

**Katz Seminar: The Importance of the Critique of Religion in Marx's Thought**  
**Wendy Brown, University of California, Berkeley**  
**April 2008**

In the "Introduction" to the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Marx wrote: "the critique of religion is the prerequisite of every critique." What might this mean? That all critique must begin by grasping and exposing religious illusions about its object? Or that a critique of religion is the necessary first step to critique of all human social practices and organization? Or that critique is no longer necessary once the illusions and errors of religion are exposed? Or that religion is the tablet on which the arts of critique are developed? Or even perhaps that the critique of religion reveals most of what we need to know about what man is, wants and could be?

This seminar will begin with Feuerbach's critique of religion, which strongly shaped Marx's own thinking about both critique and religion. We will then examine Marx's critiques of religion and the ways in which this critique becomes the basis of his early critiques of political economy, idealist philosophy, and the constitutional state. Finally, we will consider the ways that a concern with capitalism's religiosity emerges in Marx's late work, and then consider the importance of this dimension of Marx's critique of political economy for understandings of neoliberalism, secularization, religion's contemporary renaissance, and the encounter of religion and capitalism today.

**Session I: Feuerbach's Critique of Religion**

Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989)

I (Introduction), II (God as a Being of the Understanding) and XIX (The Essential Standpoint of Religion)

**Session II: Marx's Critique of Feuerbach and Bauer**

Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", 143-44 (from the Marx-Engels Reader, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. R. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1979)\*)

Marx, "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole" 106-109

Marx, "On the Jewish Question", 26-52

**Session III: Marx's Critique of the Religiosity of Hegel and of the Constitutional State**

Marx, "Introduction" to the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, 53-65

Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. J. O'Malley, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 19-40, 65-81

#### **Session IV: Marx's Critique of Capital's Religiosity**

Marx, "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society," 101-105  
from *Capital*: Preface, 1<sup>st</sup> German Edition (294-298), Afterward, 2<sup>nd</sup> German Edition  
(299-302), "Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" (319-329)  
Philip Goodchild, "Value" from *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety*  
William Connolly, "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine," from *Capitalism and  
Christianity, American Style*

\*All Marx readings are from *The Marx-Engels Reader* unless otherwise indicated.