

**Radical Challenges to Constitutional Democracy**  
**MC 370—002**  
**James Madison College, Michigan State University**  
**Fall 2015**

*“The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else.... Madmen in authority, ... are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.”*

*J.M. Keynes*

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**Basic Course & Contact Info**

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**Days & Time:** MW, 10:20 – 11:40 am

**Room:** 339 Case Hall

**Course Management Site:** [d2l.msu.edu](http://d2l.msu.edu)

**Phone and Computer Policy:** Phones away and on airplane mode; no tablet and/or laptop use during class time unless authorized by professor.

**Instructor of Record:** Ross B. Emmett

**Office:** 304 S. Case Hall

**Office Hours:** MW 3-5 pm

**Preferred Method of Contact for Course-Related Questions:** inquiries of relevance to all students should be asked on the Piazza discussion platform, available via D2L or Piazza.com; private questions can be asked via email.

**Email:** [emmettr@msu.edu](mailto:emmettr@msu.edu)

**Phone:** 517.432.6139

*Yes, I am on Facebook, but I am only “friends” with graduates, not current students. You can check out my website ([www.msu.edu/~emmettr](http://www.msu.edu/~emmettr)) or follow me on LinkedIn or Academia.edu.*

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**Course Description**

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**Prerequisites:** MC 271 or completion of a Tier 1 writing requirement.

MC 370 is the third required course in the sequence of four core political theory courses in the Political Theory & Constitutional Democracy field. Following MC 271 – which examined the Enlightenment literature often identified with classical liberalism—MC 370 looks at a body of writings which ask whether classical liberalism actually brought liberty, equality and communal benevolence to “the people,” and whether more radical responses to hierarchy and oppression are necessary.

At the heart of classical liberalism lay the rejection (in principle, if not in practice) of any form of natural hierarchy—of any theory of politics, economics or society based on rank-ordered differences among people. If all people are equal, how then can they not also be free; and if all are free, how then can they not be equal? When the promise of freedom and equality went sour in the “dark satanic mills” of the Industrial Revolution and the rampant individualism of America (starting before the “purifying knife” of the guillotine in France at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but becoming especially strong during the 19<sup>th</sup> century), Europeans asked whether other alternatives were available. All of the alternatives pursued seemed to imply a radical re-composition of society’s institutions: using the word radical here in both the original sense of “uprooting” and the more modern sense which implies the use of violence or at least significant and rapid social upheaval.

Whereas the American constitutional tradition explicitly identified itself with the British constitutional tradition, the European radicals sought fundamentally to break with the past, and drew upon different sources. Rousseau, well known to the American Revolutionists (esp. Jefferson and Franklin), kicks off our readings with a rejection of the natural law arguments of many classical liberals: the institutions of society are not a natural progression (built upon an unchanging human nature) of the emergence of civil society from the state of nature; instead, we are the product of our own creations. Institutions make us what we are; and what we are is not pretty. Our original natural state may have been good, but the institutions we built have corrupted us. The obvious response is: tear down the institutions and build new ones around the kind of humans we should be. In the spirit of Rousseau, the French did just that in 1789.

To us, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most significant alternative to liberalism and capitalism is socialism, and the writer we associate most with socialism is Karl Marx. Marx lived all of his life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, he has to be considered one of the most important 20<sup>th</sup> century figures, for it is in that century that his ideas were realized in the Russian Revolution, and the various socialist transformations of eastern Europe, Latin America, south Asia, and the Pacific Rim.

Marx was not Rousseauian: while his writings affirm an eventual revolution in which “the expropriators will be expropriated,” he is a historical materialist and an evolutionist. The material conditions of society make us what we are, those conditions evolve slowly through a historical dialectic of struggle: “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle”—the opening words of *The Communist Manifesto*. But Marx is not always clear whether history can be “helped” along by a little cataclysmic revolution: the *Manifesto*, after all, was written to encourage the “workers of the world” to unite during the rebellions that swept Europe in 1848. Unfortunately for Marx, the workers ultimately aligned themselves with nationalist forces (another tradition that radicals will reject) rather than the cosmopolitan forces of socialism. The rebellions were squelched, and Marx ended up fleeing to London, where he lived out the rest of his life trying to understand how the underlying dynamic of capital in an enterprise economy would ultimately provide the material foundation for a socialist world. Was he right?

Along with Rousseau and Marx, we will also use two contemporary examinations of socialism – one by a leading socialist philosopher (Cohen, *Why Not Socialism?*) and

the other by a leading philosopher of capitalism (Otteson, *The End of Socialism*) – in order to look at the promise of socialism today.

**Official Description:** Criticisms of constitutionalism and liberal democracy. Theory and practice of 19th and early 20th century attempts to perfect or transcend bourgeois life through radical reform or revolution.

