Course Description

This course examines “the economy” from philosophical and anthropological perspectives. We will investigate why people produce and exchange things, why they seek to amass things in some circumstances and give them away in others, and how our modern understandings of value, debt, and rationality emerged.

Goals for the Course Material

By the end of the course students should be able to:
1. Explain the shift from Truth as timeless essence to “truth” as genealogy.
2. Explain the origins of the term “economy” and the evolution of its modern meaning.
3. Explain the “substantivist / formalist debate.”
4. Comprehend “the economy” as a political consequence of human decision-making.
5. Critique the modern notion of the natural, self-interested individual.
6. Explain how a gift functions within and interrupts an economy
7. Explain how debt is fundamental to human social life.
8. Explain how forgiveness functions within and interrupts an economy.
**Skills Developed**

1. The ability to identify arguments and provide counter-arguments.
2. The critical engagement with and the questioning of one’s assumptions.
3. The thoughtful integration of action with values.
4. The existential risking of crisis and transformation through self-reflection.
5. The acceptance of the invitation of philosophy to wonder at the big questions.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Thinking Skills: Students should be able to construct (or re-construct) a philosophical argument, both verbally and in writing. They should be able to anticipate and clearly articulate counter-arguments. Students should be able to recognize and question their own assumptions/prejudices. Students should be able to frame questions aware that what is asked often determines the response.
2. Reading Skills: Students should be able to interpret texts and to recognize and reflect on textual ambiguities. Students should be able to discern the steps of a philosophical argument, as well as the stated and (more importantly) unstated presuppositions of the argument.
3. Writing Skills: Students should be able to write logically compelling arguments in a clear, concise, and well-ordered manner.
4. Familiarity with some of the central philosophical questions in the History of Philosophy (broadly construed): Students should have a rudimentary knowledge of the history of philosophical questions and their attendant concepts and arguments, and be able to recognize versions of these questions in contemporary philosophical discussions. Students should be able to recognize and articulate alternative perspectives to the problems and claims with which they are confronted in contemporary life.
5. Students should be able to reflect critically on philosophical questions in the context of their own lives.

**Texts**

**To be purchased:**
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology*
Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams*
Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*

**Available online:**
Plato, *Apology*
Hatch, *Theories of Man and Culture*
Weismantel, “Moche Sex Pots”
Sahlins, “The Spirit of the Gift” (*Stone Age Economics*)
Sahlins, “Two or Three Things I Know About Culture”
Wardlow, *Wayward Women*
Donham, *History, Power, Ideology*
Bourdieu, “The Work of Time,” “Symbolic Capital,” and “Modes of Domination” (*The Logic of Practice*)
Robbins, “Rethinking Gifts and Commodities: Reciprocity, Recognition, and the Morality of Exchange”
Gasché, “Heliocentric Exchange”
Derrida, “The Time of the King” (Given Time)
Derrida, “On Forgiveness”

Grading System

One 7-page paper will be due at the end of the semester. The paper is not to exceed 7 double-spaced, typed pages with standard (1”) margins (6 pages is the minimum requirement). The paper is to be based solely on the text(s) from the course on which you choose to write. Other sources may be used to guide or augment your interpretation of your text(s), but there should be no references to other sources in your paper. We are most interested in the paper as a presentation of your own critical reflection. The paper is not a summary or a report. We expect your paper to explore a specific thesis. The thesis should be stated clearly and concisely at the beginning of the essay, and everything in the essay should be dedicated to demonstrating this thesis using specific evidence from the text(s). Note that the thesis of the essay is the one, central idea that you want to convince the reader of. A good thesis is one that can be proven (that is, there is objective evidence in the texts to support it) and that needs to be proven (that is, it is not obvious or self-evident). You therefore need to avoid vagueness and state the thesis with as much specificity as possible. Your thesis should be articulated in the title of your paper, in the form of a question. Your thesis, in the form of a question, should also be present in the first paragraph of your paper in bold font. YOU MUST GET YOUR THESIS APPROVED BY ONE OF US. You must examine your thesis critically, i.e., you must explore its assumptions, put your own questions to it, etc. In addition, you should be able to formulate credible judgments about the material that reflect your understanding of it. The paper should be clear, concise, well-ordered, and precise. Grammar and spelling will be taken into account in the grading of the paper. LATE PAPERS WILL NOT BE GRADED.

