

# PL214 Marx Yesterday and Today

Seminar Leader: Dr. Jan Völker  
Course Times: Wed. 17:00 - 20:15  
Email: j.voelker@berlin.bard.edu  
Office Hours: On appointment

## Course Description

The name “Marx” today tends to conjure up a familiar reference that is somehow at the same time obscure: either a resource for left-wing critique that we are often told is in need of rediscovery, or a monolith responsible for ideological oppression and stagnation. But what does “Marx” mean if we consider the variety of his works and the phases of his long career as a journalist, agitator, writer, philosopher, and political economist? It is well known that Marx is supposed to have put the Hegelian system “on its feet,” or introduced the reality of material life into a philosophy concerned with the mind and the spirit. But what were the implications of this maneuver for the rest of Marx’s career, and for the relationships between “philosophy,” “history,” “politics” and “economics” that it articulates? The early Marx is sometimes considered a “humanist,” while the later is a scientist tracing the “laws” of capital or of historical development itself. Other interpreters regard the early Marx as the true philosopher, while still others would consider that “philosophy” can only be described as such when it does not engage with politics at all. In reading Marx’s work we will explore these distinctions and debates, as well as the uses to which Marx’s ideas and proposals can be put in understanding our contemporary world, even where we might reject orthodoxies that have been established in the reception of his theories. Above all, Marx’s writings challenge the very notion of “objective” forms of knowledge that claim to be detached from interests, and show how such interests may be recognized and traced in arguments, cultural practices, and social structures. This course will be an opportunity to become familiar with Marx’s major works and interpreters, and with the appropriations of his theories that have influenced political and cultural movements. Students able to do so are encouraged to complete readings in the original German, and to write their papers and assignments in German.

## Requirements

Attendance at every class is essential, as is full advance preparation of the course readings for each session of the seminar. There will be two essays, and in-class presentations that form part of the participation grade.

## Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the grade for the course. Students are advised to consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

PLEASE NOTE: No electronic devices are allowed in class.

Essay Deadlines: Mid-term essay: deadline Friday, 24 March, 23:59. Final essay: deadline Friday, 12 May, 23:59.

### Writing Assignments

Mid-Term Paper: 1800-2500 words, 5-7 pages. Final paper: 2800-3500 words, 8-10 pages.

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C.

Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

### **Grade Breakdown**

Mid-term essay: 20% , Final essay: 30% Seminar grade: 50% (20%presentation, 30%participation)

All texts will be provided via dropbox or email!

### **Schedule**

Wednesday, 1 February

- Introduction
- Marx: “On the Jewish Question” (1844)

Wednesday, 8 February

- Marx: *Paris Manuscripts* (1844): Notebook 1
- Marx: *Paris Manuscripts* (1844): Notebook 3

Wednesday, 15 February

- Marx: *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*: Introduction (1844)
- Marx: “Theses on Feuerbach” (1845)

Wednesday, 22 February

- Marx/Engels: *The German Ideology* (1845-46), Excerpts
- Marx/Engels: “The Communist Manifesto” (1848)

Wednesday, 1 March

- Marx: *Grundrisse* (1857-58): Introduction
- Stuart Hall: “Marx’s Notes on Method: A ‘Reading’ of the ‘1857 Introduction.’”

Wednesday, 8 March

- Marx: “Wage Labour and Capital” (1847)
- Marx: “Value, Price and Profit” (1865)

Wednesday, 15 March

- Marx: *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867): Chapter 1

Wednesday, 22 March

- Marx: *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (1867): Chapter 2-3

Wednesday, 29 March

- Rancière: “The Concept of Critique and the Critique of Political Economy: From the 1844 Manuscripts to Capital” (from *Reading Capital*)

Wednesday, 5 April

- Althusser: “The Object of Capital” (from *Reading Capital*)

10-14 April Spring Break

Wednesday, 19 April

- Balibar: *The Philosophy of Marx* (excerpts)

Wednesday, 26 April

- Paolo Virni: “General Intellect”
- Fredric Jameson: “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (From: *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*)

Wednesday, 3 May

- Michael Heinrich: “Invaders from Marx”
- Michael Heinrich: “Ambivalences of Marx’s Critique of Political Economy as Obstacles for the Analysis of Contemporary Capitalism”

Wednesday, 10 May

- Moishe Postone: “Critique and Historical Transformation”
- Luce Irigaray: “Women on the Market”

Completion Week, 15-19 May