



# CAPITALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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**Cover art:** Adolph Menzel, "Steel Rolling Mill (Modern Cyclopes)" (*Eisenwalzwerk*), 1875.

## The Main Idea

What is capitalism, and why do so many people complain about it? In this course we will explore the ideas, questions, and criticisms surrounding the system known as "capitalism." The first half will be spent examining classic statements by Smith, Marx, Polanyi, Schumpeter, and Hayek. We will then look at some of the challenges capitalism is facing in the 21st century in relation to growth, equality, climate change, and democracy. Along the way, we will ask: How should capitalist markets be regulated, if at all? Does capitalism promote freedom, or are capitalism and freedom at odds with each other? Is capitalism sustainable in the long term, or will we need to think about alternatives? If so, what?

## Format of the course

This proseminar will be conducted as an asynchronous online course, and all readings, lectures, discussion spaces, assignments, and other learning materials will be available on Moodle: <https://moodle.studiumdigitale.uni-frankfurt.de/moodle/course/view.php?id=1090>.

- All required texts ("primary readings") for the course will be available at the start of the semester, as well a number of additional readings ("secondary readings") that you may find useful.
- In addition to the readings, you will find variety of learning materials to guide you through them. These will typically include some form of recorded lecture, and may also include webpages, handouts, or links. These will be made available by the beginning of each week.
- Our primary medium for discussing the materials will be via the chat forums. Each week will have a dedicated discussion thread, and 2 to 4 students will act as "discussion leaders" for that week's primary readings.
- **NOTE: You are required to log onto the Moodle on a regular basis. 14 days of inactivity will result in unenrollment (It may be possible to gain readmission with permission from the instructor).**

## Overview of requirements

	Teilnahmeschein	Leistungsschein
Weekly primary readings	required	required
Act once as forum "discussion leader"	required	required
Regular participation in online forum	choice between a) regular participation in online forum or b) write 1250 to 1750-word response to one exam question	recommended
Midterm exam		write 1250 to 1750-word response to one question
Final exam		write 2700 to 3300-word response to one question

Both students pursuing a **Teilnahmeschein** and students pursuing a **Leistungsschein** are expected to:

- Keep pace with the weekly primary readings;
- Participate regularly in online forum discussions;
- Play role of "discussion leader" (along with a few other classmates) in the online forum for at least one week's primary reading.

The course will feature a short mid-term exam and a final exam. Each exam will consist of a list of essay questions that students will complete at home.

For those pursuing a **Teilnahmeschein**:

- Participating regularly and thoughtfully in the online forums will be sufficient for credit in the course (this is preferred).
- For those to do not participate regularly for whatever reason, you may alternatively write one essay of 1250 to 1750 words (~ 4–6 pages, double-spaced) in response to one question in **either** the mid-term **or** the final exam, using the readings from the course.

For those pursuing a **Leistungsschein**:

- You are required to take both the mid-term and the final exam.
- For the mid-term exam, students must write an essay of 1250 to 1750 words (~ 4–6 pages, double-spaced) in response to one question, using the readings from the course.
- For the final exam, students must write one essay of 2700 to 3300 words (~ 9–11 pages, double-spaced) in response to one question, drawing upon the readings from the course and independent research.
- Your final grade will be based on your performance as "discussion leader" and your exam grades, with extra credit for regular and thoughtful forum participation.

## About the Weekly Readings

As you look over the syllabus, you will notice a list of readings for each week. Don't get nervous—you will not be asked to read all of them! The readings for each week are divided into several categories:

- **Primary readings:** The “primary reading” will be the main focus of that week’s lecture and discussion. Each week’s primary reading will typically be 25-40 pages long in total, though not always. It is expected that everyone will have read and be ready to discuss the primary reading each week. I have marked these readings in the syllabus with two stars [★★] so that they can be found easily.
- **Secondary readings:** For a number of our sessions, you can expect to find a handful of “secondary readings” listed after that week’s primary reading, which may be relevant to the issues raised or offer a differing perspective. These readings will be marked in the syllabus with one star [★]. You are not required to read them on a weekly basis, but some of them may come in useful for answering the exam questions.
- **Supplementary readings:** For those of you who find a particular week’s reading compelling, most weeks will also include recommendations for further reading. These may include other works by the author of the primary reading, in-depth interpretations of the author’s work, related works by other authors, or contemporary attempts to grapple with related issues. These will often be full-length books; as such, they will not be made available on the course website.