There will be twelve short reading quizzes. The quizzes will not be announced in advance, and will be given at the beginning of class.

There will be two examinations. The final examination will be comprehensive. Both examinations will consist of objective and short answer questions. The answers should be clear, concise, well-ordered, and precise. IF (FOR WHATEVER REASON) YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO TAKE AN EXAMINATION AT THE SCHEDULED TIME, YOU MUST CONTACT ONE OF US BEFORE THE SCHEDULED TIME OF THE EXAMINATION. IF YOU DO NOT CONTACT ONE OF US BEFORE THE SCHEDULED TIME OF THE EXAMINATION, YOU WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO TAKE THE EXAMINATION.

Quizzes (12 quizzes; 2 lowest scores dropped: 10 x 3 %) = 30 %
Midterm Examination = 20 %
7-page Paper = 20 %
Final Examination = 30 %

No extra credit work will be accepted.

If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact Academic and Disability Support Services: 203.254.4000, ext. 2615. You need to inform one of us of any academic accommodations within the first two weeks of the semester.
The Fairfield University Writing Center is a free resource available to all Fairfield University students. At the Writing Center, a writing tutor will work with you at any point in the writing process, from brainstorming to editing. The tutoring conference is collaborative; please come prepared to be an active participant in the session, and review the website for suggestions to help you prepare for your appointment. For more information or to make an appointment, visit the Writing Center website at www.fairfield.edu/writingcenter, email us at writingcenter@fairfield.edu or stop by the DiMenna-Nyselius Library, Lower Level.

Please note: Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, data, work, or language of others and submitting them as one’s own to satisfy the requirements of a course. Plagiarism constitutes theft and deceit. Students are often confused by just what constitutes plagiarism. When the ideas or writings of others are presented in assignments, these ideas or writings should be attributed to that source. Special care should be taken, when cutting and pasting materials or when paraphrasing, to cite sources correctly and to use quotation marks around exact words from source materials. Actions that result in plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. Consequently, students must understand the concept of plagiarism. When reading, processing, or using materials from any source, appropriate documentation is always essential.

Resources such as the library and the writing center are available on campus to assist you in your academic endeavors. You are encouraged to take advantage of these resources.

Course Schedule

Part I: Disciplinary Perspectives
What is an academic discipline? Where do disciplines come from and how do they work? What is philosophy as a discipline? What is anthropology as a discipline? How do these disciplines differ in their approaches to knowledge production? How does a disciplinary perspective illuminate what we want to know, and how does it obfuscate alternative ways of knowing? How do our assumptions shape our conclusions? How did the idea of Truth change in the 19th century? How did this change affect other disciplines, such as biology, economics, sociology, and anthropology?

Thursday September 5  Introduction

Monday, September 9  (Dr. Keenan)  What is Philosophy?
Plato, Apology
The Shift from Truth as Timeless Essence to “truth” as Genealogy
Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals

Thursday, September 12  (Dr. Crawford)  What is Anthropology? A “Four Field” Approach to the Study of Everything

Part II: Homo Economicus
Humans cooperate to manipulate their environment in ways that no other animal does; we produce the material, social and intellectual world we live in. How do our systems of production (making the stuff we want and need) fit with our systems of reproduction (making babies and remaking the societies that nurture them)? What consequences do different systems of re/production have for us, for our happiness, our impact on the environment, our survival? What assumptions can we make about how humans work? Are we fundamentally kind, mean-spirited, gentle, violent, cooperative, or
individualistic? Are we all of these things? Why do people behave differently in different places and times? Are we rational? Do we make independent decisions or express what “society” or “culture” wants us to do? In short, what governs our behavior? Why do we make decisions as we do?

