

POLS 401, Spring 2005
Marxist Political Theory
Professor Chad Lavin

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“*Ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste.*”
Karl Marx

Course Description.

Marxism is undoubtedly one of the most influential philosophies of recent centuries. It is also probably *the* philosophy about which everybody has an opinion. Unfortunately, consensus on the meaning and/or value of marxism has always been rare. This disagreement may stem from an incompatibility of marxism and the sort of doctrinal posturing typically coveted in political theory. But it is also surely due in part to the fact that many interpretations and applications of marxism owe little if anything to Marx’s actual writings.

In this class, we will examine some of the central texts of the history of marxism, including those of Marx and Engels and those of some of their varied interpreters, to get a handle on marxism as a theory and a practice. We will be reading Marx primarily as a philosopher – though a philosopher with interest in economics, politics, and, of course, revolutionary strategy. Some familiarity with the history of Western political thought will be helpful in this class, though it is not required. We will be covering a lot of material in this class; readings will often be both very long and remarkably difficult. Your assignments will require that you commit serious time and attention to the texts.

The course is organized around three broad, interrelated themes in Marx’s work. First, we will examine Marx’s epistemology and method. One of the most woefully neglected areas of Marx scholarship, his articulation of how we know things is crucial to understanding his later claims of what we (can) know. Second, we will examine Marx’s politics. Here we will focus on how Marx fits into the history of modern political thought, his critique of political and philosophical liberalism, and his theory of how (if at all) we produce history. Third, we will examine Marx’s economics. Marx is of course known primarily for his analysis of capitalism, and examining his perspective on the internal organizations of our economic system should raise questions relevant questions about its relation to human freedom.

In the end, I hope we will all emerge with a greater understanding of the provocations and insights of marxist political theory, able to assess the value and relevance of marxism unhindered by the polemics endemic to either side of the Cold War.

Required Texts.

The following books are required, and are available in the bookstore. Used copies are also readily available from online vendors.

- Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition* (Norton, 1978)
- Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1* (Penguin, 1992)
- VI Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (International Publishers, 1990)
- Coursepack available at Metro Copy on Calhoun street (behind the Claiborne Blockbuster)

In addition, everybody will read *one* (1) of the following books as a basis for a group project. They are available in the bookstore and wherever else fine paperbacks are sold.

- Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (Anchor, 2000)
- Catherine Mackinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Harvard, 1989)
- Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (South End Press, 1999)
- Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-System* (Cambridge, 1990)

Assignments & Grades.

I expect you to read and consider everything assigned. Since many of the readings will be quite difficult, I do not expect you to arrive to class prepared to explain every reading. You should arrive having thought about the material and, ideally, with well-formulated questions designed to help move class discussion. I recommend coming to class with at least one specific question about the assigned reading. While I will not take attendance, regular attendance and participation will be invaluable to earning a good grade in the class.

Student will write two (2) papers and make one (1) group presentation for this class. I will provide more detailed topics as the class progresses.

- Your first paper will be an in-depth treatment of a single concept or aspect of Marx's thought. This paper will be roughly 6-8 pages and will count for 30% of your final grade.
- Your second paper will be an application of marxism and evaluation of its value for understanding an aspect of the contemporary world. This paper will be roughly 10-12 pages and will count for 35% of your final grade.
- Your group project will be a 6-8 page review and 50 minute presentation of one of the four optional texts. This will count for 15% of your final grade.
- You will also be required to file evaluations of your colleagues' presentations, each of which will count for 3% of your final grade.
- The remaining 11% of your grade will come from your class participation.

Papers are due at the beginning of class on date indicated in the syllabus. These must be hard (paper) copies. Submissions by email will not be accepted without previous arrangement. Due dates are firm, though extensions will gladly be granted if coordinated at least 48 hours in advance. Late work will be docked *one (1) full letter grade* for each calendar day late.

In addition to this paper copy, you must also submit an electronic copy of each paper to www.turnitin.com.
turnitin class id: 1237232
turnitin password: bourgeoisie

Honor Code

Students are expected to adhere to the Tulane University Honor Code. All work submitted in this class are assumed to be your own. If you have *any* questions regarding this Honor Code, please ask the professor. Violations will be treated severely.

Course Schedule

Abbreviations:

C = *Capital* CP = *coursepack* MER = *Marx-Engels Reader*

M Jan 10 Greetings.

