

## **Philosophy Proseminar: Marx and the Alienation Concept**

### **Course Information:**

Course: PHIL 4198, Section 10  
Semester: Fall 2015  
Time: M 11:10am - 1pm  
Location: Rome B103

### **Instructor:**

Name: Professor Vanessa Wills  
Campus Address: Phillips 523  
Phone: 202-994-6911  
E-mail: [vcwills@gwu.edu](mailto:vcwills@gwu.edu)  
Office Hours: MW 1:30pm-2:30pm, or by appointment

### **Course Description:**

In "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," Marx identifies four chief aspects of alienation under capitalism. These are: the worker's loss of ownership in her own products; the debasing and stultifying character of wage-labor itself; the inability of human beings to recognize and to treat one another as human and therefore as of the same kind, with interests in common; the individual human being's separation from her own nature as a member of the human species. Particularly in his earlier writings before *The Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx regularly characterizes communism as "the return of man to himself"--the abolition of alienation in each of its forms.

In this course, we will investigate the contours of the "alienation" concept in Marx's thought. We will consider its meaning and its justificatory role in Marx's critiques of class society and his arguments for communism. We will investigate the relationship between Marx's views on alienation and his views about human nature. We will also engage the question of whether Marx abandoned the alienation concept in his "mature" work, and of the potential theoretical implications of such abandonment.

In addition to reading Marx and his collaborator, Engels, we will read several of those with whom Marx entered into conversation about the alienation concept, particularly Hegel, Feuerbach, and Stirner, and we will read relevant secondary literature.

Course Prerequisites:

Course intended for junior and senior PHIL majors only.

**Texts:**

Author: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels  
Editor: Phil Gasper  
Title: *The Communist Manifesto: A Road Map to History's Most Important Political Document*  
Publisher: Haymarket Books  
ISBN-13: 9781931859257

Author: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels  
Editor: Robert C. Tucker  
Title: *The Marx-Engels Reader (Second Edition)*  
Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company  
ISBN-13: 978-0393090406

Author: Sean Sayers  
Title: *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*  
Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan  
ISBN 13: 9781137379856

Author: Bertell Ollman  
Title: *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society*  
Publisher: Cambridge University Press  
ISBN-13: 978-0521290838

### **Learning Outcomes:**

As a result of completing this course, students will be able to:

1. Conduct focused, in-depth study of an individual philosopher's body of work, using skills developed in the study of Marx that can be applied to the study of other philosophical thinkers.
2. Critically evaluate complex philosophical texts.
3. Apply a broader historical context for their evaluation of other past and contemporary positions in moral, social, and political philosophy.
4. Understand, evaluate, and participate in scholarly debates regarding the interpretation of major texts in the history of philosophy.
5. Deliver scholarly presentations to an audience of peers.
6. Explain the connections between philosophical debates about human nature and debates in moral, social, and political philosophy.
7. Independently initiate, plan, and execute a research project culminating in a well-organized, well-argued research paper that adheres to discipline-appropriate conventions.

### **Grading**

Weekly Response Papers: 10%  
Midterm Take-Home Exam: 20%

Class Presentation (1): 10%  
Class Presentation (2): 10%  
Class Participation: 10%  
Final Research Paper: 40%

**Late work:** With the exception of weekly response papers, you should assume that I will refuse to accept your late work, that I will refuse to grade it, and that it will not in any way count towards the requirements of this course. (Policies regarding students with documented disabilities are distinct from those covering late work, and are detailed below in the section titled, “Support for Students Outside the Classroom.”)

