

Macalester College

Autumn, 2021

Capitalism and World (Dis) Order

(Intl 489– 01)

Monday 7:00 pm -10:00pm

Carnegie Hall (404)

Professor: Dr. *Ahmed I. Samatar*

Office Hours: **Tuesday/Thursday 3:15pm - 4:30pm** (or by appointment).

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History is a stage where forces which are within human control contend and cooperate with forces which are not.

--- R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1926.

At such moments in history when the writing on the wall becomes too frightening, most people flee to the reassurance of day-to-day life with its unchanging pressing demands.

---- Hanna Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 1975

No social phenomenon, such as the institution of property, and no mental category, such as experience, could be properly understood except by grasping the dialectics of its development, the contestation and incorporation that it underwent over time.

--- Sheldon Wolin (recalling Hegel and Marx), *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds*, 2001

I. Course Description.

A. Purpose.

The age of globalization (and this pandemic is another vivid and immediate manifestation) presents us with a dizzying variety of inter-connected and contradictory phenomena. Yet, ‘in the flood of the present,’ it is a major challenge to distinguish what is durable, if not controlling, and at the heart of our times from what is ephemeral and lies at the margins. This is one of the basic curiosities that animate this seminar. In this context, then, our explorations will revolve around the concept of *capitalism* – one of resilient heuristic value.

Capitalism, for many, is synonymous with the “natural” exchange of goods and services through “the free market.” This interpretation conveys important assumptions. However, a fuller examination might show that capitalism is neither natural and free, nor limited to economic (though dominant) transactions. Capitalism more precisely, as we have learned from Immanuel Wallerstein, is at once a historical social system and a way of being which now penetrates all forms of life: cultural, material, ecological, civic, and more. This senior seminar, then, aims to identify the origins of the system, delineate the main

contours of its evolution, and bring out some of the main features of its contemporary status. Thinkers such as Smith, Marx, and Braudel will loom, but the immediate readings range from recent work by Friedman, Anievas and Nisancioglu, and Dyer-Witheford.

The course concludes, except for those working on an honors thesis, with a substantial comparative and meditative paper on the theme of the course. *The paper will have TWO relatively EQUAL components:*

- *Part one will focus on the three readings. This comparative effort will discuss each volume. Here you will discern the main argument of each, identify the main concepts (no more than three) and their relationship to each other, and underscore the central conclusions of each volume.*
- *Part two will be an opportunity for you to articulate your own thinking on the subject matter of the course and in what ways the proceedings of the seminar have advanced your understanding of the theme.*

B. Strategy.

The material for the seminar is organized into the following segments:

1. Syllabus Review, Distribution of Assignments.
2. Capitalism and World Order: Introductory Lectures.
3. Religion and Rise of Capitalism in Europe/USA.
4. Geopolitics, Role of the Rest, and the Great Divergence.
5. Digital Capitalism, the Vortex, and Cyber- Proletariat.
6. Final Project.

A note of caution: While the readings and the general orientation of the seminar are hoped to be broad and accessible to students from different disciplinary backgrounds, the materials may not meet the optimum test of comprehensiveness on such a vast theme, called forth by transdisciplinarity. Despite this and other shortcomings, however, members of the seminar are strongly urged **not** to hesitate to bring their intellectual proclivities and wares to the concerns of the semester. In the end, we will strive toward **integrative thinking** — that is, a strategy of keeping the particulars and the whole together through a disciplined dialectical oscillation between theoretical abstraction and historical concreteness.

*Code of the Semester: Be safe, wakeful, share your thoughts, be respectful of the mind, and stay **on top** of all assignments.*

II. Texts (available at Bookstore).

- Anievas, Alexander and Nisancioglu, Kerem. *How The West Came to Rule: The*

- Geopolitics of Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press, 2015.
- Dyer-Witheford, Nick. *Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex*, London: Pluto Press, 2015.
 - Friedman, Benjamin. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: Knopf, 2021.

III. Course Format and Requirements.

We meet on Monday nights (7:00 pm-10:00 pm). The mainstays of the seminar are: introductory lectures, dense readings, **brief student** reports on assigned readings, collective discussions, a mid-term (in class) examination, and a final comparative-cum-meditative essay (for those who are not working on an honors thesis).

A. Format.

Every member will be expected to have completed the assigned readings in time. However, *two* students (except on a few occasions) will be assigned to lead each reading session by doing the following:

1. Identify the principal argument(s) and, when possible, the strategy used to deliver the argument(s);
2. Isolate 3–4 concepts that you deem most *seminal* in the author's work, *explain* their importance and their relationship to each other;
3. Relate the gist of the material to the preceding readings;
4. Articulate your reactions (be *specific* as well as brief); and
5. Set **TWO** questions for general discussion.

*** Discussion leaders should prepare a typed outline (no more than two pages) that will be distributed to *all* at the beginning of the seminar. Each presentation must **not exceed TWENTY FIVE minutes**.

