

**(Un)Common Reading**  
**Capitalism and Its Greatest Critic: On Marx and Marxism (IDH 3931)**  
**Spring 2015**

**Instructor:** Kevin Funk, MA

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**Office hours:** M 3:15-4:15 & W 1:00-2:00, AND 317

**Class schedule/location:** M 7 (1:55-2:45), LIT 0117

**Summary & objectives:**

As Robert Tucker notes in the preface to *The Marx-Engels Reader*, “A knowledge of the writings of Marx and Engels is virtually indispensable to an educated person in our time, whatever his political position or social philosophy.” Yet despite the undisputed and enduring significance of Marx and Marxist/Marxian thought, it is relatively “uncommon” (hence the name of the course) in the United States for spaces to exist in which prolonged engagement with Marxism in its many diverse manifestations is possible. This course attempts to provide one such space.

The aim is not to create or cater to a would-be cell of neo-Marxist acolytes, but to deeply engage with his arguments and ways of thinking, as well as those of his interlocutors. While the first (and longer) portion of this class entails careful reading of some of Marx’s most important texts, we will spend the last classes analyzing contemporary extensions and critical appraisals of this rich body of thought. Throughout, our concern is with linking Marx’s insights with current issues, problems, and debates.

For example, through this course students will:

- 1) Familiarize themselves with Marx’s critiques of the capitalist system, situate them historically, and consider their impact on the trajectory of world history.
- 2) Engage with critiques of Marxist thought and contemplate the extent to which Marx/Marxism are still relevant for understanding contemporary politics and economics in the U.S. and throughout the world.
- 3) Reflect on timeless debates within the humanities and the social sciences concerning how to conduct research and navigate the tension between structure and agency, as well as whether the proper role of intellectuals is to “interpret[] the world” or “to change it.”

**Requirements & guidelines:**

In the spirit of breaking free from class-based structures and hierarchies, there are no prerequisites for this course. Nor must you be a participant in the Honors Program. However, you *are* required to put forth your best efforts as we spend the semester wrestling and attempting to grapple with what are undoubtedly complex, profound, and perhaps even contradictory texts and arguments.

Such engagement will not come easily! As Marx once wrote: “There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining the luminous summits.” Be ready to read, observe, think, and, to a lesser extent, write.

Finally, recall that *knowledge* without *action* (praxis) for Marx is an idle, bourgeois endeavor that serves no legitimate social purpose and reinforces the status quo. Accordingly, you are highly encouraged to consider how the arguments raised in class (from whatever perspective) inform your worldviews and the actions you take in your daily lives. You are participants in the social world: find a way to engage with it.

### Course format:

This is a (relatively) small, discussion-oriented seminar. Your comments and reactions to readings and other materials must, by definition, play a fundamental role in guiding the trajectory of the class. I will impose only a minimum of structure and allow your interventions to take us wherever they may. *Be ready to engage deeply with the readings and to participate.*

### Book & readings:

As befits a course of this nature, the reading load is relatively heavy. I make no apologies for this. I have selected the texts with great care and expect you to read them accordingly. As there are no exams, your ability to read, digest, engage with, and react to the readings will be of great importance both for your grade and our collective experience in this class. There is one required text (see below), which you are required to purchase/rent/somehow gain access to. Other readings will be available via the course site.

### Required text:

Tucker, Robert C., ed. 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader* (second ed.). New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

### Course requirements & grades:

<b>A</b>	93-100	<b>B+</b>	87-89.9	<b>B-</b>	80-82.9	<b>C</b>	73-76.9	<b>D+</b>	67-69.9	<b>D-</b>	60-62.9
<b>A-</b>	90-92.9	<b>B</b>	83-86.9	<b>C+</b>	77-79.9	<b>C-</b>	70-72.9	<b>D</b>	63-66.9	<b>E</b>	<60

### **40 percent: attendance, participation, & engagement**

In addition to attending class, you are expected to make substantive contributions to discussions, particularly in such a way that shows you have grappled with course materials. As part of this grade, you are required to see me during office hours at least once. Also included in this grade is a brief “ethnographic” experience to be completed at the end of the semester (details forthcoming).

### **20 percent: leadership of class discussion**

You will be responsible for leading a class discussion once during the semester (dates to be chosen on the first day of class). On this day, you will present a brief overview of the material, analyze the assigned reading and its broader importance, and raise questions for our collective consideration. In total, this should take approximately 15 minutes. During the rest of the class, we will have an open discussion. Again, we will talk about the specific requirements for this assignment during class. Depending on the number of students enrolled in the course, we may have more than one discussion leader per day.

### **40 percent: reflection papers**

You will write two short papers: one after the section on Marx’s writings, and the other at the end of the class. These papers are designed to gauge whether you have been following along and contemplating the issues under consideration. Respectively, they are worth 15 and 25 percent of your final grade. I will distribute prompts, as well as provide additional information, as the relevant dates draw near. The

absolute maximum is 500 words for the first paper and 1000 words for the second. To receive full credit, they *must be received by midnight* on the specified dates.

