Course Description

This seminar will introduce students to the thought and writings of Rosa Luxemburg, Raya Dunayevskaya and Hannah Arendt. Devoted to the advancement of radical politics, Luxemburg and Dunayevskaya represent two singular cases in the history of philosophy's encounter with activism. Educated in Marxist philosophy, both thinkers chose public activism as the most coherent translation of Marx's program for the success of revolutionary action. A political activist and co-founder of the Spartacus League, Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) offered lucid and provocative reflections on the possibilities of reconciling political theory with social action. Her work on the idea and experience of spontaneity emphasized the dilemma between political party discipline and the people's right to act. A close reader of Luxemburg and militant of the Marxist Humanist movement in America, Raya Dunayevskaya

Eugène Delacroix, *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830)
(1910-1987) revisited Rosa Luxemburg’s original questions incorporating the new unresolved interrogations of her era. The Cold War, political authoritarianism, the new feminist wave, racial conflict and anti-colonialism, formed part of Dunayevskaya’s new understanding of Luxemburg’s theory in the context of the new historical context after the Second World War. Dunayevskaya’s correspondence with Herbert Marcuse, philosopher of the Frankfurt School, evidenced the degree of her commitment to the resolution of ongoing social conflict and to the discovery of effective and long-term political strategy.

Hannah Arendt offers a self-critical approach to revolutionary politics. Her works revisit the history of radical leaders, including Luxemburg, confronting the shortcomings of radicalism and the possibilities for the restoration of an authentic political renewal in the postwar context. Arendt’s work contributes to de-mythicize the orthodox Left, proposing a critical approach to the study of political theory and historical action. Her thinking process evidences the maturity of the political theorist empowered by historical knowledge and fearless of public polemics. Arendt’s spirit of self-criticism and intellectual autonomy shows the perfect embodiment of the revolutionary spirit committed to the coherence between theory and practice.

The study of these three female thinkers narrates the story of the adoption, the adaptation and the transformation of a theory for radical change free of any ideological dogmatism. The seminar will discuss important connections to the history of social movements and the evolution of feminism worldwide. Prior exposure to political theory is highly recommended, although not required.

**Course Objectives**

1. Students will learn to close-read and critically analyze the philosophical writings of Rosa Luxemburg and Raya Dunayevskaya comparing similarities and differences in both theoretical discourses.
2. Students will reflect on the connections between intellectual work and political activism. They will explore the ways in which active political life serves a constructive test measuring the feasibility of theoretical programs.
3. Students will distinguish the different adaptations and modification of Marxist theory in later militant generations. They will reflect critically on the limits of revolutionary theory and the shortcomings of radical activism.
4. Students will establish parallels between Marx, Luxemburg, Arendt and Dunayevskaya’s vision of social change and recent forms of social protest including the counter-globalization movement, Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring.
5. Students will work on an original research project and submit a final research paper on a topic relevant to the seminar’s discussion and readings. They will actively and consistently engage with the reading material through weekly short-written responses to the assigned texts of the week.
Course Rationale

This course is designed as a two-hour seminar discussion. Each session will be devoted to a close analysis and reading of the assigned text(s) and author(s). I will offer a 10-15 minute introduction to each session, offering context to the life and times of the author(s) in question. Discussion will require attentive reading of the assigned material and active participation. The course syllabus (pp.4-8) outlines the themes, central ideas and reading assignments for each session. Students are required to reflect on the three listed topics underneath each session's title. I will email discussion questions and general comments related to the assigned material two days before the seminar for students to prepare for the upcoming meeting. Suggested readings and other sources will also be posted in the course's website in Columbia's Courseworks.

There will be two screenings related to the seminar's topic: Die Bleierne Zeit/ Two German Sisters, Margarethe von Trotta (1981) and Arendt, Margarethe von Trotta (2012).

