Modernity: Toward a New Conception

Instructor: Christopher S. Gibson

1. Course Summary
This course defines Modernity as a way of thinking, a philosophy that grounds much of the developed world today which emphasizes rationality, efficiency, and logic. Stemming from these central assumptions, Modernity extends to our economic system, (focusing on free market competition, meritocracy, efficiency) the arts (focusing on transferrable commodities as art), ethics (emphasis on utilitarianism, consequentialism). In order to survive in the the system of Modernity, people must accept such principles and compete for survival.

This course examines the assumptions of Modernity theoretically through philosophy (ethics and political philosophy) as well as practically through important issues facing the world today (the environmental crisis and economic disparity).

Students will read about philosophers, examine their philosophical ideas through specific cases, and have both theoretical and practical discussions, paving way toward a new conception of Modernity, a new definition of the times we live in.

2. Course Requirements

1. **Weekly Two-page summary & response for readings:**
   a. One-page summary
   b. One-page response
        Double spaced, A4, Times New Roman or similar font. Due at the end of <u>each class</u>.

2. **Weekly student presentations (rotation):** In addition to the instructor's lecture, one student will be responsible for giving a short presentation on the theme, followed by a discussion.

3. **Midterm paper & Presentation:** (Due at midterm)

4. **Final paper & Presentation:** (Due in final class)

Note
The course acts as a wide survey on the theme of modernity-reference to political philosophy, sociology, aesthetic philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, literature- and many more are welcome- but please consult with the instructor before using the sources for your papers or presentations.

3. Class Schedule & Readings

Note:
All presentations will take place on Sundays.

	Date	Class Theme and Readings
1	8/30/2014 & 8/31/2014	**Introduction and Overview** **MODERNITY: TOWARD A NEW CONCEPTION** -Discussion- "What is the world like today?" -Explanation of assignments -Choose Weekly Student Presenters
2	9/6/2014 & 9/7/2014	**THE PRE-MODERN, MODERNITY, AND THE POST-MODERN** *The Philosophy Book* Pre-modern: Confucius (p.36-39) Modernity: Descartes (p.118-123) Post-modern: Nietzsche (214-221) **Optional: Derrida** (p.308-313) *Renaissance and the Age of Reason* p.100-101 *The Age of Revolution* p.144-145 **Student presentations** **Response Topic:** If you had to choose, which way of thinking do you prefer? The Pre-modern, modernity or the post-modern? Explain.
3	9/20/2014 & 9/21/2014	**THE LIGHT AND DARK OF MODERNITY:** **Rationalization, Commodification, Alienation** Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* Adorno and Horkheimer: *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* *2* Student Presenters:_____ **Response Topic:** "Compare modernity with the pre-modern. Do you think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? Why or why not?"

	Date	Class Theme and Readings
4	9/27/2014 & 9/28/2014	**ECONOMIC DISPARITY: KARL MARX vs. ADAM SMITH** -Class Debate: Socialism vs. Free Market Economy -Go over Midterm paper topics *The Philosophy Book* -Karl Marx (p.198-203) -Adam Smith(p.160-163) -Bill Clinton: Yale Commencement (2011- YouTube) 2 Student Presenters:_____ **Response Topic:** "Argue for Marx (strong regulation) or Smith (free market). Which do you think is correct?"

	Date	Class Theme and Readings
5	9/29/2014 & 9/30/2014	**THE ETHICS OF "MODERNITY":** The Person vs. The Result: Kant's Deontology and Mill's Utilitarianism *The Philosophy Book* -Immanuel Kant (p.166-171) -John Stuart Mill (p.190-193) -Jeremy Bentham **Student Presentations:** **Read Midterm papers to class** **DUE: Midterm Paper (3 pages double-spaced)** **Midterm Paper Topics:** 1. What is modernity as you understand it? 2. Choose deontology or utilitarianism and argue your perspective. Include a counterexample. 3. Do you think the light of modernity outweighs the dark? Use reasons and examples to argue your point.
6	10/4/2014 & 10/5/2014	**RETURNING TO THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC DISPARITY** **Midterm Paper review- tips on writing** -Jeffrey Sachs: The End of Poverty (excerpt) Decide Final Paper topics- confirm with instructor **No student presentations**