**Attendance:**

- It is expected that students will attend each meeting of this course, prepared and on time. Students are responsible for all material presented in class, which will at times go well beyond the material presented in the readings.
- **Class participation** is a core component of this course. You do not have to have something brilliant to impart to the room in order to participate. If there is a word you don't understand, an argument you don't quite follow, or a historical reference that you don't “get”, then ask. You will be participating and contributing to the classroom environment when you do so.
- Students and faculty come to the classroom with a range of backgrounds, beliefs, and perspectives. We must all show respect for one another and for everyone's opinions. By the same token, we must each be willing to be challenged, to be pressed for reasons that support our opinions, and to question. In this class, we will engage in what Karl Marx called “the ruthless criticism of all that exists,” meaning here that no position is to be accepted without questioning.
- Students may not pack up to leave the room until the class's posted end-time. This is to minimize noise and disruption during the allotted class time.
- If you know that you must leave class early, please advise the professor prior to the start of class on the day in question and sit close to the door so as to minimize disruptions as you leave the room.

**Laptop Policy:**

Students may not use laptops, iPads, or any other electronic devices in the classroom. All cell phones must be powered off during class time. Students who require such electronic devices in order for reasonable accommodation to be made should contact Disability Support Services as detailed below.

**Academic Integrity:**

I personally support the GW Code of Academic Integrity. It states: “Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication

of information.” For the remainder of the code, see: <http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity> .

*The Code of Academic Integrity applies to **all work***, including Weekly Response Papers and all portions of essay assignments, **including** Paper Proposals, Outlines, and Smooth Drafts. You must cite all work appropriately. There are no exceptions.

### **Support for Students Outside the Classroom:**

#### *Disability Support Services (DSS)*

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/>

*University Counseling Center (UCC) 202-994-5300*

<http://counselingcenter.gwu.edu/>

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career and study skills problems. Services for students include:

- crisis and emergency mental health consultations
- confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals

### **Security:**

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

### **Class Schedule**

Monday, August 31: Introductory Meeting

Monday, September 7: Labor Day weekend. All GWU classes are cancelled.

Monday, September 14: Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Haymarket Books edition)  
Hegel, “Lordship and Bondage”  
(<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/phba.htm>)

Monday, September 21: Marx, “Estranged Labour” (pp. 70-81 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)  
Marx, “Private Property and Communism” (pp. 81-93 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)  
Marx, “The Meaning of Human Requirements” (pp. 93-101 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Monday, September 28: Marx, "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society" (pp. 101-105 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Marx, "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole" (pp. 106-125 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Marx, "Alienation and Social Classes" (pp. 133-135 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Harris, "Alienation of the Capitalist Class: Toward a More Careful Reading of Marx" (available on Blackboard)

Monday, October 5: Feuerbach, Introduction to *The Essence of Christianity*

([https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec01\\_1.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec01_1.htm) and

[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec01\\_2.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec01_2.htm))

Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (pp. 143-145 in *Marx-Engels Reader*)

Monday, October 12: Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own* (selections available on Blackboard)

Monday, October 19: Marx, Part One of *The German Ideology* (pp. 147-200)

Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism in *For Marx*

([http://home.comcast.net/~platypus1848/althusser\\_marxismhumanism1965.pdf](http://home.comcast.net/~platypus1848/althusser_marxismhumanism1965.pdf))

Monday, October 26: Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital" (pp. 203-217)

Mills, "Materializing Race"

**Friday, October 30: Take-home Midterm Exam is due.**

Monday, November 2: Ollman, Part Two of *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society*

Monday, November 9: Ollman, Part Three of *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society*

Monday, November 16: Gimenez, "Connecting Marx and Feminism in the Era of Globalization: A Preliminary Investigation" (available on Blackboard)

Kain, "Marx, Housework, and Alienation" (available on Blackboard)

**FRIDAY NOVEMBER 20: Charles Mills visits the GWU Philosophy Department.**

Monday, November 23: Sayers, Chapters 1-5 in *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*

Monday, November 29: Sayers, Chapters 6-9 in *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*

Monday, December 7: Meszaros, “Conceptual Structure of Marx's Theory of Alienation” in  
*Marx's Theory of Alienation*  
(<https://www.marxists.org/archive/meszaros/works/alien/meszaros3.htm>)

**Monday, December 14: Final Paper due.**