Full participation by EVERYONE in the life of the seminar is a supreme requirement.

B. Requirements:

1. Attendance: every unexcused absence will result in the **deduction** of THREE points from the final score.
2. Continuous class participation/oral presentations (25 points).

3. Midterm examination (in class) on the major concepts of the course (25 points).
4. Final Project (6000-7000 words, *excluding* notes and bibliography, 50 points):
 - (a) Set the context.
 - (b) Bring forth the organizational structure of your paper.
 - (c) Identify briefly the central argument of each of three volumes and the MAIN concepts that drive or sustain each text.
 - (d) Articulate any *similarities and differences* in the fundamental insights of each volume, and with regard to the theme of the seminar.

--- PART TWO ---

 - (e) Express your thinking on the theme of the course.
 - (f) Integrate the lectures (and other relevant literature which you already know of) where appropriate.
 - (g) Compose a fitting title page for the paper.

***** DUE DECEMBER 10 (Friday), no later than 3:00 pm, at my mailbox by my office door.**

Reminder and Caution: There is NO final examination for this seminar. The final paper must be double-spaced, with the pages numbered.

NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

IV. GRADING

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|----------|---|----|
| 100 – 95 | = | A |
| 94 – 90 | = | A- |
| 89 – 85 | = | B+ |
| 84 – 80 | = | B |
| 79 – 75 | = | B- |
| 74 – 70 | = | C+ |
| 69 – 65 | = | C |
| 64 – 60 | = | C- |
| 59 – 55 | = | D |

V. Course Schedule

A. Introduction (Sept. 13):

1. Review of seminar philosophy and syllabus.

2. Distribution of Assignments.
3. Clearing Preliminaries:
 - (a) What is a Paradigm?
 - (b) What is Capitalism?
 - (c) What is World Order?
 - (d) How Does One Approach the Phenomena?

*** Start Reading Friedman, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

B. *The Rise of Capitalism in Europe and USA* (Sept. 20):

1. Religion, Economic Thinking, and Politics.
2. Adam Smith's Influence and the Competitive Market

Required Reading: Friedman, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* pp.1X-109.

Discussants: _____

C. *Reformation and Predestination* (Sept. 27):

1. Luther's Reform.
2. Calvin and the Second Reformation
3. Child-bearing, work, and Death.
4. Smith and Human Progress.

**Required Reading: Friedman, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*
pp. 109-227.**

Discussants: _____

E. *The Birth of Political Economy* (Oct. 4):

1. Smith and the USA.
2. Slavery.
3. Economic and Social Conditions.

Required Reading: Friedman, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. pp. 228-333

Discussants: _____

F. *Ideological Struggles* (Oct. 11):

1. Premillennialists.
2. Liberals Theology.
3. Crises and contestation.
4. Conservative Triumph.

Required Reading: Friedman, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, pp. 334-415.

Discussants: _____

G. *Counter Paradigm* (Oct.18):

1. Eurocentrism.
2. The Transition Debate.
3. Origins and the Theory of Combined and Uneven Development.
4. Nomadic Mode/Black Death.

Required Reading: Anievas and Nisancioglu, *How the West Came to Rule*. pp. 1-90.

Discussants: _____

G. *Counter-Thrust Continued* (Oct.25):

- 1.The Ottoman-Habsburg Competition.
2. Pre-capitalism/Tributary Order.
3. Bourgeois Revolutions.
4. Slavery and the Atlantic.
5. Subsumption of Labour.

Required Reading: Anievas and Nisancioglu, *How the West Came to Rule*. pp. 91-214.

Discussants: _____

H. *Counter-Thrust Continued* (Nov. 1):

1. The Dutch and the Colonization of Southeast Asia.
2. Primitive Accumulation.
3. Antediluvian Capital.
4. The Rise of the West and the “Privilege of Backwardness.”
5. “Penalties of Progress.”
6. Revising Uneven Development.

Required Reading: Anievas and Nisancioglu, *How Europe Came to Rule*. pp. 215-283.

Discussants: _____

I. *Digital Capitalism* (Nov. 8):

1. Cybernetic Capitalism.
2. Class and Cybernetic Proletariat.
3. Vortex.
4. Circulation.

Required Reading: Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, pp. 1-101.

Discussants: _____

J. *Digital Capitalism, Cont'd* (Nov. 15):

1. Mobile Phone.
2. Surplus humanity.
3. Cyber communism and Human Front

Required Reading: Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, PP. 102-205.

Discussants: _____

K. MIDTERM EXAMINATION (NOV. 22)

L. WORK ON FINAL PAPER (NOV. 23—DEC. 10).

**M. FINAL PAPER DUE: DECEMBER 10 (FRIDAY), 3:00 PM.
PLEASE LEAVE IT ON MY MAILBOX BY THE DOOR OF MY
OFFICE.**