Paper #	Date of posting of question(s)	Due date
1	3/23	3/28
2	4/20	4/25

#### Course policies:

- All assignments must be turned in via the course website (<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>).
- Late submissions will be penalized at a rate of 10 percent (e.g. from 95 to 85) every 12 hours.
- You can format assignments as you wish so long as the output is easy on my eyes.
- You may use your preferred citation style, provided it is applied consistently.
- In all of your writing assignments, style, syntax, grammar, etc. all count.
- Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.
- Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

#### University policies:

##### *Academic honesty*

Violations of the Student Honor Code (including, but not limited to, copying and plagiarizing) will be reported to the Dean of Students Office for consideration of disciplinary action. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.

##### *Counseling and wellness*

A variety of counseling, mental health and psychiatric services are available through the Counseling and Wellness Center, whose goal is to help students be maximally effective in their academic pursuits by reducing or eliminating emotional, psychological, and interpersonal problems that interfere with academic functioning. For more information, call 392-1575 or visit <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>.

##### *Students with disabilities*

The University of Florida is committed to providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students requesting accommodations should register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)) as soon as possible by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students should present me with their accommodation letter.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

#### *Availability of readings:*

\*- from Tucker book

All other readings are either available on the course site (<https://lss.at.ufl.edu/>) or via the below links.

- 1/12 Introduction, context, & biography  
\*Tucker. "Introduction." Pp. xix-xxxviii.  
\*Engels. "Working-Class Manchester." Pp. 579-585.  
\*Marx. "The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850." Pp. 586-593.  
\*Marx. "For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing." Pp. 12-15.
- 1/19 **NO CLASS: Martin Luther King Day**  
Uhuru Sekou. "The radical gospel of Martin Luther King." <http://alj.am/1mvEE8R>.
- 1/26 Marx the humanist (was Marx a "Marxist"?)  
\*Marx. "On the Jewish Question." Pp. 26-52.  
Avineri. "Marx and Jewish Emancipation." Pp. 445-450.
- 2/2 "Marxism's" genesis  
\*Marx. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." Pp. 66-105.  
Czank. "On the Origin of Species-Being: Marx Redefined." Pp. 316-323.
- 2/9 The materialist conception of history  
\*Marx. "Theses on Feuerbach." Pp. 143-145.  
\*Marx. "The German Ideology: Part I." Pp. 146-200.
- 2/16 Marx's magnum opus  
\*Marx. "Capital, Volume One." Pp. 302-364.
- 2/23 Emancipation  
\*Marx & Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party." Pp. 469-500.  
\*Marx. "Speech at the Anniversary of the *People's Paper*." Pp. 577-578.
- 3/2 **NO CLASS: Spring Break**  
*The Onion*. "Marxist Student Has Capitalist Parents." <http://goo.gl/fM6o8E>.
- 3/9 Democracy & bourgeois democracy  
\*Marx & Engels. "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League." Pp. 501-511.  
\*Marx. "Against Personality Cults." P. 521.  
\*Marx. "Critique of the Gotha Program." Pp. 525-541.  
Bronner. "The Democratic Legacy of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels." Pp. 1-31.
- 3/16 Marxism, anarchism, & the state: after the revolution  
\*Marx. "After the Revolution: Marx Debates Bakunin." Pp. 542-548.  
\*Engels. "Versus the Anarchists." Pp. 728-729.  
Bakunin. "Critique of the Marxist Theory of the State" (only this section).  
<http://goo.gl/uCjSQv>.  
Goldman. "Anarchism: What It Really Stands for." <http://goo.gl/L5qOmd>.
- 3/23 Marx & imperialism/colonialism/modernization  
Avineri. "Introduction." Pp. 1-31.  
\*Marx. "On Imperialism in India." Pp. 653-664.

- 3/28      *Paper due*
- 3/30      Marx travels  
            Lenin. "The Scope of Organizational Work." Pp. 150-156.  
            Mariátegui. "The Land Problem" & "Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party." Pp. 69-74; 237-242.  
            Cabral. "Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea." <http://goo.gl/ddXYxX>.  
            Allende. "Speech to the United Nations." <http://goo.gl/U4wkCl>.
- 4/6        Culture & the superstructure  
            Jones. *Antonio Gramsci*. Pp. 1-10; 27-30; 41-52.  
            Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Pp. 3-14; 407-409.
- 4/13      Postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism & the "politics of difference"  
            Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition*. Pp. xxiii-xxv.  
            Callinicos. *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*. Pp. 1-8.  
            Schwartz. "A Peculiar Blind Spot." Pp. 389-402.  
            Chibber. "How Does the Subaltern Speak?" <http://goo.gl/AkHcVG>.
- 4/20      And now: what is to be done?  
            Eagleton. *Why Marx Was Right*. Pp. 1-11.  
            Marable. "The Crisis of the Black Working Class." Pp. 23-51.  
            Deresiewicz. "Faulty Towers: The Crisis in Higher Education." <http://goo.gl/0zJdSb>.  
            **DISCUSSION: ethnographic project**
- 4/25      *Final paper due*