

Introduction to Marx

QUARTER YEAR

Instructor information

Instructor: Laurenz Ramsauer
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Course description

No secular text in the history of humankind has had more real, political influence than Karl Marx's *Capital*. No matter what one may ultimately think about Marx's ideas, for anyone interested in political thought, social theory, modern history, the history of economics or even 20th century geopolitics, the significance of Marx's work can hardly be overestimated. In this course, we will discuss Marx's most influential texts and ideas together with their philosophical context. This course will be of interest to students interested in social and political philosophy, as well as to those interested in the history of political thought and economics. The course will also provide a background for students interested in advanced work on Marx and Marxist thought.

Texts

All texts will be made available online.

Course requirements

- Thoughtful participation in discussion: 20%
- A 10 minute in-class presentation: 30%
- Final 10–15-pages essay: 50% (due Month/Day)

Assessment

Thoughtful participation in discussion means that you regularly attend class and come prepared to each meeting ready to discuss the material. This not merely involves articulating your own point of view but also the ability to take in what others are saying and to genuinely engage with it. An excellent in-class presentation conveys the content of the reading concisely without overly simplifying, is presented clearly, raises interesting questions and/or criticism, and connects the reading with previous course material. You can find a short guide on how to write a good philosophy paper [here](#), and you can find the rubrics for the assessment of your oral presentation and essay [here](#) and [here](#) respectively. You can also find a brief guide on using AI tools in philosophy papers [here](#).

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

If you need accommodation, please inform me as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

Schedule

Week 1: Materialism

Month/Day. Aristotle's materialism

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-5, 7-8; VI.1, 4-5; X.6-8

Aristotle, *Politics* I.1-2

Marx, *Grundrisse* (excerpt)

Month/Day. Feuerbach and Marx's materialism

Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (chapter 1)

Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*

Week 2: Alienation

Month/Day. Marx on alienation

Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Tucker 70-105)

Marx, *Notes on James Mills*

Optional: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (excerpts)

Month/Day. Alienation in contemporary philosophy

Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation* (excerpts)

Week 3: History

Month/Day. Hegel on history and dialectics

Hegel, *Reason in History*

Optional: G.A. Cohen, 'Imagines of History in Hegel and Marx'

Month/Day. Marx's historical materialism

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.1-2

Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* (Tucker 147-175)

Optional: Susan Himmelweit, 'Reproduction and the materialist conception of history: A feminist critique'

Week 4: Ideology

Month/Day. Marx's on ideology

Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'

Marx, *The German Ideology* (excerpt)

Marx, *On the Jewish Question* (excerpt)

Month/Day. Ideology cont.

Michael Forster, 'Ideology'

Week 5: Marx's economics: the commodity and Capital

Month/Day. Commodity-exchange

Marx, *Capital Vol I*, chapters 1-3

Month/Day. Capital

Marx, *Capital Vol I*, chapters 4-5

Week 6: Marx's economics: labor-power and exploitation

Month/Day. Labor-power

Marx, *Capital Vol I*, chapters 6-7

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (excerpts)

Month/Day. Exploitation

Marx, *Capital Vol I*, chapters 10 and 25

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.1-2

Aristotle, *Politics* (excerpt)

Hesiod, *Works and Days* (excerpt)

Week 7: From class struggle to Communism

Month/Day. Class struggle and history

Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*

Month/Day. The goal of class struggle: something better than justice?

Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*

Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [excerpt]

Week 8: The state and revolution

Month/Day. The Paris Commune

Louise Michel, *Memoirs* [excerpts]

Marx, *The Civil War in France* [excerpt]

Optional: Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (excerpts)

Month/Day. Marxism and revolution

Louise Michel, *Memoirs* [excerpts]

Alain Badiou, 'The Paris Commune' (excerpt)

Week 9: Marx and ethical theory

Month/Day. Does Marxism need ethics?

G. A. Cohen, 'Equality: From Fact to Norm'

Brian Leiter, 'Why Marxism Still Does Not Need Normative Theory'

Optional: G. A. Cohen, 'Freedom, Justice and Capitalism'

Month/Day. Marx and Human Rights

Steven Lukes, 'Can a Marxist Believe in Human Rights?'

Week 10: summary

Academic Integrity

Academic work is an author's original contribution and properly cites all sources used (such as articles, books, interviews, films, podcasts etc.). This matters for both epistemic and moral reasons. For epistemic reasons, it is crucial that academic work can be double-checked by academic peers, so readers must be able to easily identify all sources an author relied on. For moral reasons, it is crucial that other authors receive the credit they deserve.* Feel free to consult with me before completing your assignments if you should have any concerns about the correct way to reference the work of others. The consequence of plagiarism will be a failing grade. In the unfortunate event that a student is suspected of plagiarism, I also have to follow the university's official guidelines for responding to academic misconduct.

Climate and Inclusion

Philosophy involves the ability to formulate your own and carefully attending to others' arguments, both in writing and in conversation. Even when philosophers disagree, this is not an adversarial activity: philosophy can only be done well as a collective activity with the shared end of furthering our mutual understanding. This requires that all of us be prepared to listen carefully and seriously to what others have to say, no matter how strongly we may disagree. Creating such an inclusive environment matters not merely for moral reasons, but for epistemic reasons too. If some groups are left feeling unwelcome and their perspectives left unheard, we seriously impair our collective ability to make progress in knowledge. It is therefore my goal as an instructor to create an environment where everyone feels respected and welcome. I encourage you to reach out to me if you have suggestions for promoting a welcoming and open academic environment, and I will give them serious consideration. If there are any circumstances that make you feel uncomfortable in our classroom, please let me know. All discussion will remain confidential.

* For instance, these academic integrity and climate statements are modelled after Tyler Zimmer's syllabus on Philosophy of Economics (2022).