Monday, September 16
(Dr. Crawford)

**Anthropological Theories I: From Ibn Khaldun to E.B. Tylor**
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapters 1 and 2

Thursday, September 19
(Dr. Crawford)

**Anthropological Theories II: From Tylor to Boas**
Hatch, “Rise of the Anti-Intellectual” (*Theories of Man and Culture*)

Monday, September 23
(Dr. Crawford)

**Anthropological Theories III: Production and Reproduction**
Weismantel, “Moche Sex Pots”
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapter 4 (pp. 83-94)

Thursday, September 26
(Dr. Keenan)

**Neoclassical Economics**
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapter 3

Monday, September 30
(Dr. Keenan)

**Marxian Economics**
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapter 4 (pp. 94-113)

Thursday, October 3

Review

Monday, October 7

Mid-Term Examination

**Part III: Gifts and Exchange**

Humans exchange a phantasmagorical variety of things in a wide variety of ways with a range of social consequences. Why are we so obsessed with exchanging things? Why do we want things? Why do we want to give things away? What are the obligations to give in different societies? What are the obligations to receive? How are gifts different from loans? Why is selling a thing different than giving it? What things cannot be sold, and what things cannot be gifts? Where did money come from, why do we work so hard to get it, and why do we sometimes give it away (especially to our children, though sometimes to complete strangers)? How do things come to have value? What kinds of value are there? What does it mean to “own” something, and what things cannot be owned (and why)? What is property? What is a commodity? How does an economy “grow,” why does it grow, and how is limitless economic growth fitted to the terminal trajectory of human life? In what way does a gift function within an economy, and in what ways does it interrupt an economy?

Thursday, October 10
(Dr. Keenan)

**The Gift I**
Mauss, *The Gift*

Monday, October 14

No Class—University Holiday

Thursday, October 17
(Dr. Crawford)

**The Gift II**
Mauss, *The Gift*
Sahlins, “The Spirit of the Gift” (*Stone Age Economics*)
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapter 6
Monday, October 21  
**Moral Economics**  
Sahlins, “Two or Three Things I Know About Culture”  
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapter 5

Thursday, October 24  
**Ethnography and the Logic of Gifts I: Sex, Death, Pigs and Brides**  
Wardlow, *Wayward Women*

Monday, October 28  
**Ethnography and the Logic of Gifts II: Marx on Safari**  
Donham, *History, Power, Ideology*

Thursday, October 31  
**Practice Theory**  
Bourdieu, “The Work of Time,” “Symbolic Capital,” and “Modes of Domination” (*The Logic of Practice*)  
Wilk and Cliggett, *Economies and Cultures*, Chapter 7

Monday, November 4  
**Value as the Importance of Actions**  
Graeber, “Value as the Importance of Actions” (*Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*)

Thursday, November 7  
**Marcel Mauss Revisited**  
Graeber, “Marcel Mauss Revisited” (*Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*)

Monday, November 11  
**Rethinking Gifts and Commodities**  
Robbins, “Rethinking Gifts and Commodities: Reciprocity, Recognition, and the Morality of Exchange”

Thursday, November 14  
**Questioning Gifts and Exchange**  
Gasché, “Heliocentric Exchange”  
Derrida, “The Time of the King” (*Given Time*)

**Part IV: Exchange, Debt, and Forgiveness**

What is money? Was money invented to replace onerous and complicated barter systems or was society divided into debtors and creditors long before the existence of money? In what ways are legal and religious ideas like “guilt,” “sin,” “redemption,” and “forgiveness” (i.e., the basic ideas of right and wrong) derived from debates about debt? What is debt? What kinds of debt are there? Why is debt foundational to human social existence? What debts *cannot* be repaid and why? What debts *must* be paid back and why? How does our individual and collective debt bear on our future as a nation or as a species? What is the extreme point of a genealogy of debt? In what way does forgiveness *function within* an economy, and in what ways does it *interrupt* an economy?

Monday, November 18  
**Responsibility, Debt, and Guilt**  
Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Thursday, November 21  
**Debt I**  
Graeber, *Debt*
Monday, November 25  
(Dr. Crawford)  
**Debt II**  
Graeber, *Debt*

Thursday, November 28  
No Class—University Holiday

Monday, December 2  
(Dr. Crawford)  
**Debt III**  
Graeber, *Debt*

Thursday, December 5  
(Dr. Crawford)  
**Debt IV**  
Graeber, *Debt*

Monday, December 9  
(Dr. Keenan)  
**Forgiveness**  
Derrida, “On Forgiveness”

Friday, December 20  
Final Examination (8:00 a.m.)