

Syllabus

Title of the Course:	Marx's Materialism: Praxis and Human Emancipation	Course Breakdown:	30 online teaching hours in 15 weeks, 270 or 420 hours independent study
Name of the Instructor:	Dr. Siyaveş Azeri & Dr. Saladdin Ahmed	Weekly class time:	Wednesday, 18:15-19:45 (CET)
Language:	English		
Hosted by:	Academic Freedom Network	Certificate issued by:	Freie University Berlin (10 ECTS or 15 ECTS)

This online course is organized and funded by the *Academic Freedom Network*. The Academic Freedom Network was established by the partnership of the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, Academics in Solidarity at FU-Berlin, Off-University, Einstein Fellows Research Group at HU-Berlin and The New University in Exile Consortium, The New School, NY, USA. The Academic Freedom Network is a project as part of the Berlin Center for Global Engagement (BCGE).

Description of the course

Marx's critical project has arguably been the most influential body of philosophical work since Lao Tzu and Aristotle. At the heart of Marx's critical philosophy is his materialism. This seminar aims to introduce the distinctive features and revolutionary essence of Marx's materialism via analysis of primary texts, with a particular emphasis on Marx's concepts of "praxis" as a philosophical category, "practical criticism," and "practical materialism." The weekly sessions will correspond to Marx's famous *Theses on Feuerbach*. The widely quoted eleventh thesis, "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it," will be considered at various points throughout the seminar. To ground each thesis, we will conduct a close reading of passages from various texts, including *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*; *The Holy Family*; *The Communist Manifesto*; *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*; *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863*; *The German Ideology*; and *Capital*. At the same time, our discussions will be enriched by examples from today's social and political struggles for human emancipation in various parts of the world.

Learning Aims

To provide a general understanding to:

- investigate, identify, and discuss Marx's materialist philosophy;
- assess the significance of Marx's materialism in relation to his philosophy of praxis;
- demonstrate the significance of materialism and praxis in Marx's overall philosophy;
- examine the ways in which Marx's materialism can enrich our critical analysis of society and relations of power.

Upon the successful completion of the course students will be able to:

- explain Marx's distinct materialist philosophy;
- demonstrate the critical potentiality of Marxist philosophy;
- apply Marxist materialism critically in various disciplines; and
- engage in improved critical analysis.

Course requirements

1. **Attendance/Participation – 20 %:** You are required to listen to and annotate every week's lectures, which will be posted on the course's side by Sunday 5 pm CET prior to the beginning of the week. We will also hold a 2-hour live session each week via Zoom, during which we will discuss the corresponding week's readings and lectures. You are strongly encouraged to attend each session and participate via video/audio and/or chat.
2. **Weekly Reflections – 15 % (due Friday 5 pm CET):** Each week, you will be required to post a 300-word reflection on the corresponding reading(s) in the discussion forum.
3. **Perusall Reading Assignments – 25 %:** An electronic version of the weekly reading(s) will be made available on Perusall. You are required to read them and make comments by Sunday at 5 pm CET each week. For full credit, you should read the texts closely and leave thoughtful comments and questions on various parts of the texts.
4. **Proposal for Final Project – 5 % (due Jan 11, 2021):** Details will be posted on the course website.
5. **Final Project – 35% (due Feb 27, 2021):** Details will be posted on the course website.

Written Assignments

All written assignments should include your full name, date of submission, and word count as a header in the upper right corner. Use a standard 12-point font such as Times New Roman, Calibri, or Arial, and retain 1-inch margins. Papers should be double-spaced with inserted page numbers.

Academic Integrity

Borrowing and building on others' ideas is part and parcel of the learning process, but in doing so, it is important to always give credit where it is due. This applies not only to written assignments but also to presentations and in-class discussions. Acknowledging the original source of an idea is not just a technical requirement of academic writing, but a moral imperative insofar as passing off another's idea as one's own is akin to theft. You are always welcome to contact us for clarification or to discuss a particular case, but when in doubt, it is always better to err on the side of caution and acknowledge the original source of an idea.

