This module provides an introduction to the main anthropological approaches to economic life. The first part of the module explores classical analytical frameworks for understanding how people live and organise their lives in different ways. The second part focuses on contemporary issues surrounding value creation and contestation. Students should be aware that this module is not intended to be an economics course for anthropologists and others. Instead, grounded in the comparative and ethnographically-based discipline of anthropology, it brings together a wide range of regional, cultural and historical material. We will examine market and nonmarket economies, gift giving and commodity exchange, state and alternative currencies, human and posthuman economies. The aim of the module is to broaden the notion of ‘the economy’ and introduce students to the expansive and inclusive world within which people mobilize action.

In addition to the required readings set each week, students may find the following handbooks useful. These are all introductory and offer a broad overview of key debates in economic anthropology.


To complement the focused insights offered by articles and book chapters, students may also find the following monographs useful. These offer comprehensive and detailed insights into the economic practices discussed in the module.


Teaching: 2 hours per week
Lecture: Wednesday 12-1pm in Arts Seminar Room 3
Tutorial group 1: Thursday 12-1pm in Arts Seminar Room 7
Tutorial group 2: Thursday 1-2pm in Arts Seminar Room 9
Film screening: Wednesday 14 March at 1-3pm in School 1
Office hours: Wednesday 1-2pm in Room 58, School V, United College.
Alternative contact: Via email, mmh20@st-andrews.ac.uk

Course assessment: 3000 words essay (50%) and a 3 hours exam (50%)
Essay deadline: Monday 19 March 2018

**Week 1: Gift economies and the Kula ring**

Gift economies were central to foundational debates in economic anthropology and continue to intrigue us. What is a ‘gift economy’? How are they governed? And to what extent can they be seen to form the basis of society?

**Required readings:**


**Supplementary readings:**


**Week 2: Reciprocity**

The formalist-substantivist debate essentially concerned the kinds of explanations and models that could be used to understand economic life cross-culturally. To what extent can we assume generalized utilitarianism and maximization to be universal? Are markets always ‘embedded’? And what role is played by the natural environment?
Required readings:


Supplementary readings:


Week 3: Debt and credit

Anthropology’s interest in debt and credit goes back to the very beginnings of the discipline. Why have debt and credit been such powerful mechanisms across the world? How do they relate to notions such as guilt, sin and redemption? And what can we learn from the escalating concerns about ‘national debt’?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:

• Hickel, Jason. 2016. “To Deal with Climate Change We Need a New Financial System”. The Guardian 5 November.
• James, Deborah. 2014. "‘Deeper into a Hole?’ Borrowing and Lending in South Africa." Current Anthropology vol. 55, issue S9, pp. S17-S29.
• Stout, Noelle. 2016. “# Indebted: Disciplining the Moral Valence of Mortgage Debt Online." Cultural Anthropology vol. 31, issue 1, pp. 82-106.

Week 4: Money and spheres of exchange

Studies of money have not only been central to economic anthropology, but also offered important insights to anthropology more generally. What can we learn from the cross-cultural study of money objects? What are its challenges? And how can we try to overcome such challenges?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:

• Zelizer, Viviana. 1997. The social meaning of money.
Week 5: The social life of things

Value is embodied in exchanged objects. If we focus on the objects rather than the transactional mode, what can we learn about exchange, commodification and value? Why do we give and receive objects? And how to reciprocate?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:


Week 6: Currencies

Although national banks often play a central role in managing and authorizing currencies, they are rarely the sole contributors of value. How do currencies become valuable? What is value? And what are currencies?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:

• Maurer, Bill, Taylor C. Nelms, and Lana Swartz. 2013. “‘When Perhaps the Real Problem is Money Itself!’: The practical materiality of Bitcoin”. Social Semiotics vol. 23, issue 2, pp. 261-277.

Week 7: Anthropology of finance

Anthropologists have in recent years brought attention to the cultural underpinnings of financial systems. To what extent is the Homo Economicus assumed by Western orthodox financial theory and regulation illusory? What are the visions of corporate capitalism? And how are risks and uncertainties experienced, communicated and managed?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:


Week 8: Global markets
The production and accumulation of capital is a profoundly geographical and spatial affair. How are these global markets rationalized and justified by financial and other directly-involved professionals? And to what extent can global markets be seen as collective experiments?

Required readings:

Supplementary readings:
Week 9: Cosmoeconomies

Religious practice and economic life are often closely intertwined and in ways that are not necessarily oppositional. How does the presence and participation of spirit beings affect our economic practices? How can we approach such economies? And what does it tell us about human economic agency?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:


Week 10: Posthuman economies

Posthumanism demands that we recognize the existence of a plurality of worlds and beings. What constitutes ‘economic life’ if we allow for such a decentering of ‘the human’ and open up for such a radical questioning of self and other, essence, consciousness, intelligence, reason, agency, intimacy, life and, not least, society?

Required readings:


Supplementary readings:
• De la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. Earth Beings: Ecologies of practice across Andean worlds.

Week 11: Economies of/in the Anthropocene

Atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen has proposed that the influence of human behaviour on the Earth’s atmosphere is now so significant that we have now entered a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene. What are the implications of the Anthropocene’s associated timescale and ecology for questions of economic life? To what extent is human presence a disturbance? And what kinds of economic practices may flourish under conditions when humans have become a ‘force of nature’?

Required readings:

Supplementary readings:
• Haraway, Donna. 2015. Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making kin. Environmental Humanities, vol. 6, issue 1, pp.159-165.
• Tsing, Anna. 2015. The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins.