

POLS 399: Writing-in-the-Discipline
Seminar in Political Theory: Reading Marx's *Capital*
CRN: 33379; Tuesdays 12:30-3:00 p.m., BSB 1171

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Office hours: Mondays 2-4 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS

This course is mainly devoted to the study of one book: Karl Marx's *Capital*, Volume I, which was first published in German in 1867. Marx arguably qualifies as the single most influential philosopher and "social scientist" of the modern age; the first volume of *Capital* is his most important work. Marx's text can be read as a comprehensive work of social theory: a text that moves back and forth between a history and a logic that together attempt nothing less than an account of an emerging human condition. We will also take seriously the idea of reading it somewhat differently, primarily as political theory. Our approach throughout will be critical: we will read and write and discuss closely, probing strengths and weaknesses to gain an understanding of the text; this might also, in the process, help us to develop our own discerning judgment.

Criticism seems to be called for in a time of crisis, and we undertake this study in the context of recent and continuing global crises (financial, economic, ecological, political, etc.) of what we now call "capitalism" (not a term used by Marx). Marx gives us some ways to think about the foundations and contours of crisis. These suggest study of what has been called, since the seventeenth century, political (o)economy. The subtitle of all of *Capital* is "A Critique of Political Economy." Throughout the course we'll try to think about what it means to do political economy, and what it means to critique it. Marx's own critique is, according to William Clare Roberts, a republican political-theoretical critique. We'll read Roberts's *Marx's Inferno* alongside *Capital* to help us consider what continuing relevance, if any, Marx's politics—which were largely, according to Roberts, a response to nineteenth-century European socialist movements—have for our own.

POLS 399 is a seminar; it is essential that seminar members read each meeting's complete assignment before class, and that they faithfully attend each week's session prepared to contribute. Students are expected to prepare weekly memos as well as two critical essays on assigned topics (essay drafts followed by individual conferences with the instructor are strongly recommended). Students will also do team class presentations of appr. 20-30 minutes. Final grades will be based on memos (30%), two critical essays (40%), presentations (15%), and regular attendance and participation (15%).

Memos

Each week, students will turn in a brief (appr. 350-600 word) memo. These must be written in sentence and paragraph form, and include informal textual citations. Good memos report on and briefly engage some of the reading's main assumptions, arguments, and conclusions. Memos will be evaluated with a pass, pass-minus, or failing grade. If a memo is not brought to the beginning of class on the due date it counts as a failure (but see exception week of October 12). Students who fail four or fewer of the fourteen memos will receive an "A" for their memo grade (95 or above with 10 or more good passes, below 95 if pass-minus grades must be counted). *With fewer than 10 passes, the memo grade declines steeply* ("B" for 9 passes, "C" for 8 passes, etc.). Students are advised not to miss any memos in the first weeks. I will give extra guidance on the first few memos. Note that the grading scheme holds through the semester even if memo work is missed from illness or other necessity.

Essays

Two essays on assigned topics will be due on the dates designated below. Late essays will be penalized. All writing must, of course, be your own and follow standard citation procedures.* Students are encouraged to consult with me from the beginning about their writing and to hand in drafts. Especially if you are having difficulty with the reading or writing for this course, talk with me early and often, in office hours or by appointment.

***Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is widespread and often misunderstood because of students' reflexive reliance on search engines and the open internet. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense; it is grounds for automatic course failure and can be grounds for dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about what plagiarism is and how to avoid it, please see <https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu/what-constitutes-plagiarism>.

You should read and reread the primary sources, think about them, discuss them with me and with your classmates, and sit and write. You should not rush to consult outside secondary texts when doing the memo and essay assignments; the best way both to grasp the material and to develop your own skills is to struggle with the reading directly and repeatedly. If you do this and seek to supplement your work with that of others, note that there is a wealth of critical work on Marx (and now some on Roberts) available in and through the UIC library, and for *Capital* in particular there is some excellent work available on the open internet (for example the course by David Harvey at www.davidharvey.org). If you do rely at all on outside sources for your memo or essay or presentation work, *they must be cited*.

Required Texts (UIC Bookstore, see also Blackboard for additional assignments)
Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1976)
William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017)

COURSE OUTLINE

August 24: Introduction

- Syllabus; Tooze, *Crashed* intro; Kantor, Weise, and Ashford (NYT on Amazon)

August 31: Reading *Capital* and the Commodity

- Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (hereafter *Capital*), prefaces and 1.1-2, 87-137
- Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 1-19 (ch. 1)
- **MEMO 1 DUE**

September 7: The Commodity Form, Value, and Exchange

- *Capital*, remainder ch. 1.3-4, 138-177
- *Marx's Inferno*, 20-55 (ch. 2)
- **MEMO 2 DUE**

September 14: Exchange and the Anarchy of the Market

- *Capital*, ch. 2, 178-187
- *Marx's Inferno*, 56-103 (ch. 3)
- **MEMO 3 DUE**

September 21: Money

- *Capital*, ch. 3, 188-244
- Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, 57-85 (Blackboard)
- **MEMO 4 DUE, Essay #1 assigned (due 10/22)**

September 28: Capital, Freedom, and Force

- *Capital*, chs. 4-6, 245-280
- *Marx's Inferno*, 104-145 (ch. 4)
- **MEMO 5 DUE**

October 5: Surplus-Value and the Struggle Over the Working Day

- *Capital*, chs. 7-10, 281-416
- **MEMO 6 DUE**

October 12: FILM BREAK

- **MEMO 7 DUE Oct. 15 (2 paragraph analysis of film only, due over email)**

October 19: Surplus-Value and the Transformation of Work

- *Capital*, chs. 11-14 and 15.1-2, 417-517
- **MEMO 8 DUE**
- **Essay #1 due by 4 p.m., Friday October 22 (file followed by printout is fine)**

October 26: Automation

- *Capital*, ch. 15.3-10, 517-639

- **MEMO 9 DUE**

November 2: “Promising Good and Delivering Evil”

- *Capital*, chs. 16-18, 641-672
- *Marx’s Inferno*, 146-186 (ch. 5)
- **MEMO 10 DUE, essay #2 assigned (due 12/6)**

November 9: Wages, Subsistence, and Reproduction

- *Capital*, chs. 19-23, 673-724
- Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care” (Blackboard)
- **MEMO 11 DUE**

November 16: Accumulation

- *Capital*, chs. 24-25, 725-870
- **MEMO 12 DUE**

November 23: Dispossession

- *Capital*, ch. 26, 871-940
- Arendt, “The Political Emancipation of the Bourgeoisie” (Blackboard)
- **MEMO 13 DUE**

November 30: Republic of Labor?

- *Marx’s Inferno*, 187-257 (chs. 6-7)
- **MEMO 14 DUE**

Essay #2 due by 4 p.m., Monday, December 6 (file followed by printout is fine)

THERE IS NO FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THIS COURSE

***Face Masks: Masks covering both the mouth and nose must be worn at all times by all students, faculty, and staff while on campus and inside any building regardless of vaccination status. If you do not wear a mask, you will be asked to leave the classroom and will not be allowed back in class unless or until you wear a mask. If you have forgotten your mask, you may pick one up from the Department of Political Science undergraduate office at BSB 1102. Students who do not comply with the mask-wearing policy will be reported to the Dean of Students. Eating and drinking are not allowed in classrooms.

***Students with disabilities who require accommodations for access and participation in this course must inform their instructors and be registered with the Disability Resource Center. Please see <http://drc.uic.edu> or contact the DRC at 312 413-2183 (voice) or 312 413-7781 (FAX).