**Everybody’s Working for the Weekend: Ambition and Alienation**

**UNCP4309/PHIL4309: Spring 2025**

**Professor Christine Rojcewicz**

**Classroom: Fulton Hall 423, Monday, Wednesday 1:30-2:45pm**

**Contact Information:** **rojcewic@bc.edu****, 617-552-3137**

**Office Hours: Fulton Hall 315P**

**Monday 9:00-1:00, Wednesday 9:00-1:00, and by appointment (in person and/or Zoom)**

**Course Description:**

This course invites students to think beyond the limits of their identities as students and instead to anticipate the step into their new role as working members of society. The aim of this course is twofold. First, it will prepare BC grads to overcome the difficulties they will face in the working world with respect to a feeling of alienation from their work. Second, it will also address why some may have an easier time succeeding in their chosen field than others. Why does it seem like somepeople are more ambitious than others? Can we blame mere laziness? This question will be answered with a resounding no. Rather, this class will show that there are indeed systematic measures in place that cause some folks to not appear as ambitious as others. In order to work through these two issues, this class will look at alienation and capitalism. Is alienation integral to capitalism, or is it possible to have a capitalist system that does not rely on exploitation and instead serves the common good? Furthermore, can we consider our society to be contributing to our freedom? This course will look at how capitalism affects the way we “make a living” through the origins of capitalism and work. This class will begin to unravel the nuanced relationship between freedom, fairness, and underlying systemic problems that cause economic and social inequality.

There will be a few main topics that we will cover in class. First, the accelerated rate of production brings us against the limits of humans’ interaction with the environment/non-human world. Our next topic will be to begin to determine what role race might play in systemic alienation, particularly in the context of the US. How do historical and current systems of inequality affect us now? We will also look at automation and artificial intelligence. Will automation in the future cause us feel less alienated from our labor? We will discuss how one ought to lead and manage, knowing that one’s employees are caught in a system that makes it harder for some to succeed than others. Lastly, we will also look at systemic changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and WFH (work from home).

**Learning Goals and Objectives:**

To fulfill the Carroll School mission and promote successful outcomes for all its graduates, this course places emphasis on the following Carroll School learning goals, ensuring that upon graduation, students will be ethical reasoners, team players, and critical thinkers. These goals and objectives include: analyzing business through a philosophical lens, understanding the importance of critical thinking (the examined life), acquainting students with philosophical inquiry, fostering ethical analysis skills, engaging in both discussion and debate, and appreciating the practice of asking questions. Above all, the course strives to emphasize the importance of being attentive, reflective, and loving citizens of the world. These qualities are what make the best leaders, and as a course designed for future leaders in business, a vital aim is helping students recognize that a more just future is in their hands.

**Texts and Readings:**

Course readings will be available on **Canvas** (under Modules 🡪 Resources & Readings), and anything that is not available for you on Canvas will be sent out through email. You do not need to purchase any texts for this class. ***The assigned reading must be done before class begins.***

**Course Requirements:**

Participation: 20%

Paper 1: 25%

Paper 2: 25%

Paper 3: 25%

Reflection essay: 5%

**Grading:** (in percentages)

A 100-95

A- 94.99 - 90

B+ 89.99 - 87

B 86.99 - 82

B- 81.99 - 80

C+ 79.99 - 77

C 76.99 - 72

C- 71.99 - 70

D 69.99 – 60

All assignments are to be completed on time, per the syllabus. Late assignments will be penalized a half a letter grade per day late. For example, an assignment turned in a day after the due date that would have received an A would receive an A-. Please see me or email me *beforehand* if extenuating circumstances arise.

**Attendance and Participation**: Class attendance is mandatory. You are allowed two free absences throughout the semester. All other absences are either unexcused, or you must have a note from the Dean. Class participation is also required. A large portion of this course will be discussion based, so it is imperative that you participate in discussions, group work, and come to office hours. Although visiting office hours is not required, it is strongly suggested. Everyone must treat others with equal respect and compassion and maintain a positive and welcoming environment in the classroom. Disrespectful comments will not be tolerated.

**Rubric for Participation Grade:**

A range: Exceptional contribution to class discussion. Participation that demonstrates genuine understanding of the lectures and the readings. Exceptional participation means asking your own questions, and you are able to synthesize different concepts and think critically about the class material. **This is rare**; it sets apart the very best.

B range: Regular participation; student demonstrates an understanding of the lectures and readings.

C range: No participation but regular attendance.

D: Sporadic attendance.

F: Half or more of the class sessions are missed

**Technology Policy:** Cell phone use is prohibited during class. Any use of laptops must be for course material only. Failure to comply with this technology policy will result in an unexcused absence for the day. *Please see me or email me if you are in need of accommodation*.

