**Political Economy: Approaches, Concepts and Issues**

**5SSPP201**

Module convenors: Dr Alexandre Afonso and Dr Christel Koop

King's College London  
Department of Political Economy  
Academic year 2013-2014

**Aim of the module**

This module introduces students to a number of approaches theorising the relationships between politics, the state and markets. The module is divided into five parts, with each part focusing on one theoretical approach. The module is designed to link classical approaches with contemporary analyses. The themes the module will focus on are (1) Marxism and the role of classes (2) culture and the economy, (3) the social embeddedness of markets, (4) methodological individualism and public choice, and (5) the role of institutions. Within each part, we will start by looking at one major work that has offered a major contribution to the approach (*The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Polanyi's *Great Transformation*, Olson's *Logic of Collective Action*, and North's *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*) We will focus on the main arguments of these books, their underlying assumptions, their methodology, and their contribution to the approach. We will then continue by assessing recent work applying these approaches to contemporary issues in political economy.

**Learning outcomes**

At the end of the module, students should be able
- to identify the specific assumptions and characteristics of different approaches in political economy;
- to compare these different approaches and their ability to explain real-world phenomena;
- to use the theoretical tools acquired in the module to analyse and compare concrete empirical cases.

**Teaching arrangements**

The module will be co-taught by:
- Dr Alexandre Afonso (lectures)
- Dr Christel Koop (lectures)
- Dr Colin Jennings (lectures)
- Mr Aris Trantidis (seminars)
- Mr James Hill (seminars)
- Mr Anton Howes (seminar)

There will be eleven weekly, one-hour lectures, ten weekly, one-hour seminars (seminars start in week 2), and one revision session before the exam, all in Term 1. The lecture will take place on *Tuesdays, from 12pm to 13pm, in room STD/S-2.18.*

The schedule for the seminars is the following:
You are expected to have read the articles and chapters under 'Core reading' in the reading list before the lecture and seminar. Please also note that attendance is mandatory, and participation is part of the module assessment.

**Assessment**

The module will be assessed in three ways. 10 percent of the overall module mark will be assessed by means of an evaluation of your module attendance and participation. Second, 45 percent of the overall mark will be assessed by an essay. Third, 45 percent of the overall mark will be assessed by a two-hour, unseen written exam.

The assessed essay should not have more than 2,500 words, and should be submitted electronically. The essay questions will be posted on KEATS. Please make sure that your essay includes, on the front page, your candidate number, the title of your essay, the title of the module, the date, and – very important – the word count. Normally, you will receive feedback and an indicative mark in four weeks. Further details on the submission of essays, and on the word count, can be found in the programme handbook.

The essay is to be submitted before 5pm (4:59 at latest) on Friday, 13 December 2013. Please note that the essay deadlines are absolute. Failing to submit an essay by the appropriate date and time will result in a mark of zero. Word limits for the essays are fixed, and penalties will be applied in the case of over-length essays. Be aware that KEATS does not accept documents above 20MB. If for some reason you experience problems while submitting your essay, it is advised to email it to us before the deadline, and seek to document your problems in case you need to apply for mitigating circumstances.

**Reading**

There are a few core texts for this module, but the reading list will also consist of articles and chapters. The reading list for each week is divided into two sections. First, under 'Core reading', the central reading for the topic of that week is listed. Second, under 'Further reading', you will find additional articles and chapters on the topic. The latter section aims to enable those students who are particularly interested in the topic to deepen their knowledge.

You are expected to have read the chapters and articles under 'Core reading' before the lecture and seminar. In order to understand the different views on, and aspects of, the topics that are covered, you are advised to focus on the main arguments that are made in the various readings rather than to spend all your time on one or two readings. The discussion questions that are formulated for each week should help you in this process.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Room</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Aris Trantidis</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>13:00-14:00</td>
<td>STD/S-1.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>James Hill</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>13:00-14:00</td>
<td>STD/S-1.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>James Hill</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>14:00-15:00</td>
<td>STD/S-1.01</td>
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<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Aris Trantidis</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>15:00-16:00</td>
<td>STD/342N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>James Hill</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>17:00-18:00</td>
<td>STD/K4.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>Aris Trantidis</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>17:00-18:00</td>
<td>STD/S2.28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 7</td>
<td>Anton Howes</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9:00-10:00</td>
<td>STD/S-3.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group 8</td>
<td>Anton Howes</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>10:00-11:00</td>
<td>STD/S0.12</td>
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The core texts of the module are the following:
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels – *The Communist Manifesto*.

A number of copies of these books have been made available at the KCL Maughan Library. However, you are also encouraged to acquire them; they are classics that certainly have a place in your private library. The particular edition does not matter. Electronic versions of some these books are freely available on repositories such as Gutenberg.org or Marxists.org. You can find them with a quick Google search.