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## Overview of Course Requirements

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All course work will be graded on a percentage basis (out of 100%). On D2L, assignments and averages will also appear in percentages. Conversion to the university's 4-point scale will follow this chart:

94-100%	4	67-73%	2
87-93%	3.5	60-66%	1.5
80-86%	3	50-59%	1
74-79%	2.5	<50%	0

## Requirements with Grading Weights

Daily Memos	Min. requirement
Participation	15%
Rousseau Paper	30%
Marx Paper	30%
The Promise of Socialism Paper	25%

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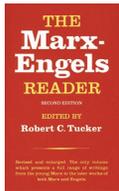
## Required Reading

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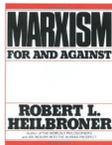
**Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2012), *The Basic Political Writing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hackett).**

**NOTE:** Paperback. Used copies available. Ebook version available. Will be used for class discussion.



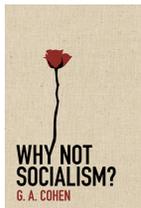
**Tucker, Robert C. (ed.) (1978), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (W. W. Norton).**

**NOTE:** Paperback. Used copies available. Will be used for class discussion.



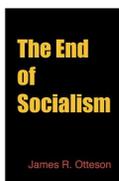
**Heilbroner, Robert L. (1980), *Marxism: For and Against* (W. W. Norton).**

**NOTE:** Multiple formats available. Lots of used copies.



**Cohen, G. A. (2009), *Why Not Socialism?* (Princeton University Press).**

**NOTE:** Small hardcover book. Used copies available. Ebook version available. Will be used for class discussion.



**Otteson, James (2014). *The End of Socialism* (Cambridge University Press).**

**NOTE:** Multiple formats. Used paperback copies available. Will be used for class discussion.

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## Detailed Descriptions of Course Requirements

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### ***Participation***

Most class periods will be spent discussing assigned reading; hence, it is important that everyone has read the material for the day (the daily memo requirement will help with that). Your participation grade will reflect your participation in class discussion on a regular basis. If you are not present in class, you cannot participate; if you are continually absent, your participation mark will necessarily be zero. Remember that the quality of one's remarks in class is as important as their quantity: frequent poor-quality comments will no more earn you full credit for participation than will attendance with little participation in discussion.

Here is a rough guide to my grading of participation (since frequent absences result in a failing grade no matter how much you participate when present, I've deleted the bottom end of the grade descriptions): 77% (approximately 2.5/4.0) for regular attendance and a few comments/questions in class; 80% (3.0/4.0) for regular attendance and some good contributions; 85% (3.3/4.0) for very good attendance and good contributions; 90% (3.5/4.0) for showing familiarity with the readings, leadership in the direction of class discussion occasionally and attending regularly; 95% (3.8/4.0) for regularly moving class discussion forward by providing productive comments based on the readings that contribute to discussion and also help others to enter/participate in the conversation.

My practice is to inform you around the middle of the semester about how I would evaluate your participation to that point. While you can discuss this grade with me, the best way to have an impact on the final grade is to change your participation during the latter half of the course. I will revise the participation grade at least once during the second half of the course, and will finalize the grade at the end of classes.

### ***Daily Memos***

Daily memos ensure that the assigned reading has been read (or at least looked over!) by a plurality, if not majority, of the students participating in the day's discussion. Their purpose is not to make sure you get the text "right," but to start you thinking about themes that central to the text, and their relevance to constitutional democracy.

*How daily memos work:* prior to class, you will write a two-page (typed, double-spaced) memo that addresses the following: **a)** what questions about political theory does the reading address? What answers does the author provide to these questions? *This is the most important section of the memo;* and **b)** your favorite quotation from the reading, with an explanation of its relevance to our discussions. In order to assist me in reading your memo, please use the following headers to separate the two issues: **Questions** and **Favorite Quotation**.

*Memos are turned in at the beginning of a class period.* Those who are not in class (not matter what the reason) or who know they will arrive significantly late need not prepare a memo for that day. There is no need to appeal for permission to turn in a memo on a day you know you will miss. (I know that everyone has legitimate reasons for missing

some classes, and have compensated for that in setting the minimum number.) Simply ensure that you prepare memos for the days you are in class. If you are in the hospital for more than a week, please contact me while in the hospital to make arrangements (NOTE: You should always contact Jeff Judge's office if you are absent for a significant period of time so that he can inform your professors.). If in doubt about whether you can complete an acceptable memo on a particular date, you should not turn a memo in, because a check-minus is no better than a missed memo. You simply need 17 acceptable daily memos on record by the end of the term.

