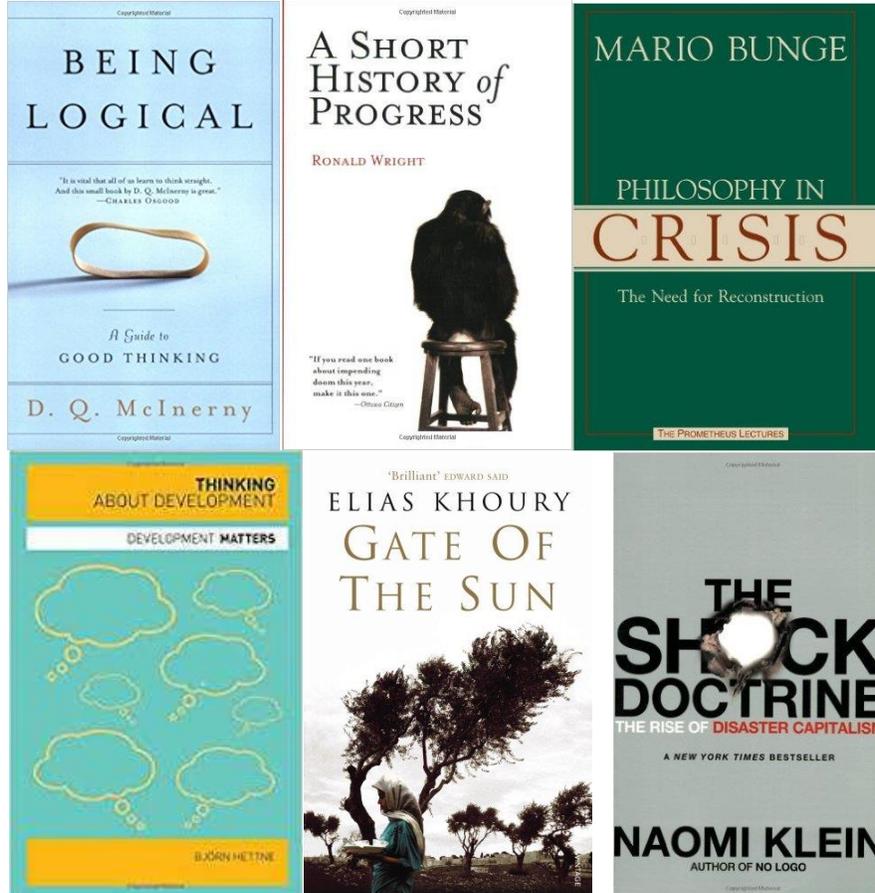


First Year Seminar (FYS)
Spring 2018 - Tuesday & Thursday
The West versus the Rest: Challenges of Modernity

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1. Title and Description:

This course aims to situate first-year students within the nervous system of “Liberal Arts Education” by introducing the interconnectedness of its disciplines. The weaving platform is studying the controversies over “modernity.” Examining solutions to world problems in culture, wealth, and power are sampled within western and non-western contexts and how all stand to benefit and lose by modern ways of living. The readings draw from diverse disciplines (i.e., global history, systematic philosophy, humanistic ethics, environmental urbanization, and third-world suffering under the dominant political economy) in order to explore the fruits of modernity, its multifaceted predicament, and the strife over the possible solutions.

Rethinking western-centrism, realizing cultural pluralism, enhancing global development, achieving world peace, and strengthening religious dialogues have been important goals of “Liberal Arts Education.” Yet, there is rarely a unified platform that can address these issues collectively and coherently in a single class. The following micro and macro problems illustrate the methodological quandary.

From the micro-social point of view, I am in freezing Minnesota googling a Caribbean restaurant on my expensive iPhone, which is designed in Silicon Valley, manufactured in inhumane conditions in

Asia, hacked by adversary powers to the USA, and under surveillance by the American NSA due to alleged counter-terrorism measures! My iPhone exemplifies the interconnected web of modern predicaments.

From the global macro-point of view, we are living several contradictions; the welfare state is declining in America while privatization by the billionaire class is on the rise; industrial jobs have been moving to developing countries while human and labor rights in these countries are under attack; the intellectual dreams of progress are on low-ebb while radical groups and fanatic ideologies are metastasizing; individual and sexual rights and whims are proliferating while cultural wars are disturbing solid inherited traditions; quality of life is rising while environmental degradation is threatening our very existence; and new atheism is screaming while religious identities are becoming more exclusive. What is common among all these macro-contradictions? It is the web of modernity that weaves all these threads, both positive and negative, which constitute contemporary life.