**Programme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>24 September</td>
<td>Dr Alexandre Afonso</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Marxism: <em>The Communist Manifesto</em></td>
<td>1 October</td>
<td>Dr Alexandre Afonso</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Contemporary Marxian approaches</td>
<td>8 October</td>
<td>Dr Alexandre Afonso</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Max Weber: <em>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</em></td>
<td>15 October</td>
<td>Dr Alexandre Afonso</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contemporary approaches in economic sociology</td>
<td>22 October</td>
<td>Dr Alexandre Afonso</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td><em>The Great Transformation</em> and the concept of embeddedness</td>
<td>29 October</td>
<td>Dr Christel Koop</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Reading week</td>
<td>5 November</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td><em>The Great Transformation</em> and the politics of countermovements</td>
<td>12 November</td>
<td>Dr Christel Koop</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Methodological individualism: <em>The Logic of Collective Action</em></td>
<td>19 November</td>
<td>Dr Colin Jennings</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Contemporary public choice approaches</td>
<td>26 November</td>
<td>Dr Colin Jennings</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>The role of institutions: <em>Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance</em></td>
<td>3 December</td>
<td>Dr Christel Koop</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Institutional theory and the economy</td>
<td>10 December</td>
<td>Dr Christel Koop</td>
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**Contact details**

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Mr Aris Trantidis
Teaching Fellow in Political Economy
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Office hours: Thursdays 2:30-4:30

Dr Christel Koop
Lecturer in Political Economy

Mr James Hill
Week 1 – Introduction (Alexandre Afonso)

In the first section, we will present the outline of the module, the modalities of assessment as well as an outline of the questions we will tackle in the course.

Discussion questions:
1. What is the scope of political economy?
2. Does politics shape the economy, or does the economy shape politics?
3. What kind of explanatory variables can we use in political economy?
4. What are the limits of rational choice in the analysis of economic phenomena?

Core reading


Week 2 – Marxism: The Communist Manifesto (Alexandre Afonso)

Discussion questions:
1. How has capitalism transformed divisions in society?
2. Are workers and capitalists engaged in a “free exchange”? Does everybody benefit equally from this exchange?
3. How are wages supposed to evolve under capitalism?
4. Is capitalism stable?
5. According to Marx, what is the driver of political change?
6. What is the role of the state in the economy?
7. Can capitalism coexist with a free society?
8. Was Marx wrong? Where was he right?

Core reading
Further reading


Week 3 – Contemporary Marxian approaches (Alexandre Afonso)

Discussion questions:
1. How can we explain the rise of neoliberalism from the late 1970s onwards?
2. What are the main characteristics and functions of the “neoliberal state”?
3. How do Marxists explain the global financial crisis?
4. How is the “new” Marxism different from the old?

Core reading


Secondary Readings (includes non-Marxian but connected perspectives)


Week 4 – Max Weber: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Alexandre Afonso)

Discussion questions:
1. According to Weber, why did capitalism prosper under Protestantism?
2. How does Weber's view of religion and culture differ from the one proposed by Marx?
3. What is the empirical problem Weber starts from?
4. Does religion still influence economic life?
5. How is Weber’s methodology different from the one employed by Marx?
6. Can you think of other examples whereby culture influences economic behaviour?

Core Reading

Secondary Readings

Week 5 - Contemporary approaches in economic sociology (Alexandre Afonso)

Discussion questions:
1. How does the sociological analysis of the economy differ from mainstream economics?
2. Where do actors’ preferences come from?
3. How does social structure influence economic outcomes?
4. Do markets function in a similar manner everywhere?

Core Reading

Secondary Reading
Week 6 – *The Great Transformation* and the concept of embeddedness (Christel Koop)

**Key questions**
1. How does Polanyi use the concept of embeddedness?  
2. What are the similarities and differences between the use of the concept by Polanyi and Granovetter?  
3. What implications does using the concept of embeddedness have for studying the economy?

**Core reading**


**Further reading**


**Week 8 – *The Great Transformation* and the politics of countermovements (Christel Koop)**

**Key questions**

1. What does Polanyi’s concept of countermovement refer to?
2. How has the concept been used in contemporary political economic studies?
3. To what extent is the concept of countermovement useful in understanding the aftermath of the financial crisis?

**Core reading**


Owen Worth (2013). Polanyi’s *magnum opus*? Assessing the application of the countermovement in international political economy. Forthcoming in *The International History Review*.


**Further reading**


**Week 9 – Methodological individualism: *The Logic of Collective Action* (Colin Jennings)**

**Discussion questions**

1. According to standard economic logic, why are smaller groups more likely to be effective in forming than larger groups?
2. Why is this insight likely to have major implications for political and economic outcomes?
Core reading


Further reading


**Week 10 – Contemporary public choice approaches (Colin Jennings)**

Discussion questions

1. How can elections be likened to an economic market place with buyers and sellers? Using economic logic, if there are assumed to be only two parties motivated only by winning the election, what is the likely outcome? Is this outcome good?
2. Do politicians require constraints? To what extent do you think electoral concerns constrain politicians? What do we mean by a political principal/agent problem?
3. Other than elections, what other sorts of institutions may be useful in attempting to resolve the principal/agent problem?

Core reading

Andrew Hindmoor – *Rational Choice (Political Analysis)* (2006) – chapters 1, 2 & 7

Further reading

Joseph Stiglitz – *Economics of the Public Sector* (2000) – chapter 7

**Week 11 – The role of institutions: Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance (Christel Koop)**

Discussion questions

1. What are institutions?
2. What role do institutions play in the political economy?

Core reading


Further reading


**Week 12 – Institutional theory and the economy (Christel Koop)**

**Discussion questions**

- How have studies in institutional economics applied the concept of institution?
- How have studies in political science applied the concept of institution?

**Core reading**


**Further reading**