To ensure that we can keep track of your memos over the semester, please put the following information on separate lines at the top (left) of your memo: Your name; MC 370, and the Date of class for which you're turning in the memo. If you wish to number your memos, you may add a line which reads "Memo # \_\_\_."

Your professor will grade daily memos on a check, check-minus system. As long as you turn in at least 17 memos that are acceptable and therefore receive a check, your final grade will be determined by the other components of the course requirements, as indicated above. If you do not turn in 17 acceptable daily memos, your final grade will decrease .3% for every missed memo or check-minus received. (The maximum one can lose from not turning in memos is 5%.) Daily memos will be returned at least once a week, if not more frequently. A record of memos is recorded on D2L, using the attendance register.

*How can you ensure a check on your memos?* My response is threefold. First, a memo is not a summary of the assigned reading. Memos that are simply summaries seldom earn a check. The student must make, in my estimation, an effort to discover the text's central questions and uncover the logic it uses to answer them. Secondly, my "standard" for a check is a memo that would earn at least a grade in the low 3-point range. Such a memo has the basics of the argument about the text's central questions. Finally, the argument you make does not need to be the "correct" interpretation. We can only learn the meaning of the text if we try to understand it ourselves; and our initial understanding is often confused and partial. But it is better that we try to interpret the texts ourselves, than that we leave the job of interpretation to others—including the prof!

### ***Papers***

Three papers will be written during the course: one each on Rousseau and Marx, and a final paper on "The Promise of Socialism." The Rousseau and Marx papers each count for 30% of the course grade, and constitute major components of your grade. The Rousseau and Marx papers will each be at least 10 pages in length. The final paper, on "The Promise of Socialism," will be slightly shorter, 8 pages, and count 25% of the final grade. Details of the topics and requirements will be distributed well ahead of the papers' due dates. Please read my guide to "How I Grade Papers" (available on D2L) for some indication of what I look for in papers, and how I will grade your performance. Papers that do not show familiarity with the specific readings used in our course, as well as our class discussions, will receive a grade no higher than 68%.

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## Expectations

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### *What you can expect from me*

My pedagogical goal in this course is to provide a structured environment in which you learn to think about philosophy, politics, social economic organization, and ethics. Experience in James Madison College has taught me that students learn from a combination of reading, listening to short lectures, participating in focused discussion, and writing. That is the environment I expect to provide you in this course.

MC 370 asks us to engage responsibly ideological viewpoints that may be different than our own. Being responsible about our own ideological viewpoints means that we have to put in the hard work of constructing a rational defense of our political, social, and economic view of the world. Questioning our assumptions, and learning to defend them, is essential to this task. In our readings, lectures, and discussions, you can expect to be asked to “get inside” views of the world that may be unfamiliar and potentially discomfoting, or disagree with the assumptions of your own ideology. I plan to model how one can engage such views responsibly.

I will be on time and will try to maximize our use of the time we have. I will post announcements relevant to the class on Piazza. I will also use Piazza to post contemporary news stories and/or commentaries related to our texts and discussions.

Class time will be used to enhance your understanding of the assumptions, conclusions, and implications of the political theories discussed in our texts. Lectures will not rehearse the readings, but focus on key assumptions and on issues that need expansion. They will be coupled with discussions that allow you to raise questions you have about the readings and the ideas you’re encountering, as well as point your attention to key tensions or challenges in the readings and lectures. There are times when we will discuss the contemporary constitutional or policy implications of the ideas in our readings, but that is not the purpose of the course or the primary use of class time. You can expect me to give you the same opportunity to participate in discussion that I give to other students.

You have a right to clear explanations of the expectations for assignments, and to prompt and adequate feedback about your performance. Information regarding my expectations for the essays will be provided in class and/or on Piazza and the “How I Grade Papers” brief available on D2L. Individual feedback will be provided on your papers, and you may come to talk about your performance during my office hours.

Your performance during university will be enhanced by contact outside the classroom with your professors. I welcome you to stop by my office early in the term to introduce yourself. I will respect my posted office hours, and can make appointments if the posted times are not convenient for you. I will also respond to questions raised privately or publicly on Piazza. Indeed, posting on Piazza or meeting with me occasionally during the term to discuss questions you have about the class can even increase your participation grade!

## ***What I expect of you***

I expect you to attend class, to have read the assigned material in advance, and to write a memo before most classes. I also expect you to come prepared for engagement in the discussion of topics related to the readings. Being engaged does not mean simply talking. Engagement with class discussion comes in many forms. Constantly reading social media and/or sleeping through class are not among them! Thoughtful contributions that advance our common understanding of political philosophy will be rewarded more than simply talking.