## Forum Discussions and Discussion Leaders

Because we will be conducting the course online, our primary medium for discussing the weekly readings will be via the online forums on Moodle.

Each week, a new discussion thread will be opened on the coming week’s reading. Several students (about 2–4) will act as **discussion leaders** for that week. Everyone in the class must act as a discussion leader *at least once* to receive credit. As a discussion leader, your job will be to initiate the discussion, pose questions to the rest of the class, keep the discussion going, and serve as moderators for the week.

Regardless of whether you are a discussion leader for a given week, all students are expected to participate regularly in the forums. You do not have to contribute *every* week; however, you should contribute frequently enough to show that you are following along in the class.

**Quality forum contributions should demonstrate that you have done the week’s reading and are trying to think about the issues they raise.** They can involve asking questions about the reading or answering questions posed by others; they can involve raising points of agreement or [respectful!] disagreement with points made by me or others.

Quality contributions are not about being “right.” They are about figuring things out, realizing what you might have missed, correcting mistakes and misinterpretations, and being confronted with perspectives you may not have previously considered.

**Above all, forum contributions should be on topic, and they should be polite and respectful of other students’ views and backgrounds.**

Though participation is required, your primary goal should not be to “impress” me or your fellow classmates. On the contrary, you should see the forums as an opportunity to think about the texts, experiment with ideas and arguments, and ask for clarifications. **Do not be afraid to ask questions!**

## Exams

There will be two written, take-home exams. Each exam will consist of a list of essay questions; students taking the exam are required to write a response to one. The questions will be distributed **at least** 10 days in advance of the deadline.

**Midterm exam:** Questions for the midterm exam will be based on the readings of the first half of the course. Students taking the exam are to write a response to one and only one question.

- Students taking the class for a **Teilnahmeschein** may choose whether they want to take the midterm exam **or** write a similar essay for the final exam. Students taking the class for a **Leistungsschein** must take both exams.
- The essay should be 1250 to 1750 words (≈ 4–6 pages) in length.
- Your response must take the form of a complete essay. It should begin with a clear statement of your argument, it should be structured in a way that allows for a systematic, step-by-step development and defense of your argument, and it should end with a concluding paragraph or two that reiterates your main points.
- Your response should draw upon the primary readings (★★) and, where necessary, secondary readings (★) from the syllabus. Independent research is permitted but not required.
- **All sources, including class readings, articles, books, websites, my lectures, forum postings, and course materials found on Moodle, must be properly cited.**

**Final exam:** Questions for the final exam will cover the entire course. Students taking the exam are to write a response to one and only one question.

- Students taking the class for a **Teilnahmeschein**, who choose to take this exam, should write an essay of 1250 to 1750 words that follows the same format as the midterm exam (see above). Independent research is permitted but not required. **All sources, including course materials, must be properly cited.**
- For students taking the class for a **Leistungsschein**: You must write one essay of 2700 to 3300 words (≈ 9–11 pages) in response to one question.
  - Your response should draw upon both the course readings and independent research. In addition to the primary readings (★★) and, where necessary, secondary readings (★), you should cite **a minimum of three scholarly sources** found independently.
    - “Scholarly sources” may include academic books and journal articles, as well as legal documents, NGO reports, and official government documents.

- You are permitted to cite newspaper articles, websites, and other sources, but they will not count toward the minimum.
- If you have questions about what does and does not count as a “scholarly source” for the purposes of the final exam, please ask!
- Your response must take the form of a complete essay. It should begin with a clear statement of your argument, it should be structured in a way that allows for a systematic, step-by-step development and defense of your argument, and it should end with a concluding paragraph or two that reiterates your main points.
- **All sources, including class readings, articles, books, websites, lecture videos, handouts, forum postings, and course materials found on Moodle, must be properly cited.**

### **IMPORTANT!!!**

All papers must be double-spaced, in 12-point type, with one-inch margins, and must be submitted to me via email as either a Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Adobe PDF (.pdf) file at [brian.m.milstein@gmail.com](mailto:brian.m.milstein@gmail.com).

All papers must be written in English.

For all papers, you will be expected to adhere to proper conventions of scholarly attribution. Any work quoted or otherwise referenced must be appropriately and fully cited. Any idea, argument, information, or quotation that you might employ from an external source must likewise be accompanied by full citation. You are free to use any standard of bibliographic citation style you wish, but you should apply it fully and consistently.

**I don't have any special technology. What I do have are a very particular set of skills... skills I have acquired over many years of teaching and marking papers... skills that make me a nightmare for people who engage in academic dishonesty. If you cite all of your sources whenever you draw upon the ideas of someone else and identify when you borrow someone else's wording, with full bibliographic references and page numbers, there will be no problem. But if you engage in plagiarism, use people's ideas or words without proper attribution, or do not employ proper methods of academic citation... I will find you, and I will fail you.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by Pierre Morel (2008) *Taken*, Los Angeles: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.

## Grading of Exams

All exams will be graded on a **100-point scale**. The criteria for assessment of exams will be as follows:

**Completion of assignment.** Up to **50 points** will be awarded on the basis of how completely you fulfill the requirements of the exam: that you answered the question fully, that you made sufficient use of the primary and (where appropriate) secondary readings, that you did the necessary independent research for the final, and so on.

**Comprehension of material.** Up to **15 points** will be awarded on the basis of how well you make use of the material provided for reading, display an understanding of the major ideas and arguments of the authors we have read in class, and are able to explain and apply them in one's own words.

**Formulation and defense of argument.** Up to **15 points** will be awarded on the basis of how well you put forward a clear thesis in response to your chosen question and are able to defend that thesis in an organized way, using solid reasoning and evidence.

**Clear writing.** Up to **12 points** will be awarded for clear, concise, and well-organized writing. You should strive to organize your paper into well-structured paragraphs, write in clear sentences, use clear phrasing, avoid errors in spelling and grammar, and use proper and sufficient citation.

**Critical thinking.** Up to **8 points** will be awarded on the basis of your ability to identify the strengths, weaknesses, usefulness, and limits of the ideas and arguments presented by the authors covered in class, and to think creatively and offer original perspectives on the issues and problems we discuss.

## Final Grade

The final grade for a **Leistungsschein** will be tabulated based on a **100-point scale**:

- Up to **15 points** will be awarded for your contribution as a discussion leader.
- Up to **30 points** will be awarded for the midterm exam (your score  $\times$  30%).
- Up to **55 points** will be awarded for the final exam (your score  $\times$  55%).
- Up to **10 points** will be awarded based on active and thoughtful forum participation (Note that the maximum possible score is 110).

### Grading Scale

97,0	$\leq$ <b>1,0</b>	43,5 - 49,5 = <b>3,7</b>
90,0 - 96,5	= <b>1,3</b>	37,0 - 43,0 = <b>4,0</b>
83,5 - 89,5	= <b>1,7</b>	30,0 - 36,5 = <b>4,3</b>
77,0 - 83,0	= <b>2,0</b>	23,5 - 29,5 = <b>4,7</b>
70,0 - 76,5	= <b>2,3</b>	17,0 - 23,0 = <b>5,0</b>
63,5 - 69,5	= <b>2,7</b>	10,0 - 16,5 = <b>5,3</b>
57,0 - 63,0	= <b>3,0</b>	3,5 - 9,5 = <b>5,7</b>
50,0 - 56,5	= <b>3,3</b>	3,0 $\geq$ <b>6,0</b>

## Weekly Schedule

All primary and secondary readings for the course will be made available on Moodle, as well as at least some of the suggested supplementary readings (which will be indicated with an [online](#) icon).

Please note the readings listed may be subject to change, and additional supplementary readings may be added or made available over the course of the term (Check Moodle periodically for updated versions of this syllabus).

Exam Dates		
Midterm exam	Questions to be distributed:	<b>Monday, 21 December, 2020</b>
	Exam due:	<b>Monday, 18 January, 2021</b>
Final exam	Questions to be distributed:	<b>Monday, 22 February, 2021</b>
	Exam due:	<b>Monday, 29 March, 2021</b>

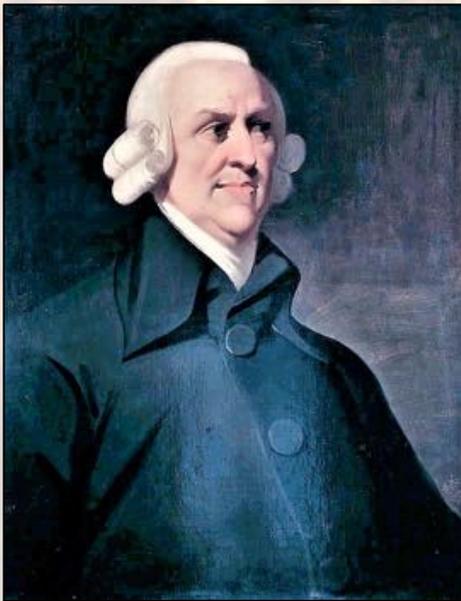
## Week I (2–8 November):

### Introduction

No required readings for this week

## Week II (9–15 November):

### Adam Smith



#### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Adam Smith (2015 [1776]) *The Wealth of Nations* (excerpts), in Steven M. Cahn (ed), *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Pp492–506. [online](#)

#### ★ Secondary reading:

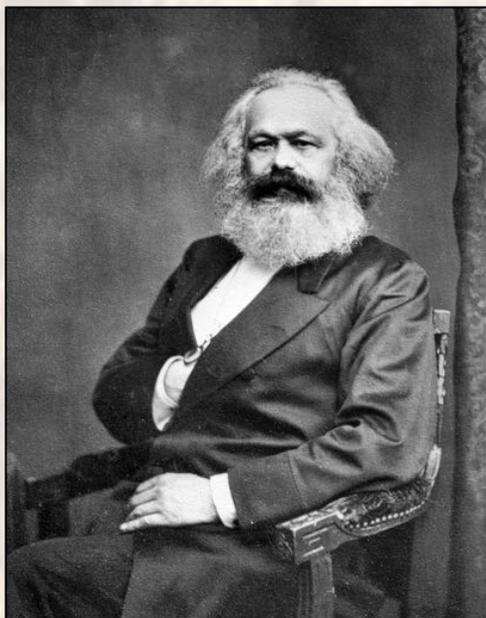
- Elizabeth Anderson (2017) “When the Market Was ‘Left,’” in Stephen Macedo (ed), *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk about It)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). Pp1–36. [online](#)

#### Supplementary reading:

- Emma Rothschild and Amartya Sen (2006) “Adam Smith’s Economics,” in Knud Haakonssen (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press). Pp319–65. [online](#)
- Adam Smith (1981 [1776]) *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics).

## Week III (16–22 November):

# Karl Marx



### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Karl Marx () “The Rights of Egoistic Man” [from “On the Jewish Question”], trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, in Michael Rosen, Jonathan Wolff, and Catriona McKinnon, *Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Pp173–5. [online](#)
- Karl Marx (2015 [1844]) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan, in Steven M. Cahn (ed), *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Pp701–8. [online](#)
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2015 [1848]) *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. Martin Milligan, in Steven M. Cahn (ed), *Political Philosophy: The Essential Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Pp714–26. [online](#)