W Jan 12 Terrell Carver, "Reading Marx: Life and Works" (CP)

I. METHOD

on the dialectic

F Jan 14 Marx, "Discovering Hegel" (MER 7-8)

Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction* (MER 53-65)

M Jan 17 No Class: MLK Day

W Jan 19 Marx, "For a Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing" (MER 12-16)

Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (MER 16-25)

- knowledge & history*
- F Jan 21 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (MER 146-175)
- M Jan 24 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (MER 176-200)
- analytical marxism*
- W Jan 26 G.A. Cohen, "The Primacy of Productive Forces" (CP)
Marx, "Marx on the History of His Opinions" a/k/a "1859 Preface" (MER 3-6)
Engels, "Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx," (MER 681-2)
- cultural marxism*
- F Jan 28 Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure," "Determination," "Productive Forces," and "From Reflection to Mediation" (CP)
Engels, "Letters on Historical Materialism" (MER 760-765)
- structural marxism*
- M Jan 31 Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (CP)
- critical marxism*
- W Feb 2 Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (MER 143-145)
Georg Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?" (CP)
- F Feb 4 Georg Lukács, "What is Orthodox Marxism?" (CP)
- M Feb 7 No class. Catch some beads.
- W Feb 9 No class. Write your papers.
- F Feb 11 Reading TBA
Paper #1 Due
- the method of political economy*
- M Feb 14 Marx, *Grundrisse* (MER 222-244)
Marx, *Capital*, Preface to the 1st Edition, Postface to the 2nd Edition, and Preface to the French Edition (C 89-104)

II. POLITICS

- agency & class*
- W Feb 16 Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (MER 469-500)
Marx, "The Coming Upheaval" (MER 218-219)
- F Feb 18 Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (MER 594-617)
Marx, "Classes" from *Capital, Volume 3* (CP)
- M Feb 21 Engels, "The Tactics of Social Democracy" (MER 556-573)
Engels, *The Civil War in France: Introduction* (MER 618-629)
E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, preface (CP)
- W Feb 23 Group presentation: Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God*
- against liberalism*
- F Feb 25 Marx, *1844 Manuscripts* (MER 66-93)
Iain Levison, "Becoming an Associate" (CP)
- M Feb 28 Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (MER 26-52)
- W Mar 2 Movie: "The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" (dir. Michel Gondry)
- F Mar 4 Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital" (MER 203-217)
- M Mar 7 Engels, "The Origin of Family, Private Property, and the State" (MER 734-759)

- revolutionary strategy*
- W Mar 9 Marx, "Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association," "Economics and Politics in the Labor Movement," "Against Personality Cults," "The Possibility of Non-Violent Revolution," and (*especially*) "Critique of the Gotha Program" (MER 512-541)
- Engels, "Versus the Anarchists" (MER 728-9)
- F Mar 11 Group Presentation: Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*

III. ECONOMICS

- on the commodity*
- M Mar 14 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 1, sections 1-3 (C 125-163)
- W Mar 16 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 1, section 4; Chapter 2; Chapter 3, section 1 (C 163-198)
- exchanging money*
- F Mar 18 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 3, sections 2-3 (C 198-244)
- Mar 20-25 Spring Break
- M Mar 28 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 4-5 (C 247-269)
- W Mar 30 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 6-7 (C 270-306)
- exploiting intensity*
- F Apr 1 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 8-9 (C 307-339)
- M Apr 4 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 10, sections 1, 4-7 (C 340-344, 367-416)
- dividing labor*
- W Apr 6 Marx, *Capital*, chapters 12-13 (C 429-454)
- F Apr 8 Group Presentation: Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*
- mechanizing production*
- M Apr 11 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 15 sections 1-5 (C 492-564)
- W Apr 13 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 24 sections 1-2 (C 725-737)
- F Apr 15 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 25 sections 1-3 (C 762-793)
- becoming capital*
- M Apr 18 Marx, *Capital*, Chapter 26-28, 32 (C 873-905, 927-930)
- modes of globalization*
- W Apr 20 Lenin, *Imperialism* (9-46)
- F Apr 22 Group Presentation: Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*
- M Apr 25 Lenin, *Imperialism* (47-128)
- W Apr 27 J.K. Gibson-Graham, "Waiting for the Revolution, or How to Smash Capitalism while Working at Home in Your Spare Time" (CP)
- F Apr 29 TBA

Final paper due by 12 noon on Monday, May 9.

.this syllabus is subject to change with reasonable notice from the professor.