Generative AI tools, such as Microsoft Copilot, ChatGPT, Dall-E, BARD, and others, may be used in Carroll School courses for assignments or other course work, unless the course faculty or syllabus specifies otherwise. **In this course, you can choose to use these tools where specified by the instructor directly or as described in the course syllabus; otherwise, these tools should not be used by you at all for any assignment, project, exam or any other assigned work**. You should know that the careful use of AI tools may positively augment your learning experience in this course, although such tools sometimes generate solutions, material, or ideas that are fabricated, inaccurate, or completely false. Also, consider this: if you use AI to replace your own hard work – thinking, analysis, writing etc. – then you are not learning. As a student in this course, it is also your responsibility to review any AI-generated or AI-corrected content for accuracy. The course faculty may require that your use of AI as a student in this course be documented thoroughly using proper citations, such as APA or MLA format. Any inappropriate use of AI tools on your part may result in a serious academic integrity violation subject to the policies of Boston College.

**Accommodation Services**:

If you are a student with a documented disability seeking reasonable accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, dugganka@bc.edu, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities and ADHD, or Rory Stein, (617) 552-3470, rory.stein@bc.edu, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities, including temporary disabilities. Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations. University resources can be found at this link: [Accommodations for Students](https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/sites/accessibility/Accommodations.html).

**Academic Integrity:**

The pursuit of knowledge can proceed only when scholars take responsibility and receive credit for their own work. Recognition of individual contributions to knowledge and of the intellectual property of others builds trust within the University and encourages the sharing of ideas that is essential to scholarship. Similarly, the educational process requires that individuals present their own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique, and eventual reformulation. Presentation of others' work as one's own is not only intellectual dishonesty, but it also undermines the educational process. All students are expected to understand the university’s policy about academic integrity; it can be found at: [Undergraduate Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures](https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/academics/sites/university-catalog/policies-procedures.html#academic_integrity_policies). Any violations of this policy will result in the student receiving penalties as prescribed by the university.

**Recording Classes:**

This class will be recorded by Boston College to assist students enrolled in the class who miss any sessions due to an excused absence, such as illness. In addition, the recordings can be a resource for all students who would like to review the material covered in class. All recordings will be stored within the Canvas site. Students may not record/stream video or audio, including use of AI-transcription apps, or take photos in the classroom, or share portions of any recorded video or audio of the class with anyone outside the class except with the written permission of the instructor and such other permissions as may be required by law or University policies.

**Calendar of Readings and Assignment Deadlines:**

All reading assignments will be found in Canvas. Each week will be comprised of a philosophical reading and an article illustrating the contemporary application of the philosophical theory. Since this course is current events-based, reading assignments are subject to change. If a reading is added, its equivalent will be removed.

**Week 1**: Introduction, definition of alienation

**Jan 13**: No reading, syllabus

**Jan 15:** Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pgs. 19-31

[Steel Industry in Pittsburgh](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ofm2RQjvrI)

**Week 2**: Wage labor

**Jan 20**: NO CLASS

**Jan 22**: Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, pgs. 69-187

Economist, “Robber Barons and Silicon Sultans”

**Week 3**: Alienation, *Homo Faber*

**Jan 27:** Karl Marx, *The German Ideology,* pgs. 149-173

National Center for Employee Ownership, “[ESOP Basics](https://www.esop.org/articles/employee-stock-ownership-plan-esop-basics.php)”

**Jan 29**: Karl Marx, *The German Ideology,* pgs. 176-200

Harvard Business Review, [“How Well is Employee Ownership Working?”](https://hbr.org/1987/09/how-well-is-employee-ownership-working)

**Week 4**: Alienation as integral to capitalism

**Feb 3**: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* pgs. xxiii-xl

The Gray Area, “[Why Work is so Miserable in America”](https://www.vox.com/the-gray-area/24034358/gray-area-work-labor-miserable-protestant-ethic)

**Feb 5**: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* pgs. 13-29

NPR, “[The Great Resignation: Why People are Leaving Their Jobs in Growing Numbers”](https://www.npr.org/transcripts/1048332481)

**Week 5**: Alienation and human freedom

 **Feb 10**: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* pgs. 30-109

Boston College, “[Moving Four-ward?”](https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/bcnews/nation-world-society/sociology/-study-pilots-four-day-work-week.html)

[4 Day Week Global](https://www.4dayweek.com/)

 **Feb 12**: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* pgs. 110-125

GoDaddy, [“How to Monetize Your Hobby”](https://www.godaddy.com/resources/skills/how-to-monetize-your-hobby)

LinkedIn, “[Do You Have Productivity Guilt?”](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/do-you-have-productivity-guilt-neville-chamberlain/)