### ★ Secondary reading:

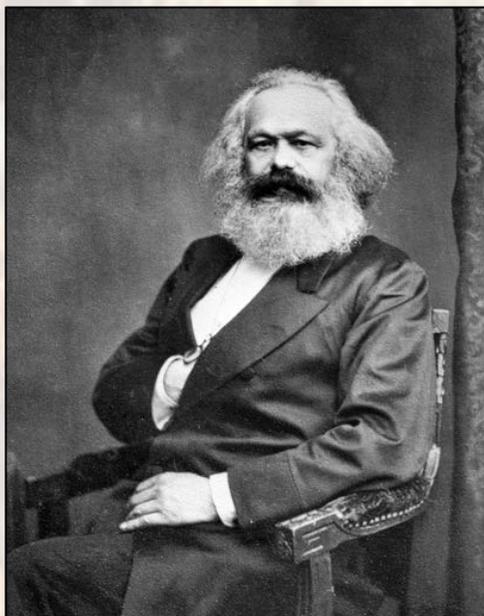
- Elizabeth Anderson (2017) “Private Government,” in Stephen Macedo (ed), *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don’t Talk about It)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). Pp37–71. [online](#)

### Supplementary reading:

- Jonathan Wolff (2017) “Karl Marx,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/marx/>).
- An online encyclopedia of Marx and Marxism that includes many texts:
  - Marxists Internet Archive (<https://www.marxists.org/>)

## Week IV (23–29 November):

### Karl Marx (cont'd)



#### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Karl Marx [1978 [1849]] “Wage Labor and Capital,” in Richard C. Tucker (ed), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton). Pp203–17. [online](#)
- Karl Marx [1978 [1868]] *Capital, Volume One* (excerpts), in Richard C. Tucker (ed), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton). Pp329–43. [online](#)
- Karl Marx [1978 [1868]] *Capital, Volume One* (excerpts), in Richard C. Tucker (ed), *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton). Pp431–8. [online](#)

#### Supplementary reading:

- William Clare Roberts [2017] *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- One of Rosa Luxemburg’s famous innovations on Marx’s account of “primitive accumulation” was in showing how it is a necessary and ongoing feature of capitalism:
  - Rosa Luxemburg [2003 [1913]] *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge).
- For David Harvey’s course on *Capital, Volume One* (with recorded lectures), see:
  - <http://davidharvey.org/reading-capital/#capital-v1-2019>

Week V (30 November–  
6 December):

## Friedrich Hayek



### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Friedrich Hayek (1999 [1945]) *The Road to Serfdom*, condensed version (London: Institute of Economic Affairs). Pp31–62. [online](#)

### ★ Secondary reading:

- F.A. Hayek (2011 [1960]) *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Pp57–90. [online](#)

### Supplementary reading:

- David Schmidtz (2016) “Friedrich Hayek,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/friedrich-hayek/>).
- Bas van der Vossen (2018) “Libertarianism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/libertarianism/>).
- Libertarian institutes and resources (including historical writings and contemporary pieces):
  - The Liberty Fund (<https://www.libertyfund.org/>).
  - Ludwig von Mises Institute (<https://mises.org/>).

Week VI (7–13 December):

## Joseph Schumpeter

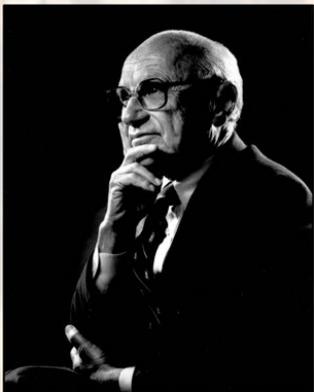


### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Joseph A. Schumpeter (2003 [1943]) *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London: Routledge). Pp81–106, 121–30. [online](#)

Week VII (14–20 December):

## Milton Friedman



### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Milton Friedman (1970) “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits,” *The New York Times Magazine*, September 13. [online](#)
- Milton Friedman and Rose Friedman (2002 [1962]) *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). Pp119–36, 161–76, 190–95. [online](#)

## Week VIII (11–17 January):

### Amílcar Cabral



#### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Amílcar Cabral (1979) “Presuppositions and Objectives of National Liberation in Relation to Social Structure” in *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings*, trans. Michael Wolfers (New York: Monthly Review Press). Pp119–37. [online](#)