2. Format:

Classes, other than laboratory work and physical exercise, can be divided into three types. These are professor-centered, textbook-centered, and discussion-centered. The first is like a class on classical Chinese or Arabic history where the professor reveals a completely unknown topic to students and therefore students' contribution is minimal; the second is in elementary mathematics or foreign language classes where the textbook dominates daily schedule and exercises; the third is similar to a literary or intellectual history class where students' engagement with the readings, the professor, and their classmates is the objective. In this third type, completing the readings is of the utmost necessity. Students will exercise and demonstrate development of oral and written critical responses to course readings and discussions, as well as develop, substantiate, and present their more considered ideas in a final paper and final presentation.

3. Readings

1. *Being Logical: A Guide to Good Thinking* by D.Q. McInerney (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005).
2. *A Short History of Progress* by Ronald Wright (Carroll & Graf, 2005).
3. *Thinking about Development: Development Matters* by Björn Hettne (London: Zed Books, 2013)
4. *Philosophy in Crisis: The Need for Reconstruction* by Mario Bunge (Prometheus Books, 2001).
5. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* by Naomi Klein (Picador, 2008).
6. *Gate of the Sun: Bab El Chams* by Ilyas Khuri (Vintage Books, 2006)

4. Assignments:

- **5 Short (1-page) critical responses to readings** **30%**
 - **In-Class daily participation, assessed at midterm and final** **15%**
 - **Midterm Exam with identification of the terms and their significance and short answer sections** **20%**
- Final Paper (7-8 pages)**
- **Oral Presentation** **10%**
 - **Final Copy** **25%**

Students will submit five critical responses to each of the five books we will read over the course of the semester. These responses are to be submitted on a Sakai Forum on one of the mornings before we discuss each book and will form the basis of classroom discussion of the readings.

Each response should apply the formal and informal "logical fallacies" presented in the book *Being Logical* to any relevant cases from American media, local, or non-western cultures. These responses will aim to develop student analysis away from merely summarizing the facts and arguments of the readings toward active and engaged knowledge of the ways in which these readings prove sound in their

argumentation and shed light on western and non-western cultures. The aim of these writings is to facilitate critical analysis of the texts at the levels of argumentation and applicability.

A midterm exam will test students' comprehension of some of the basic concepts and schools of thought found in the course texts that animate the debates over modernity and westernization. One section will focus on central terms and their significance. One section will ask students to compare perspectives and assess some of the arguments that they have encountered up to this point. The midterm exam will provide an opportunity for students to assess their ability to navigate these sometimes abstract and jargon-laden debates.

The five response papers are intended to develop students' critical analytical writing skills toward the development of a final, cumulative paper that puts forth the students' overall assessment of the debates engaged in class discussion and reading over the course of the semester.

In the last three classes, a draft of the paper will be presented to the class for discussion and revised for final submission. Students are asked to orally present a summary of all critical responses, and explain final evaluation of the fallacies in the readings in light in our global culture.

5. Outcomes and Assessment:

All writing assignments will be assessed based on the quality of the writing's central argument, cogency of supporting analysis, strength of evidence and quality of writing. The oral presentation will be assessed based on the clarity of the presentation, its focus and balance, and the mastery of the material demonstrated. Participation will be assessed at midterm and final with consideration of attendance, quantity and quality of contributions and with consideration of each student's self-evaluation provided to the instructor.

1. Cognitive Outcomes: "What will students completing this course know?"

Students will be able to detect formal and informal fallacies regarding big historical trajectories and recognize the pros and cons of intellectual and social progress. They are also expected to define and describe the cultural, political, and economic institutions that shaped the modern society.

2. Behavioral Outcomes: "What will students completing this course be able to do?"

Students will be able to coordinate between various and conflicting normative proposals based on wide factual considerations in order to find the cumulative force and formulate pragmatic solutions in lengthy coherent arguments. They are also expected to develop the skill of objecting to incorrect arguments, cite counterexamples, and reach different positions when their arguments are refuted.

3. Affective Outcomes: "What will students completing this course care about or think?"

After this class, students should have a strong grasp of the following themes and orientations:

- A. Evolution of human cultures based on environmental and social constraints *increasing the sense of global-environmental citizenship;*
- B. The problem of incoherence in many philosophical doctrines and how to achieve consistency, all of which would *strengthen the comprehension of intellectual worldviews,*
- C. Literary reaction to the problematic cost of modernization, which *amplifies the possibility of taking alternative roads,*
- D. Viable urban and environmental solutions to modernity which *can save us from unsustainable and dead-end progress,*
- E. Causes of international insecurity and local unrest due to conflicting agendas which *should provide a clearer path to international peace.*

6. Schedule:

This class is proposed for Spring 2018, from 9:30 to 10:45 on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

7. Internal or External Support:

There is no internal or external support associated with the class.

8. Synopsis for Dissemination:

This course aims to situate first-year students within the nervous system of “Liberal Arts Education” by introducing the interconnectedness of its disciplines. Examination of the challenges of western and non-western perspectives will take place within the following disciplines, i.e., global history, systematic philosophy, humanistic ethics, environmental urbanization, and third-world resistance. This weaving platform constitutes an interdisciplinary study of the controversies over “modernity.”