**Week 6**: Labor vs. work

**Feb 17**: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* pgs. 7-93

Forbes, “[8 Ways to Love What You Do](https://www.forbes.com/sites/jodiecook/2021/11/01/8-ways-to-love-what-you-do/?sh=50d66e392c4f)”

**Feb 19**: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* pgs. 118-135

Hari, *Lost Connections* \*\*warning: drug abuse\*\*

**Week 7**: Environmental concerns with production and consumption

**Feb 24**: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* pgs. 136-167

The Guardian, [“Overconsumption and the Environment: Should We All Stop Shopping?”](https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/may/30/should-we-all-stop-shopping-how-to-end-overconsumption)

**Feb 26**: Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* pgs. 175-313

WSJ, “[Work-Life Balance: For Younger Workers It’s Easier Said than Done](https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/your-money-matters/work-life-balance-for-younger-workers-its-easier-said-than-done/b752451b-7e70-4808-ab48-37cf227dc733?mod=Searchresults_pos13&page=2)”

**Paper 1 due**

**Week 8**: **Spring Break**

**Week 9**: Systemic racism \*\*warning: offensive language\*\*

**Mar 10**: Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning*, pgs. 1-108

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” pgs. 55-62

 **Mar 12**: Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped From the Beginning*, pgs. 424-511

Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations” pgs. 62-71

**Week 10**: Hopelessness \*\*warning: offensive language\*\*

**Mar 17**: Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*

 Forbes, “Our Obsession with Black Excellence is Harming Black People”

 **Mar 19**: Michelle Alexander, *Mass Incarceration is the New Jim Crow*

 NPR, “[Black Vets were Excluded from GI Bill Benefits”](https://www.npr.org/2022/10/18/1129735948/black-vets-were-excluded-from-gi-bill-benefits-a-bill-in-congress-aims-to-fix-th)

**Week 11**: Capitalism and fairness

**Mar 24**: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* pgs. 3-17

 [A Theory of Justice](https://openstax.org/books/business-ethics/pages/2-6-a-theory-of-justice)

 **Mar 26**: John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* pgs. 17-142

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, pgs. 235-238

**Week 12**: Convenience vs. freedom

 **Mar 31**: Case study: Cyber Slacking and Employer Monitoring

Wall Street Journal, “[The Real Meaning of Freedom at Work”](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-real-meaning-of-freedom-at-work-11633704877)

**Apr 2**: Green, *The Company Town*

Business Insider, [“Meet Your New Landlord: Google”](https://www.businessinsider.com/company-towns-facebook-google-tesla-elon-musk-housing-real-estate-2023-12)

[Middlefield Park website](https://realestate.withgoogle.com/middlefieldpark/)

 Tennessee Ernie Ford, “[Sixteen Tons](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRh0QiXyZSk)”

**Week 13**: Culture of consumerism as cause of alienation

**Apr 7**: Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pgs. 1-9

New York Times, “[How Sanrio Makes Anti-capitalism Adorable and Profitable](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/arts/design/how-sanrio-makes-anti-capitalism-adorable-and-profitable.html?searchResultPosition=38)”

**Apr 9**: Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pgs. 9-18

The Economist, “21st Century Consumers will Change Capitalism for the Better”

**Paper 2 due**

**Week 14**: Camera Obscura: Quiet Quitting and Hustle Culture

 **Apr 14**: The New Yorker, [“The Year in Quiet Quitting”](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/2022-in-review/the-year-in-quiet-quitting)

 TikTok, [“On Quiet Quitting”](https://www.tiktok.com/%40zaidleppelin/video/7124414185282391342)

**Apr 16**: The New Yorker, “The Gig Economy Celebrates Working Yourself to Death”

CBS, [“Former Steel Mill Worker Preserves the Memory of his Closed Plant”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKrAAZMaRxY)

**Week 15**: The future of work

 **Apr 21**: NO CLASS

**Apr 22 (Monday schedule):** Netflix, *American Factory*

**Apr 23**:Netflix, *American Factory*

New York Times, [“The ‘Great Resignation’ Is Over. Can Workers’ Power Endure?”](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/06/business/economy/jobs-great-resignation.html?searchResultPosition=2)

**Week 16**: How to manage in this new era: where do we go from here?

**Apr 28**: “Can AI Bots be Content Creators?”

 The Economist, “How Businesses are Actually Using Generative AI”

 NYT, “[Hollywood’s Deal With Screenwriters Just Rewrote the Rules Around A.I.](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/29/opinion/wga-strike-deal-ai-jobs.html)”

**Apr 30**: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* pgs. 1176a17-1179a34

Kim Kardashian, [“Nobody Wants to Work”](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/bKRuylLcqHI)

**Reflection essay due**

**Final paper due: May 7**