

HIST 14100, REES 26015, SOSC 24200

Introduction to Russian Civilization III

Spring 2023

University of Chicago Center in Paris
Professor Scott Gehlbach, gehlbach@uchicago.edu
Monday–Thursday, 9:30–11:45, with Friday excursions

Course description

When taken following Introduction to Russian Civilization I and II, Introduction to Russian Civilization III meets the general education requirement in Humanities, Civilization Studies, and the Arts. This year, the course explores the nature of state socialism, or “communism”—the political and economic system that governed much of the world’s population during the twentieth century—and the transition from that system to other modes of governance. This story can be told from various perspectives, not all of them “Russian.” The material this year emphasizes the Ukrainian experience, which is both central to the history of communism and tragically illustrative of its human toll. That said, the lessons of state socialism and the postcommunist transition apply to other countries in the (former) Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—and also, to some extent, to China, Vietnam, North Korea, and Cuba, where the Communist Party retains political power.

Grading

Your grade in the course will be governed by your performance in four areas:

- (25 percent) Class participation
- (25 percent) Discussion posts
- (50 percent) Final exam

The participation grade will be based on attendance and contributions to the class discussion. If for some reason you are unable to attend class, please let me know in advance. Unexplained absences from class will negatively affect your participation grade.

Each afternoon, I will post a pair of questions about the next day’s readings on Canvas. You should choose one of these two questions to answer, using **not more than 100 words**. Grading of your responses will be “coarse,” with two points given for a 1) well-formulated response that is 2) written in clear prose, one point for a response that fails to satisfy one of (1) and (2), and zero points for a response that fails to satisfy either. I will deduct a point, with a minimum score of zero, if your response exceeds 100 words.

The final exam will be given only on the last day of class. I will say more later about exam format.

This course is not graded on a curve. If you feel that any assignment has been unfairly or improperly graded, then you may request that it be regraded. Your request should be accompanied by a cover letter indicating the source of your concern. I will regrade the entire assignment, meaning that your revised grade may be either higher or lower than what you originally received, depending on the nature of any errors in the original grading.

Readings and course schedule

You should already have *Red Plenty* (Francis Spufford, 2012). All other readings are available on Canvas.

May 8: The socialist experiment

Red Plenty, Part One, Chapter 1 (“The Prodigy”).

Plokhyy, Serhii. 2021. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. Chapter 20.

Afternoon screening: *Mr. Jones* (Agnieszka Holland, 2019, 119 min)

May 9: Collectivization and industrialization

Red Plenty, Part One, Chapter 4 (“White Dust”).

Markevich, Andrei, Natalya Naumenko, and Nancy Qian. 2022. “The Causes of Ukrainian Famine Mortality, 1932-33.” Working paper.

Gehlbach, Scott. 2021. “What Did Stalinist Industrialization Accomplish?” A conversation with Sergei Guriev, available at [Broadstreet](#).

May 10: The “classical” socialist system

Red Plenty, Part Two, Chapter 1 (“Shadow Prices”).

Kornai, János. 1992. *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 15.

May 11: The “classical” socialist system, cont.

Red Plenty, Part Four (“The Method of Balances,” “Prisoner’s Dilemma,” and “Favours”).

May 12: Excursion

Paris Commune walking tour.

May 15: Collapse

Havel, Václav. 2018 [1978]. “The Power of the Powerless.” *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. 32(2):353–408.

Plokhyy, Serhii. 2021. *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. Chapter 25.

In-class screening: *People Power* (Part of the PBS series *People’s Century*, 55 min)

May 16: Memory

Shevel, Oxana. 2009. “The Politics of Memory in a Divided Society: A Comparison of Post-Franco Spain and Post-Soviet Ukraine.” *Slavic Review*. 70(1):137–164.

Rozenas, Arturas, and Yuri M. Zhukov. 2019. “Mass Repression and Political Loyalty: Evidence from Stalin’s ‘Terror by Hunger’.” *American Political Science Review*. 113(2):569–583.

May 17: Economic transformation

Fischer, Stanley, and Alan Gelb. 1991. “The Process of Socialist Economic Transformation.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 5(4):91–105.

Balcerowicz, Leszek. 1994. “Understanding Postcommunist Transitions.” *Journal of Democracy*. 5(4):75–89.

May 18: National holiday

Center closed.

May 19: Excursion

Cimetière Russe, Sainte Geneviève des Bois.

May 22: Privatization

Frydman, Roman, Andrzej Rapaczinski, and John S. Earle. 1993. *The Privatization Process in Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States*. Budapest: CEU Press. Pages 83–129 (Ukraine).

Brown, J. David, John S. Earle, Solomiya Shpak, and Volodymyr Vakhitov. 2019. “Is Privatization Working in Ukraine? New Estimates from Comprehensive Manufacturing Firm Data, 1989–2013.” *Comparative Economic Studies*. 61(1):1–35.

May 23: Initial outcomes

Svejnar, Jan. 2002. “Transition Economies: Performance and Challenges.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 16(1):3–28.

Afternoon screening: *Leviathan* (Andrey Zvyagintsev, 2014, 140 min).

May 24: Evolution

Earle, John S., Solomiya Shpak, Anton Shirikov, and Scott Gehlbach. 2021. “The Oligarch Vanishes: Defensive Ownership, Property Rights, and Political Connections.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*. 17(4):513–546.

May 25: Final exam

In-class exam.

Optional: Fun/challenging reading for trip home

Shalizi, Cosma. 2012. “In Soviet Union, Optimization Problem Solves *You*.” Available at [Crooked Timber](#).