Course Requirements

Active Class Participation 20%
Weekly Reading Responses 20%
Bibliography and Abstract of Final Paper 10%
Final Paper 50%
Required Texts


Rethinking Marxism:
The Philosophy and Activism of Rosa Luxemburg and Raya Dunayevskaya

Part I: Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919)

Session I: Rosa Luxemburg as Political Theorist
First Encounters with Marxist Theory
Luxemburg's Original Proposals
Revolution in Fin-de-Siècle Europe

Readings

Rosa Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution (1900)

Leszek Kolakowski, “Rosa Luxemburg and the Revolutionary Left”, Main Currents of Marxism (Norton, 2005)


Session II: The Debate on Political Strategies and Priorities
The Internal Divisions of the Marxists
The Problem of Dogmatism
Adopting and Adapting Marx to Historical Reality

Readings

Rosa Luxemburg, Leninism or Marxism (1904)


Session III: The Practice of Radical Ideas
Questions of Collective Organization
Masses, Leaders and Intellectuals
The Context of Political Struggles
Readings

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike* (1906)
*The National Question* (1909)
*Theory and Practice* (1910)


Session IV: Luxemburg’s Critique of Imperialism and Warfare
Luxemburg’s Opposition to World War I
Luxemburg Defines Empire
War’s Capital

Readings

Rosa Luxemburg, *Peace Utopias* (1911)
*The Idea of May Day on the March* (1913)
*The Old Mole* (1917)
*Speeches and Letters on War and Revolution* (1918-1919)

Session V: Luxemburg’s Interpretation of Russian Revolution
Spontaneity and Organization Revisited
Marx after the Bolshevik Success
New Alternatives for Radical Action

Readings

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (1918)

Session VI: Luxemburg on the State and the Rights of Women
Prisoner of Consciousness
Women’s Rights as Measure of Social Prosperity
Women and The Fate of Political Leadership

Readings

Rosa Luxemburg, *Letters from Prison* (1916-1918)
*What are the Leaders Doing* (1919)
*Writings on Women* (1902-1914)
Part II: Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-1987)

Session VII: Dunayevskaya’s Reading of Luxemburg
The Contributions of Luxemburg to Radical Militancy
Luxemburg’s Improvements to Marxist Theory

Readings

Raya Dunayevskaya, A Letter on Rosa Luxemburg and Capital Accumulation (1943)
Luxemburg’s Theory of Accumulation. How it Differed with Marx and Lenin (1946)

Raya Dunayevskaya, Stalinists Falsify Marxism Anew. Teaching Marxism in the Soviet Union (1948)

Session VIII: Dunayevskaya’s Version of Feminism
Women’s Revolutionary Promise
The Conditions for the Evolution of the Movement
The State of Feminism in Dunayevskaya’s Time

Readings

Raya Dunayevskaya, “Rosa Luxemburg as Theoretician, as Activist, as Internationalist”, “The Women’s Liberation Movement as Revolutionary Force and Reason”, Rosa Luxemburg, Women’s Liberation and Marx’s Philosophy of Revolution (1983)

Film: Die Bleierne Zeit/ Two German Sisters, Margarethe von Trotta (1981)

Session IX: Dunayevskaya on 1968
Marxist-Humanism in 1968
The Possibilities of Praxis
Philosophy’s Interaction with the Historical World

Readings

Practicing Philosophy and Revolution, May 1968
From Marx to Marxist-Humanism, 1969
Praxis and the responsibility of intellectuals, 1971
Marxist-Humanism’s concept of ‘Subject’, 1971
Women’s liberation, then and now, 1971
Philosophy & Revolution, 1973
What is philosophy? What is revolution? What is anti-imperialism?, 1979
‘On political divides and philosophic new beginnings’, 1987

Session X: Hannah Arendt on Revolution
Rethinking Revolution
Arendt on Violence

Readings
Arendt, “The Revolutionary Tradition and its Lost Treasure”, The Portable Hannah Arendt

Session XI: Arendt on Luxemburg
Hannah Arendt and Rosa Luxemburg: Parallels

Readings

Session XII: Human Rights Polemics
Human Rights as Concept
Human Rights as Practice

Readings

Session XIII: Renovation of Democracy
Arendt’s Definitions of Democracy

Readings

Session XIV: Conscience & Agency
Judgment, Guilt, Reparations
Parameters of Political Correctness
Responsibility and Individual Will

Arendt, Excerpts from Eichmann in Jerusalem
Margarethe von Trotta, Arendt