	Date	Class Theme and Readings
7	10/11/2014 & 10/12/2014	**POLITICAL INEQUALITY & RIGHTS:** **THE SOCIAL CONTRACT (ROUSSEAU)** **OUR RIGHT TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (THOREAU)** vs. **Tradition is our guide (Burke)** Case Study -Woodrow Wilson and WW I: Self-determination and chaos *The Philosophy Book* -Jean-Jacques Rousseau (p.154-159) -Henry David Thoreau (p.204) -Edmund Burke (p.172-173) 2 Student Presenters:_____ **Response Topic:** In what situation should we exercise our right to civil disobedience in Japan?
8	10/25/2014 & 10/26/2014	**PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF MODERN ENLIGHTENMENT:** **PLATO & ARISTOTLE** **Plato vs. Aristotle** **(Transcendent truth vs. truth around us)** *The Philosophy Book* -Plato (p.51-55) -Aristotle (p.56-63) **DUE: Final Paper (First Draft)** (4-5 Pages A4 double-spaced) **Topics:** 1. In your view, **what could be a new conception of Modernity?** How could you argue for the importance of your conception (definition) based on philosophical, political, economic or historical reasons? Defend your conception. 2. **What thinker** covered in the course so far **do you identify with the most?** Defend his position while using your own ideas and examples. 3. Topic of your choice (needs approval from instructor 2 weeks in advance)

	Date	Class Theme and Readings
9	11/8/2014 & 11/9/2014	**ART AND BEAUTY: WHAT IS "BEAUTIFUL" TODAY?** **The Aesthetic of Modernity** Excerpts from Heidegger *The Philosophy Book* Student Presenter:_____ Final Paper returned with corrections
10	11/15/2014 & 11/16/2014	**REVIEW OF THE COURSE** Each student present on one part of course Free Discussion on Modernity **DUE: Final Paper corrected (final draft)** **Dress Rehearsal: Final Presentations**
11	11/29/2014 & 11/30/2014	**MODERNITY: TOWARD A NEW CONCEPTION** **Final Student Presentations (5 minutes + Q&A)** Conclusion: Proposals toward a New Modernity?

Lecture 1: Introduction
Modernity: Toward a New Conception

Christopher S. Gibson

a) Why Modernity?

In short, rethinking "Modernity" means to rethink today's world. Discussing "Modernity" means a discussion of the world we live in today and a discussion on what we want to do about it.

This course will focus on an examination of the light and dark of the world today, and will focus on what philosophical roots underlie our thoughts and the philosophical assumptions we live by. By examining the roots and the empirical reality of the world, it may be possible for us to theorize beyond the status quo and imagine a new world in the future. We should not formulate our conception merely as an utopian vision (although some utopian visions can also be useful if connected to reality) but as one that is in dialogue with the current world and its historical and philosophical roots.

Theorizing is our chance to be critical of the principles we are expected to accept in school or in society, and widen our thoughts into unknown territory, going beyond the norms of our generation. Examination of past thinkers may also yield some insight into the future. Often, we find a dialectic inherent in everything, and by bringing out the light and dark inherent in each mode of thought, we may be able to find wisdom.

b) What is Modernity?

A basic premise for this class is that the world we live in today, whether we like it or not, is inescapably modern.

Modernity is here defined as an acceptance of principles that are in accordance with the belief that rationality, science, technology and logic provide answers to our questions, while "pre-modern" principles, like superstition or religion do not, or only provide one part of the answer. A philosophical assumption that favors Modernity prioritizes this mode of thought over any other.

Historically, the world can be described to have seen two basic types of frameworks- pre-modern and modern. The pre-modern world is the world before the phenomenal advancement of technology and rational thought we see today. The modern world, after the dawn of the Western Enlightenment (especially since the 16th century or so), is said to have seen tremendous scientific, rational, and

technological progress hitherto unseen in history[1]. Today's technological world can be seen as an extension upon the premises of the Enlightenment- that by following our reason and our scientific principles, we will be guided to a better world.

An emphasis on the importance of logic, reasoning, and evidence-based thought- such as "clear and distinct ideas" (as **Descartes** puts it) -marks the turn of Enlightened thought. For the Enlightened man, what is considered valuable or "real" is what is definable and understandable by our rationality.

c) The Economic Side: Adam Smith (free market) vs. Karl Marx (socialism)

In terms of economics, the philosophy of **Adam Smith** may be responsible to a large degree in justifying the existence of the free market economy, which underlies the world of Modernity. The free market economy operates by assuming people act rationally in their trading of goods, and that the more efficiently we can trade our goods (or services), the better.

This kind of thought may convince us that churches, for instance, one of the most powerful institutions prior to the Enlightenment, are not necessary, if they do not provide "consumers" the kind of benefits they are looking for in a "product." If everything is on the free market, even religion is forced to justify itself as a type of commodity. The great wave toward the commodification of everything was criticized and analyzed by many thinkers including **Max Weber** (considered the "founder of sociology) or **Karl Marx** (a great thinker who influenced the philosophies of socialism and communism).