Course Outline

Introductions and Backgrounds; Idealism vs. Materialism; Hegel vs. Feuerbach; Hegel vs. Marx; Marx vs. Feuerbach; The Theological Equation of God and Human Subjectivity; Theology as Anthropology; Atheism by Logic; Religion's Negation of Itself

Week 1: Nov 2- Nov 7, 2020

- Introductions; The significance of Feuerbach in the history of philosophy; The human creation of God; Placing theology in anthropology; Critique of bad philosophy; What is idealism? Is idealism covert religious speculation? Theology as anthropology (again); Feuerbach on alienation; anthropological materialism; materialism as "critique" of religion; God as the alienated image of Man [Mench]

Reading materials:

- "Preface" to the Second Edition (1843); "Introduction"; "§1 Being of Man in General"; "§2 Essence of Religion in General" in Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/>

Week 2: Nov 8- Nov 14

- Marx and Engels as Feuerbachians; Surpassing Feuerbachian critique; From the critique of religion to the critique of the state; Leaping forward with materialism; materialism, theory, and practice

Reading materials:

- Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* (Edited by Engels)
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/engels.htm>
- "Commentary on Theses on Feuerbach" in Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/bloch/hope/commentary-theses.htm>

Week 3: Nov 15 - Nov 21

- Communism and critique; Rational reason; Making consciousness conscious of itself – building on Feuerbach; The state is the state of the privileged; The long history of anti-Semitism; Whose state? Political vs. human emancipation; Politics of real struggles

Reading materials:

- Marx, "Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge":
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09-alt.htm
- Marx, "On the Jewish Question":
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>

**Theses 1-3: "Unity of Theory and Practice in Thought";
Moving towards Praxis: revolutionary practice and Re-education; Moving
Beyond Naive Materialism; Critique and Critical Activity**

Week 4: Nov 22 - Nov 28

- From "anthropological materialism" to "practical materialism": What is the distinctive aspect of Marx's materialist method of criticism? (Theses 1 & 2)

Reading materials:

- "Introduction" in Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>
- *The Holy Family*, Chapter 6, Section 2a (by Engels) "Hinrichs No. 2 'Criticism' and 'Feuerbach'. Condemnation of Philosophy"
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/cho6_2.htm#6.2.a

Week 5: Nov 29 - Dec 5

- From “theological criticism” to “criticism of theology” (Marx’s “theo-logical” critique of the “perfect state”); What is the relation between the separation of the civil and the political spheres and religion? Religion as the expression of human misery; The reasons behind criticizing the *Philosophy of Right*? Practice and conditions of human activities (Thesis 3)

Reading materials:

- *The Holy Family* by Marx & Engels, Ch. 6, Section 1b. “The Jewish Question No. 1” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/cho6.htm#6.1.b>
- Ch. 6, Section 2b. “The Jewish Question No. 2” https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/cho6_2.htm#6.2.b
- Ch. 6, Section 3b. “The Jewish Question No. 3” https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/cho6_3_b.htm

Theses 4 & 5: “Understanding of Reality in Contradictions”; The Transformation from Religion to State; The Negation of the Human Subject in Capitalism; Objectification of the Human Subject

Week 6: Dec 6 - Dec 12

- Human’s subsumption under (abstract) time (of the machine); Can humans be put on the same plane as commodities? How and in what sense do humans become commodified? The question of the “essence of man” (Thesis 4)

Reading materials:

- First and Second Manuscripts of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>
- Marx’s *Poverty of Philosophy*, Chapter 1, Part 2. “Constituted Value or Synthetic Value” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/cho1b.htm>

Week 7: Dec 13 - Dec 18

- Labour as the source of human alienation; what are the positive and negative sides of labour?

