

/ Instructor: / Office hours: TBA

“In a depression, assets return to their rightful owners.”
- Andrew Mellon, early 20th century financier

This course starts from the premise that economy, politics, subjectivity, affect are indissociable except in thought, and that, while abstraction is useful for thought, engagement with historical phenomena and their context are crucial for analysis. “Social theory” is a broad, inclusive framework useful in linking the abstract and the contextual. Major contributions that bring together ideas originally developed in philosophy, political economy, political or cultural theory, social science, humanistic inquiry, and so on, are retrospectively designated social theory.

We will develop facility with social-theoretic concepts and categories that are useful in analyzing historically specific instances or constellations of “the political” and “the subjective” in relation to “the economic” (also in historically specific terms). These tools provide critical purchase on modes of domination, extraction, and subjectification that underpin, exemplify, or share features with the rule of austerity. Course authors deal with specificities of capital, class, governmentality, race, gender, affect, imperialism, law, technology, cultivating our ability to study the economic in the political, in the subjective. Our aim is not to determine whether course authors’ arguments are “correct” but to inhabit their arguments, work with them, become skilled with the authors’ categories and concepts, to understand their ideas in relation to those of other course authors, and to allow them to help us figure out and test our own approaches.

Social theory generates questions; it supports the development of contextual (including historical) knowledge necessary to the dissection of specific cases, helps us to clarify what may be new or distinctive about the aspects of social life we’re interested in. It offers a *lingua franca* for learning and communicating across disciplinary lines.

Course requirements: Obtain all required books in hard copy. Print out readings provided online. Before each class, read and re-read all of the assigned readings, making thorough notes. Read sympathetically, to inhabit the authors’ perspectives, if only temporarily. Budget your reading time carefully: there is a lot of reading; the goal is to apprehend core arguments while comprehending how empirical and conceptual details cohere in relation to, and how they are organized to support, these arguments. Do all the written assignments, thoughtfully participate in every class meeting, keeping focus on the texts and listening carefully to others. Turn off all electronic devices, including computers. Attendance is mandatory.

Course materials: We will read the following books which should be in stock at the bookstore and on reserve. It is imperative that students obtain the correct edition. (Other readings will be available online.) They are listed in the order in which they appear in the schedule.

Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt*

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen, *The Imperial Mode of Living*

Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*

Olufemi Taiwo, *Elite Capture*

Please DO NOT write in reserve copies of course texts.

Evaluation

Very short essay	10% (2-3 pages) due September 15
Medium essay	20% (5-7 pages) due October 6
Final essay	40% (10-14 pages) due December 15
Participation	15%
Conference presentation	15% (December 8)

Very short essay: In “The Task of Critical Theory Today,” Moishe Postone writes that “the historical dynamic of capitalism ceaselessly generates what is ‘new’ while regenerating what is the ‘same’.” Explain what Postone means by this, and develop your explanation with reference either to Wood’s “Separation” or Marx’s “Jewish Question.” Choose clear, concrete examples from the texts on which to base your discussion. Details TBA.

Medium essay: Choose two course readings encountered so far and put them in dialogue around a theme or issue or problem or question that a) they both address (explicitly or implicitly) and b) interests you. If the convergence is implicit then clear demonstration is crucial. Details TBA.

Final essay and conference paper/presentation: Drawing on course readings and in consultation with the instructor, identify an issue, construct a framework, and develop a comparison and/or analysis, to be presented in class December 8. Students will present on their project for ten minutes and their will be five minutes for discussion of each presentation. It is expected that this paper/presentation will be the basis for the final essay. Details TBA.

Participation: Participation will be assessed in terms of having read and absorbed the text, participating in and leading small group discussion, and making appropriate contributions to conversation. “Appropriateness,” at a minimum, requires staying focused on the text(s), identifying page numbers and lines when contributing to the discussion, and not pontificating if you haven’t done the reading. Each student will be expected to lead their small group in discussion and report back to the class at least twice throughout the semester, depending on class size. Class attendance is mandatory. Bring to class, in addition to the readings for each week, the readings for the previous week.

Support services: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Statement of Recognition: “Western University is situated on the traditional land of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaune, Lenape and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. In close proximity to Western, there are 3 local First Nations communities: the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region of southwestern Ontario, there are 9 First Nations and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western recognizes the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America) to the development of Canada.”

Schedule of topics and readings:

1. September 8: Intro to course
 - Moishe Postone, “The Task of Critical Theory Today: Rethinking Capitalism and its Futures”
 2. September 15: The economic and the political
 - Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”
 - Ellen Meiksins Wood, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism”
 - Moishe Postone, excerpts from “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to ‘Holocaust’”
 3. September 22: Governing by Debt I
 - Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt* (pp. 7-130)
 - Rob Aitken, “‘All Data is Credit Data’: Constituting the Unbanked”
 - *Recommended reading*: Cockburn, “Varieties of economic dependence”
 4. September 29: Governing by Debt II
 - Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt* (pp. 131-255);
 - *Recommended reading*: Dean, “Communism or Neo-Feudalism?”
 5. October 6: Asceticism, austerity, *ressentiment* I
 - Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Introduction and Essay 1)
 6. October 13: Asceticism, austerity, *ressentiment* II*
 - Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Essays 2 & 3)
 7. October 20: Asceticism, austerity, and the iron cage
 - Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
 8. October 27: Contextual social theory
 - Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter*
 - Wendy Brown, “Rights and Losses”
 - Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments”
- [reading week]
9. November 10: Elite capture / identity politics*
 - Olufemi Taiwo, *Elite Capture*
 - Eva Von Redecker, “Ownership’s Shadow: Neoauthoritarianism as Defense of Phantom Possession”
 10. November 17: The Imperial Mode of Living
 - Ulrich Brand & Markus Wissen *The Imperial Mode of Living: Everyday Life and the Ecological Crisis of Capitalism*
 - Eli Friedman, “Just-in-Time Urbanization? Managing Migration, Citizenship, and Schooling in the Chinese City”

11. November 24: Machine life

- Natasha Dow Schull, *Addiction By Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* (excerpts)
- Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Societies of Control”

12. December 1: Cruel Optimism

- Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (excerpts)
 - Recommended reading: Barrett, *How Emotions are Made* (excerpts)

13. December 8: Conference day

“The Eurasian countries will still visit Europe as tourists, as Americans like to visit England as a kind of theme park of post-feudal gentry, the posting of the palace guards and other quaint memories of the days of knights and dragons. European countries will look more like that of Jamaica and the Caribbean, with hotels and hospitality becoming the main growth sectors, with Frenchmen and German waiters dressed in their quaint quasi-Hollywood costumes. Museums will do a thriving business as Europe itself turns into a kind of museum of post-industrialism.”

<https://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2022/12/michael-hudson-discusses-the-future-of-europe-and-global-restructuring.html>

Further Reading

Blyth, *Austerity*

Castel, *From Manual Workers to Wage Laborers*

Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*

Heinrich, *Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx’s Capital*

Hudson, *The Destiny of Civilization*

Karatani, *The Structure of World History*

Lazzarato, *Making of Indebted Man*

Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*

Losurdo, *Liberalism, A Counter-History*

Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*

Marx, *Capital*

Mattei, *The Capital Order*

Menke, *Critique of Rights*

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*

Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*

Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*

Robin, *The Reactionary Mind*

Santner, *The Weight of All Flesh*

Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction*

Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*

Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*