

Contemporary Social and Political Thought

HPRH 2052, R02

Professor Nicholas Tampio Fordham University

Spring 2020

Class: MR 2:30-3:45, Alpha House

Office hours: MR 1-2 pm, Faber 665 Tianjin chemical plant explosion 2015

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Course Description

This is a course that covers some of the principal works in modern and contemporary social and political thought. One of the principle themes of the course is the relationship between the economy, society, and politics. How did capitalism arise in Europe and North America? How does capitalism generate wealth? How does capitalism liberate or exploit people? Should governments or civil society try to combat, regulate, or accommodate capitalism? These are a few of the questions that we will address this semester.

The course constructs a dialogue between perspectives more sympathetic and more critical of capitalism. The more sympathetic perspectives include Adam Smith, the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher who gives a seminal explanation and defense of free markets; Friedrich Hayek, the twentieth century Austrian economist whose *Road to Serfdom* (serialized in Reader's Digest) articulates a powerful critique of socialism and communism; and Jason Brennan, a contemporary professor at Georgetown University who strongly defends libertarian positions.

The critics of capitalism that we will read this semester include Karl Marx, the philosopher of communism; Cedric Robinson, who amends Marxist theory to account for the racial dimensions of capitalism; GE Cohen, a philosopher; and Nancy Fraser, a feminist Marxist. John Maynard Keynes is mostly sympathetic to capitalism but thinks that it needs to be regulated and harnessed to human ends.

Students will also write and present a research paper describing a public policy battle over free markets. Students can write about topics such as health care, education, transportation, national parks, free trade deals, and so forth. The paper should describe the controversy, the side advocating free markets, the side arguing for public control over markets, and the student's own perspective.

Required Texts

- Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Hackett Classics) 9780872202047

- Karl Marx, *Selected Writings* (Hackett Classics) 9780872202184
- Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism, 2nd Edition* (UNC) 9780807848296
- Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago): 9780226320557
- John Maynard Keynes, *The Essential Keynes* (Penguin): 9781846148132
- Jason Brennan, *Why Not Capitalism?* (Routledge): 9780415732970
- Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism* (Verso): 9781844679843

Course Requirements

(1) The midterm is on Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Cedric Robinson. A week beforehand, I will distribute 6 essay questions, and on the day of the exam we will roll a die to determine 2 questions (on different authors). Well-written essays should provide the key dates for the author (birth, death, book publication), their geographical location, and a careful presentation of their ideas that includes precise facts, concepts, and arguments. You may study in groups, but the exam is close-booked. The exam is 1 hour.

(2) The final has the same format as the midterm, and is on Hayek, Keynes, Cohen, Brennan, and Fraser.

(3-4) Students will lead two class discussions. Students should distribute a two sided sheet of paper that includes:

- Biographical data (if you're the first person to present on an author)
- A summary of the argument in your words
- A handful of key quotes that we can read and discuss in class
- Quotes from two academic secondary sources
- Your initial reaction and questions for the class

(5) Students will each write a 3000-word research paper. The students will compare and contrast 2 thinkers in that unit and consider what they would say about a current policy debate. The paper will have four sections: an introduction explaining the policy issue and debate; a section on what one thinker would say about, e.g. plans to institute a national minimum wage; a section on the other thinker would say; and your own perspective. Students should cite the primary sources, a handful of secondary sources on each thinker, and a few newspaper articles on the public policy debate.

(6) Class participation. Students are expected to come to class on time prepared to discuss the readings.

Grade Distribution

Midterm	20
Final exam	20
Leading class discussion 1	10
Leading class discussion 2	10

Research paper	20
Research paper presentation	10
Class participation	10

Class Schedule

1. January 13 – Inequality in America and the rest of the world
 - Thomas Piketty, [Introduction to Capital in the Twenty-First Century](#)
 - John Cassidy, “[Piketty’s Inequality Story in Six Charts](#),” *New Yorker*, March 26, 2014

Adam Smith and Karl Marx on the virtues and vices of capitalism

2. January 16 – Where does the wealth of nations originate?
 - Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book I, Book II
3. January 23 – What explains the different progress of opulence in different nations?
 - Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book III, IV
4. January 27 – What is the legitimate role of government?
 - Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Book IV
5. January 30 – Is freedom possible in capitalism?
 - Marx, “On the Jewish Question”
6. February 3 – How does capitalism exploit workers?
 - Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Chapter 26 of *Capital*
7. February 6 – How do capitalists govern?
 - Marx, *The German Ideology*
8. February 10 – What is the communist alternative to capitalism?
 - *The Communist Manifesto*
9. February 13 – Student presentations on how Marx and Smith would address a current public policy question, e.g. about a national minimum wage.

Cedric Robinson on racial capitalism

10. February 18 – What is racial capitalism?
 - Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Preface, Intro., Chapter 1
11. February 20 – How did capitalism transform Africa?
 - Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Chapters 4, 6
12. February 24 – How can black radicalism transform communism?
 - Robinson, *Black Marxism*, Chapters 9, 12
13. February 27 – Midterm

The Mont Pèlerin Society

14. March 2 - What was the Mont Pèlerin Society? What is the relationship between liberty and property?
 - Ludwig von Mises, [“Liberty and Property”](#)
15. March 5 - What is the importance of the price system?
 - Ludwig von Mises, [“The Middle-of-the-Road Policy Leads to Socialism”](#)
16. March 9 - No class.
17. March 12 - Student presentations on how von Mises and Robinson would address a current public policy question.
18. March 23 - What is Hayek’s critique of collectivism, socialism, communism, a planned economy, etc.?
 - Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, Preface, Forward, Introduction, Chapters 4, 7, 8
19. March 26 - What is Hayek’s vision of a new international order?
 - Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, Chapters 12, 13, 14

Keyne’s Case for Macroeconomics

20. March 30 - Why does Keynes anticipate the end of laissez-faire?
 - Keynes, “The End of *Laissez-faire*”
 - Before break, please confirm with me your research paper topic and send me a bibliography of at least 10 sources on the topic.
21. April 2 - How can the government address unemployment?
 - “An Economic Analysis of Unemployment,” “The New Deal”
22. April 6 - What is after capitalism, according to Keynes?
 - Keynes, “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren”
23. April 16 - Student presentations on how 2 thinkers Hayek and Keynes would address a current public policy question.

Contemporary debates

24. April 20 - What is GA Cohen’s critique of capitalism?
 - Cohen, “Why not Socialism?”
25. April 23 - What is Brennan’s critique of socialism?
 - Brennan, *Why Not Capitalism?*
26. April 27 - What is socialist feminism?
 - Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism*, Prologue, Chapter 2
 - See Nancy Fraser’s articles on Hilary Clinton
27. April 30 - Student Presentations on how 2 thinkers (Cohen, Brennan, Fraser) would address a current public policy question.

Thursday, May 07, 1:30 pm - Final Exam