do Science, Technology, and Innovation Mean from Africa?*, pp. 63-78.
- Bulstrode, "Black metallurgists and the making of the industrial revolution," *History and Technology* 39 (2023): pp. 1-41.
- Parthasarathi, "Trade and Industry in the Indian Subcontinent, 1750–1913," in *Reconceptualizing the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 271–290.
- Inkster, "Cultural Engineering and the Industrialization of Japan, circa 1868–1912," in *Reconceptualizing the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 291–308.
- Perdue, "What Price Empire?: The Industrial Revolution and the Case of China," in *Reconceptualizing the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 309–328.

28 November – The Environment and Toxic Landscapes

- **Readings**

- Antrop, "Why landscapes of the past are important for the future," *Landscape and Urban Planning* 70/1-2 (2005): pp. 21-34.
- Meisner Rosen, "'Knowing' Industrial Pollution: Nuisance Law and the Power of Tradition in a Time of Rapid Economic Change, 1840-1864," *Environmental History* 8/4 (2003): pp. 565–597.
- Shapiro, "Chapter 2: Deforestation, Famine, and Utopian Urgency," in *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment Revolutionary China* (2001): pp. 67-95.
- Brynne Voyles, "Conclusion: Zombie Mines," in *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*, 211–218.
- Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *The American Historical Review* 106/1 (2001): pp. 17–48.

Module 4: Making Value, Today and Tomorrow

5 December – Value and Knowledge Production

- **Module 3 Reflection** – due before class
- **Readings:**
 - Powell and Snellman, "The knowledge economy," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30/1 (2004): pp. 199-220.
 - O'Donovan, "The Invention of the 'Knowledge Economy'," "The Crisis of Growth," in *Pursuing the Knowledge Economy: A Sympathetic History of High-Skill, High-Wage Hubris*, pp. 15–37, 87-99.
 - Mokyr, "Chapter 1: Technology and the Problem of Human Knowledge," "Chapter 6: The Political Economy of Knowledge: Innovation and Resistance in Economic History," in *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy*, pp. 1–27, 218-283.

12 December – AI and Labor

- **Readings:**
 - Autor, "Why are there still so many jobs? The history and future of workplace automation," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29/3 (2015): pp. 3-30.
 - Further readings will be assigned closer to this date, in order to ensure relevancy.

15 – 19 December – Completion Week

19 December

- **Final Paper** – due by midnight