To put it another way, "Modernity" is a way of thinking that focuses on the "now". Modern essentially means "now". For instance, the technology of today will no doubt be replaced by the technology of tomorrow, and so the world is constantly revising itself, developing itself towards what is considered a *better* world. This way of thinking did not apply to a world dominated by religious priorities since the focus was on maintaining eternal ideas, such as God. Our focus across the world is now on change, and the type of change considered valuable is change that contributes to "development" towards a *better* world.

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[1] Of course, there is much debate as to whether the West was singlehandedly responsible for such advancement- China, the Middle East, and many other regions and cultures have advanced rational thinking and it is an oversimplification to assume rational thought dawned in modernity, but for the purpose of this discussion, this premise will be used.

d) The Assumptions of Modernity

Philosophically of importance is the assumption made when we call something *better.* What is this *better* world that all this development seeks to create? What is the philosophical basis- or more simply, why do we think that a more technological or more efficient world is a *better world?* Why is it, say, better to rely on explanations done through science and rationality, rather than through our families, religion or art?

Essentially, Modernity tells us to think in terms of cause and effect, like a scientist does. It might tell us that art or religion is important, but more in how we can measure its effect. If someone goes to church every week and is emotionally "happy," we could say there is a good effect produced by the church. However, the intrinsic value of religion is questioned in a "modern" mindset. It focuses on the measurable effect, but chooses not to have faith in something if it cannot be measured against some evidence.

f) Ethics: Utilitarianism vs. Deontology- man as a means or as an end?

Philosophically, in terms of ethics terminology, this can be thought of as a triumph of consequentialist utilitarianism over a deontological system of ethics. Consequence means the result (or effect) of an action. Consequentialism simply means we pay attention to the consequence of actions rather than their intention. By consequence, our current assumption focuses on empirical, measurable consequences.

The philosophies of the utilitarian **John Stuart Mill** or the deontological philosopher **Immanuel Kant** illustrate the tensions created by whether we prioritize the importance of consequence and overall measurable pleasure (utilitarianism) or focus on individual rights and intention regardless of consequence (deontology). Many examples can illustrate this problem.

An obvious problem caused by **deontological** ethics is that you cannot sacrifice one person to save a hundred. On the other hand, the problem for **utilitarianism** may be our overemphasis on the majority opinion. Democracy in a sense presupposes a utilitarianism that believes the majority opinion is more important than saving a single life. We can see disasters occurring in history because of a "tyranny of majority", as in the case where Adolf Hitler was *voted* into power in Nazi Germany in 1933, and subsequently went on a mission of genocide against the entire Jewish population.

e) Art and Beauty: uprooting art (modernity) vs. freeing art (also modernity)

The influence of Modernity has not only influenced our ethics, our politics and our economics. It has also influenced our conception and treatment of art and beauty.

In the context or art, **Martin Heidegger** said that the way art is treated as an object that can be uprooted and sent around museums globally was a very modern idea which ruined the meaning of art, which he thought is only meaningful if it remains true to its roots.

On the other side, the "uprooting" of art that **Heidegger** feared is also a way in which people can now more easily experience cultures from across the globe in museums near their homes. With the heterogeneous societies of today with families spread out across the globe, it also seems strange to focus on older conceptions of "tradition" or "roots" since they seem to be so out of sync with our lives.

g) Our verdict?: The light and dark of modernity at work

In short, it may be said Enlightenment principles have more or less won over the world, if we judge it by its influence and power over us. On the positive side, the world has become better in many ways. We have far more individual liberties than we did a century ago. Slavery has been eradicated in many places including the United States. People are able to do what they want to regardless of their ethnicity, family, or government. Many oppressive communist governments have been removed, such as those part of the USSR. Dictatorships such as Nazi Germany or Imperialist Japan have been removed from power and replaced by democratic, "Enlightened" governments that respect individual liberties and do not force people into government-directed tasks.

At least in developed countries such as the United States or Japan, at least implicitly, a philosophy of modernity (or "Western Enlightenment" philosophy) acts as a basis and justification for the system we are a part of. We accept directives that ground our society: work efficiently as individuals (rather than necessarily as part of a community, tribe or family), aim for top schools, aim for financial success, respect science, and use technology wherever it is advantageous in reaching our desired goals. On the other hand, we may be skeptical of religion, superstition, communism, dictatorships, or "backward" society which we have in effect "graduated from".