I expect you to engage responsibly ideological viewpoints that may be different than your own. Being responsible about our own ideological viewpoints means that we have to put in the hard work of constructing a rational defense of our political, social, and economic view of the world. Questioning our assumptions, and learning to defend them, is essential to this task. In our readings, lectures, and discussions, I expect that you will “get inside” views of the world that may be unfamiliar and discomforting, or that disagree with the assumptions of your own ideology. View this as an exercise in learning responsible ideology.

I also expect you will use the Piazza discussion platform as a means of both addressing questions you might have in the course, and discussing themes from readings/lectures/discussions that you wish to pursue further. Piazza can also be used to post news stories or commentaries that are relevant to our texts and/or discussions. I encourage you to both ask questions on Piazza and answer them when other ask.

I expect you to prepare carefully for each of the essays. Take the time to sift through your ideas and your source(s) to identify a clear thesis and develop a clear argument to sustain that thesis. Edit and re-write your papers to ensure that their organization reflects the logic of the argument. I expect you already write well, and that you can proofread to catch mistakes caused by hasty writing or poorly structured paragraphs and sentences.

I expect you to treat others with the same respect you expect from them. This version of the “Golden Rule” extends beyond your classmates to the individuals whom you are studying. I expect you to respect the rights of those whose ideas you utilize in writing your papers. Acknowledging the sources of your own ideas is an integral part of participation in a civil democratic society, especially in the academic context. That dreaded p-word – plagiarism – is ultimately an issue of respect. College and University policies regarding academic dishonesty will be enforced in this course (see the *College Student Handbook*).

**MC 370—002: Reading/Assignment Schedule**  
*Shaded Rows indicate important events, cancelled classes, and assignment dates*

<b>Class Date</b>	<b>Reading to be Discussed/Assignment Due</b>
Sep. 2	Lecture: Radical Challenges to Liberal Democracy and the Liberal Response
Sept. 7	<b>No Class:</b> Labor Day
Sept. 9	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Discourse on the Science and the Arts,” pp. 1-13
Sept. 14	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Discourse on the Science and the Arts,” pp. 14-25
Sept. 16	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Discourse on ... Inequality ... ,” pp. 31-43
Sept. 21	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Discourse on ... Inequality ... ,” pp. 45-69
Sept. 23	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Discourse on ... Inequality ... ,” pp. 69-92
Sept. 28	Rousseau, excerpts from <i>Emile, or On Education</i> , link provided on D2L
Sept. 30	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Discourse on Political Economy,” pp. 123-52
Oct. 5	<b>No Class:</b> in lieu of attendance at conference on inequality (Prof. Emmett away)
Oct. 7	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Social Contract,” pp. 156-91
Oct. 8-10	Conference on Question of Inequality <a href="http://lefrakforum.msu.edu/events/symposium-page.php">http://lefrakforum.msu.edu/events/symposium-page.php</a>
Oct. 12	Rousseau, <i>Basic Writings</i> : “Social Contract,” pp. 191-252
Oct. 14	<i>Marx-Engels Reader: The Communist Manifesto</i> , pp. 473-500
Oct. 19	<i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> : “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s <i>Philosophy of Right</i> : Introduction,” pp. 53-65; and “Theses on Feuerbach,” pp. 143-45
Oct. 21	<i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> : “The German Ideology,” pp. 147-200
<b>Oct. 22</b>	<b>Rousseau Paper due before 11 pm</b>
Oct. 26	Heilbroner, <i>Marxism: For and Against</i> , pp. 29-89
Oct. 28	<i>Marx-Engels Reader</i> : “Wage-Labor and Capital”
Nov. 2	<i>Marx-Engels Reader: Capital</i> , pp. 302-43
Nov. 4	<i>Marx-Engels Reader: Capital</i> , pp. 344-88
Nov. 9	<i>Marx-Engels Reader: Capital</i> , pp. 403-38
Nov. 11	<i>Marx-Engels Reader: Capital</i> , pp. 439-42; and “After the Revolution,” pp. 542-48
Nov. 16	Heilbroner, <i>Marxism: For and Against</i> , pp. 93-174
Nov. 18	Cohen, <i>Why Not Socialism?</i>
Nov. 23	Otteson, <i>End of Socialism</i> , pp. 1-71
Nov. 25	<b>No Class</b> in lieu of meetings regarding Marx and Final papers
Nov. 30	Otteson, <i>End of Socialism</i> , pp. 72-132
<b>Dec. 1</b>	<b>Marx Paper due before 11 pm</b>
Dec. 2	Otteson, <i>End of Socialism</i> , pp. 133-78
Dec. 7	Otteson, <i>End of Socialism</i> , pp. 179-207
Dec. 9	Course Wrap-up
<b>Fri., Dec. 18</b>	<b>The Promise of Socialism Paper due before 12 noon.</b>