

Course Title: Capital & Ressentiment: Intersections of Marx and Nietzsche

Course Description

Ressentiment can be understood as a basic structural and stabilizing affect of capitalism

Joseph Vogl, *Capital and Ressentiment* (2022): 125

Vogl's *Capital and Ressentiment: A Brief Theory of the Present* (2022) is one of several recent works aimed at understanding contemporary political economy and affect that explicitly combine analyses originally propounded by Marx and Nietzsche. At least since *Anti-Oedipus*, but especially since Wendy Brown's *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1995), social theorists have been referring these thinkers' critiques of modernity to one another, turning them in new directions, putting them into closer (if not necessarily more consonant) dialogue. They help us ask: how are capital's extractive social relations and the sovereign individuals' *ressentiment* shaping and reflecting practice and affect in new contexts (e.g., big tech and surveillance / platform / financial capitalism, (de)globalization, gig labor, identity wars, political polarization, expanding creditor-debtor relations, nationalist / nativist violence and rhetoric, explosively proliferating billionaires, liberal democracy's increasingly visible collapse, new developments in bio-, psycho-, necro- and other forms of politics, etc.)?

This course's premise is that certain of Marx's and Nietzsche's insights jointly provide distinctive analytic approaches to the Anglo-European world's present moment. The course will begin with works by Marx and Nietzsche that feature centrally in current critiques. The contemporary thinkers encountered in this course suggest and model how, in dialogue with one another, Marx's and Nietzsche's analyses of nineteenth-century transformations might sensitize us to social and cultural phenomena unfolding at the threshold of (what some observers are calling) *end-stage capitalism* or *technofeudalism*. (How) do we face an anticipated *prolonged period of social entropy* (or at least one of heightened *expulsions*), a projected *interregnum*, continually demanding *dehabituation* and *rehabilitation*?

This class has three axes: 1) cultivating facility with key features of Marx's and Nietzsche's critiques by engaging selected original works as well as recent scholarship; 2) analyzing selected contemporary works and assessing how they account for Marx's and Nietzsche's well-known prejudices and blind spots (in addition to their *prima facie* oppositions); and 3) practicing, in seminar discussion and written work, dissection of course readings and grounded contextualization of contemporary examples of capital's social form and its "stabilizing and structural affect."

Syllabus, including theorists or texts to be studied

Assignments will include 2 short papers responding to instructor prompts early in the semester, one longer term paper, leadership of in-class discussion groups, and an end-of-term “conference presentation” on the term paper topic. Topic of term papers to be determined in consultation with instructor.

Marx & Nietzsche texts will include:

Marx, “The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret” (*Capital* v. I) and “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (and possibly excerpts of other works)

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality* (and possibly excerpts of other works)

Other readings will be drawn from a pool including:

Arendt, Hannah: “Tradition and the Modern Age” (from *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*)

Brown, Wendy. *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Anti-Democratic Politics in the West; Politics out of History* (selections)

Chambers, Samuel. “What Kind of Theory is the Labor Theory of Value? Marx as Genealogist” *International Origins of Social and Political Theory: Political Power and Social Theory*, v. 32 (2017)

Connolly, William. *Political Theory & Modernity* (selections)

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (selections)

Fraser, Nancy. *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*

Goodrich, Peter and Mariana Valverde (eds). *Nietzsche and Legal Theory: Half-Written Laws* (selections)

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (selections)

Karatani, Kojin. *Marx: Towards the Centre of Possibility; The Structure of World History: From Modes of Production to Modes of Control* (selections)

Knafo, Samuel. “Political Marxism and Value Theory: Bridging the Gap between Theory and History” *Historical Materialism* v. 15 (2007)

Lavin, Chad. “Making Marx Effective: Postliberal Agency in the Brumaire” (from Lavin’s *The Politics of Responsibility*)

Lazzarato, Maurizio. *Signs and Machines* (selections)

Miner, Robert. “Nietzsche as Critic and Proponent of Socialism: A Reappraisal Based on *Human, All Too Human*” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* v. 51 (2020)

Pateman, Carole. *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory* (selections)

Rukgaber, Matthew. “The ‘Sovereign Individual’ and the ‘Ascetic Ideal’: On a Perennial Misreading of the Second Essay of Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality*” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* v. 43

Santner, Eric. *The Weight of All Flesh: On the Subject-matter of Political Economy*

Sassen, Saskia. *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (excerpts)

Valverde, Mariana. *Chronotopes of Law: Jurisdiction, Scale and Governance* (selections)

Vogl, Joseph. *Capital and Ressentiment* (selections)

Weeks, Kathi. *Constituting Feminist Subjects* (selections)

Instructor’s name & home department: Matt Stahl, FIMS