Political Economy: The Intellectual History of Capitalism

History 1979

Brown University
Department of History
Time: Thursdays, 4-6:30pm
Fall, 2014

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is a reading intensive seminar designed to expose students to the history of modern economic thought by working through a variety of classical and more recent authors who have written about the nature of capitalism. Among other things, we will discuss theories of value, property, markets, labor, inequality, and prices. We will also ask how the relationship between capitalism and other forms of production have been understood by a variety of authors over time. Throughout, we will pay particular attention to the different kinds of narratives and explanations that have been offered by authors working in different time periods and intellectual traditions, from economists to sociologists, biologists, philosophers, and historians.

Note that although many of our readings are about the economy, this is a history class. Thus, we will be less concerned with answering the question of whose views are superior and whose are inferior than with understanding the development of our thinking about political economy, and how different arguments relate to the historical context out of which they emerged.

Assessment:
Term Paper Draft, 5-7 pages, Oct. 30th (15%)
Final Paper, 12-15 pages, Dec. 11th (50%)
Peer review, 1-2 pages, Nov. 13th (5%)
Presentation, 10 minutes (10%)
Participation (20%)

Participation: Your participation is a vital part of this course. Please come to class having completed all the assigned reading, ready to engage in a lively and informed discussion.

Disabilities: Please contact me by the end of the second week if you have a documented disability so that we can make the necessary accommodations.

Term Paper: A printout of your paper is due on the last day of class. You may write about any topic that touches on the themes of this course. Be creative! However, given that this is
a history class, I will insist that your paper be historical in nature. That means that I will ask you to place the work of some figure or group of figures in their time and place. I will provide further guidance on writing historical papers during the course, and I encourage you to come to my office hours to discuss your progress. In addition, you will be asked to submit a 5-7 page draft of your paper mid-way through the term. I will then assign another student’s paper draft to you for peer review, which will consist of 1-2 pages of constructive feedback. Your final paper should be 12-15 pages in length.

Presentation: I will ask you to give a short presentation of 5 to 10 minutes (maximum) on the assigned readings at the start of one of our weekly discussions. These presentations should set the stage for our discussions, providing historical context on the author(s) we are reading, as well as quickly summarizing the main themes of the text(s). I will ask you to sign up for a presentation day/time in advance, and grade you based on how succinct, well delivered, and informative your remarks are.

Readings: Most readings will be available for download on the course Canvas site. Each week, I have chosen one or more texts as required readings. Everyone is expected to have read these sources thoroughly and come to class prepared to engage in a discussion based on a familiarity with the arguments they present. In addition, I have also indicated several “optional/additional” readings. These are not required, and I do not expect you to read them or make reference to them in our discussions. Rather, I include them primarily for students who find the themes discussed during a particular week of special interest and relevance, and who would like to follow up with additional readings on that theme. The optional/additional readings may also be of potential use if you would like to more deeply engage some particular literature in your term paper.

Books for Purchase: In addition to the readings that will be posted on Canvas, you will be required to purchase the following books. I recommend AbeBooks or Amazon online.


Writing Resources: You are encouraged to make use of Brown’s Writing Center, whose main offices are located in room 213 of the J. Walter Wilson Building. You can schedule an appointment to receive help and feedback on your writing here: http://www.brown.edu/Student_Services/Writing_Center/appointments/.
A Note On Plagiarism: Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. Anyone suspected of such infractions will be referred to the Dean's Office.
Course Timetable

Week 1: Introduction (Sept. 4th)

No readings

Week 2: The Enlightenment Tradition (Sept. 11th)


Optional / Suggested:


Week 3: Classical Foundations (Sept. 18th)


Optional / Additional:


Week 4: The Marxian Critique (Sept. 25th)


Optional / Additional:


**Week 5: The Marginal Revolution (Oct. 2nd)**


*Optional / Additional:*


**Week 6: Sociological Reflections, Part I (Oct. 9th)**


*Optional / Recommended:*


**Week 7: Social Darwinism (Oct. 16th)**


Optional / Additional:


**Week 8: Organicism (Oct. 23rd)**


Optional / Additional:


**Week 9: Organizing the Market (Oct. 30)**


Optional / Additional:


***Term Paper Drafts Due***

Week 10: No Class (Nov. 6th)

History of Science Society Meetings

Week 11: The Welfare State (Nov. 13)


***Peer Reviews Due***

Week 12: Neo-Classicism (Nov. 20th)


Additional / Optional:


Week 13: No Class (Nov. 27th)

Thanksgiving

Week 14: The Power of Information (Dec. 4th)


*Additional / Optional:*


Week 15: Sociological Reflections, Part II (Dec. 11th)


***Final Papers Due***