#### Supplementary reading:

- Franz Fanon (2004 [1962]) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press). [pp91–144 online](#)

## Week IX (18–24 January):

### Aníbal Quijano



#### ★★ Primary Reading:

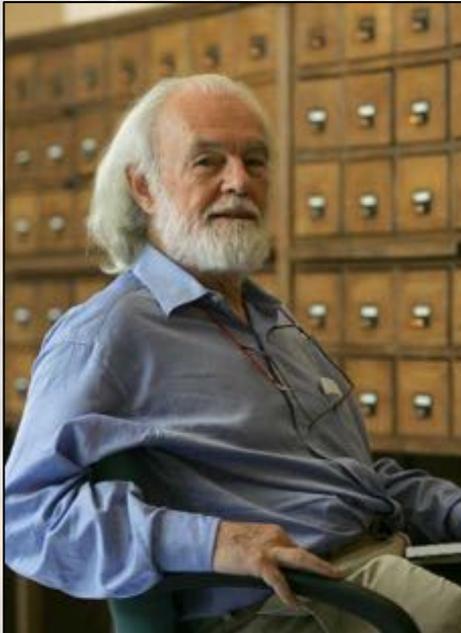
- Aníbal Quijano (2000) “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15(2): 215–32.

#### Supplementary reading:

- Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press). [pp27–46 online](#)
- Walter Mignolo (2007) “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-Coloniality,” *Cultural Studies* 21(2/3): 449–514. [online](#)

Week X (25 January–  
1 February):

## David Harvey



### ★★ Primary Reading:

- David Harvey (2004) “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Socialist Register* 40: 63–87. [online](#)

### Supplementary reading:

- David Harvey (2003) *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- David Harvey (2007) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- David Harvey (2014) *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books).
- A full listing of his publications and other works can be found at: [www.davidharvey.org](http://www.davidharvey.org)

**Week XI (2–8 February):****Nancy Fraser****★★ Primary Reading:**

- Nancy Fraser (2014) “Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 86(March/April): 55–72. [online](#)

**★ Secondary reading:**

- Nancy Fraser (2017) “From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump—and Beyond,” *American Affairs* 1(4): 46–64.

**Supplementary reading:**

- Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi (2018) *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, ed. Brian Milstein (Cambridge, MA: Polity).

**Week XII (9–15 February):****Nancy Fraser (cont’d)****★★ Primary Reading:**

- Nancy Fraser (2016) “Contradictions of Capital and Care,” *New Left Review* 100: 99–117. [online](#)

**★ Secondary reading:**

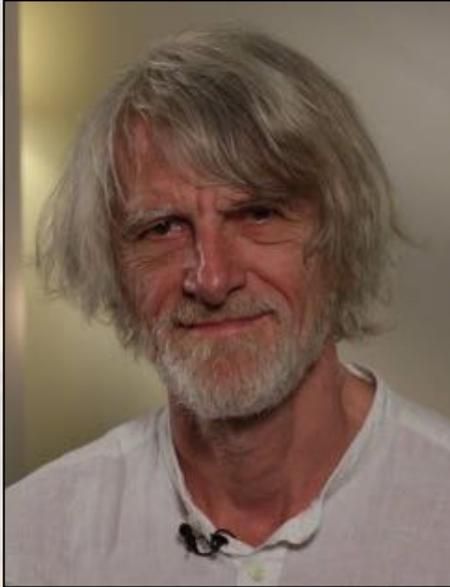
- Arlie Russel Hochschild (2004) “Love and Gold” in Luciana Ricciutelli, Angela Miles, and Margaret H. McFadden (eds), *Feminist Politics, Activism, and Vision: Local and Global Challenges* (London: Zed Books). Pp34–46. [online](#)

**Supplementary reading:**

- Nancy Fraser, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser (2019) *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London: Verso).

Week XIII (16–22 February):

## Philippe van Parijs



### ★★ Primary Reading:

- Philippe van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght (2017) *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Pp4–28. [online](#)