- Critique of Hegel's *Logic*; Is "abstract thinking" identical to "alienated thinking"? How? What is the relation between critique of (absolute) knowledge and critique of capitalist social relations? Actual, real, and necessity in Hegel; End of philosophy and Hegel; Uncovering the revolutionary Hegel; From Feuerbach vs. Hegel to Marx vs. Feuerbach (Thesis 5)

Reading materials:

- Third Manuscript of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>
- Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy Part 1: Hegel* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/ch01.htm>

MID-TERM BREAK: No classes from Dec 19, 2020 to Jan 2, 2021

HAPPY 2021!

Theses 6-8: "Reality itself in Contradictions"; Correcting Hegel by Turning him back on his Feet; Religion as a Social Product; The Idealist Fallback; Communism and Consciousness

Week 8: Jan 3 - Jan 9, 2021

- The difference between Hegel's and Marx's methods; Why does Marx turn Hegel's system upside down? "The ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought."

Reading materials:

- "Afterword to the Second German Edition" of Marx's *Capital*, Vol. 1 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p3.htm>
- "Contradiction as a Category of Dialectical Logic" in Evald Ilyenkov's *Dialectical Logic* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/essays/essay10.htm>

Week 9: Jan 10 - Jan 16

- Religion as a social product; In what sense does the critique of religion constitute the basis of all criticism? Feuerbach's shortcoming (Theses 6 & 7)

Reading materials:

- *Capital*, Vol. 1, Book 1, Part 1, Ch1, Section 4: “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/cho1.htm#S4>

Week 10: Jan 17 - Jan 23

- Abstract individual vs. the individual as the ensemble of social relations; How and in what sense is Marx’s “Man” concrete? (Theses 6 & 7)

Reading materials:

- The Preface of Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>
- “General Introduction” in Marx’s *Grundrisse* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/cho1.htm>

Week 11: Jan 24 - Jan 30

- Misconceptions and history of materialism; philosophical idealism and outdated views of the world; The role of praxis/practice/human activity; What is practice? (Theses 8&3)

Reading materials:

Engels’s *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*

- Part 2: Materialism <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/cho2.htm>
- Part 3: Feuerbach <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/cho3.htm>
- Part 4: Marx <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/cho4.htm>

**Theses 9-11: “Location and Task of Dialectical Materialism in Society”;
Materialism and a Scientific Theory of Society; Feuerbach’s Ideal Tendencies;
Philosophy and Superstition; Changing the World; Revolutionary Practice vs.
Philosophy; Conclusion**

Week 12: Jan 31 - Feb 6

- Practical materialism vs. contemplative materialism; What is the role of human “revolutionary practice” in “knowing” the world (the so-called “objects of the senses)? (Theses 9 & 3)

Reading materials:

- *The Communist Manifesto*, pp. 14-67
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>

Week 13: Feb 7 - Feb 13

- The commune against the state; The state as an machine of class enslavement and brutality; Class revolution and the emancipation of education from both religion and the state; Why is civil society the limit of contemplative materialism? (Thesis 9)

Reading materials:

Chapters 4-6 of Marx's *The Civil War in France*:

- 4. “Paris Workers’ Revolution & Thiers’ Reactionary Massacres”
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch04.htm>
- 5. “The Paris Commune”
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm>
- 6. “The Fall of Paris” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch06.htm>

Week 14: Feb 14 - Feb 20

- Old materialism vs. new (practical) materialism; in what sense the “human society” is different than and superior to the “civil society”? (Theses 10 & 9)
- Changing the world; Shouldn't one “know” something before “changing” it? (Thesis 11)

Reading materials:

- “Idealism and Materialism” in Marx's *The German Ideology*:
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>
- “Historical Materialism” in Engels's *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/ch03.htm>

Week 15: Feb 21 - Feb 27

- Review, conclusion, and further readings and reflections.

Reading materials:

- Rosa Luxemburg. 2004. "Social Reform or Revolution," in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*. Edited Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson. (New York: Monthly Review Press): pp. 128-167.