Perhaps we do not share such "modern" priorities in our lives and believe otherwise. Still it cannot be denied that our world favors

those who abide by principles of modernity and live in accordance with such priorities. It is very difficult to live in modern Tokyo or New York while completely distrusting science or technology, living outside the free market economy, or trying to convince people according to spiritual principles. Indeed, physically, such cities themselves are almost entirely urban. There is very little nature left, or anything that is not "manmade". Such cities epitomize modernity. Little is left up to nature and the whole place is controlled by man.

h) Two major problems: Environmental Crisis and Economic Disparity (Case Studies)

This leads into two major issues caused by today's modern world: the environmental disaster (including global warming and climate change) as well as a crisis in economic disparity, in countries such as the United States, and disparity across the globe. Some countries thrive on the free market principles put into place, while others are suffering.

Is the free market responsible for the economic disparity? Or is it the lack of free market? Some free market theorists (Stemming from Adam Smith's philosophy) may argue that today's world is actually *not* a free market and that is what is making problems. If there were a *purer* form of free market introduced, one that did not allow for massive inheritance of money and power, or government-industry interest group biases, lobbying and other issues caused between government and the market, we would have less problems and have a more equal society. Others say that the free market is mostly responsible for the chaos and terrible gap in wealth across the globe because it encourages financial transactions (such as those that resulted in the 2008 Financial Crisis) beyond our understanding. It is up to us to decide what is correct, but it is also important for us to make an effort to see the process of thought that goes into either side and understand why people think the way they do about today's problems.

i) Toward the "Next" Modernity?

In this course, students are free to argue however as they please. Arguing in favor of today's modernity is perfectly acceptable, as is arguing against it. The only thing that will be expected is to present deeply thought-out arguments and evidence to the class, rather than simply accept the premises without any examination. Evidence and reasoning must be used in order to argue a point.

More importantly, I would like to encourage students to present new ideas for how the world may be run, or how we might think about the world as a place to live in. Novelty and creativity are encouraged, but papers and ideas should have some form of dialogue with the thinkers, the society, or the politics of the past.

j) My argument: The Relevance of Art, Beauty and Philosophy

So what do I believe in? You have seen many possible topics and ways of analyzing and thinking about modernity, but I have not made my own point so clear. My own view is that the impoverishment of the world is due in part to an impoverishment of the conception of art and beauty.

Beauty of the Environment

Let me first talk about the environmental disaster. Somewhere along the line, we have become unable to consider nature as important to us. Or at least as important enough to keep the climate from overheating. We have abstracted ourselves into the world of technology and have learned how to ignore the natural environment around us. The world of finance has made us blind to the world we see, and has made us less concerned of the air we breathe.

Part of this comes from our inability to appreciate the beauty of nature. We have failed to appreciate nature as an end in itself, but as a means to our end- say, for more fuel for our cars or more power for our technology. We continue to make technology- spend billions of dollars on nuclear bombs that can blow up the entire world many times over- without protecting our own environment that we live in. Could this come from a far-sightedness brought about by "modernity" that stops us from appreciating the beauty of nature in front of us?

Philosophizing: A Purer Rationality (or Oneness) Beyond Us?
A Synthesis of East and West

Perhaps it is not the modern world that is wrong, but it is our interpretation of Enlightenment principles. Perhaps if we are more purely rational, we can move beyond the instrumental rationality that we hold today and focus on long-term effects rather than immediate gratification.

According to the philosopher **Immanuel Kant**, "Pure Reason," or pure rationality, is actually far beyond our own comprehension, and there is a limit to our own cognition and our rationality. We forget that there is such a limit and instead tend to assume that because of our ability to rationally analyze, we are superior to nature.

Many, including **Buddhists** (and perhaps Socrates also) have thought that philosophizing is necessary not so that we may find clear, final answers, but necessary so that we can understand the limits

of our thinking, and not presume to know more than we are able to. Philosophy may be more about "knowing its limits" (Kant) rather than certainty.

Perhaps a synthesis is possible- using our rational mind to philosophize could lead us to understand our limits, which could lead to a more humble attitude toward the environment. The economic disparity is also grounded on human greed that believes in its entitlement over other humans for the wealth.

Philosophy appeals to our rationality since it operates logically. It is the language that the Enlightened man uses. It is the language that citizens of modernity listen to. If we can conceive of philosophical arguments, or create beauty that convinces the mind both through reason and empirical intuition, of the importance of being humble, perhaps it is possible to conceptualize a new form of Modernity.

Conclusion

It is in our continued effort to think about the world we live in and our constructive criticism of it that will enable us to live in a world we wish to live in. I invite you to conceive of your own new conceptualization of Modernity which can hold a dialogue with our history, our present, and our future that lies ahead of us all.

Lecture 2
THE PRE-MODERN, MODERNITY, AND THE POST-MODERN

Christopher S. Gibson

Introduction: Why discuss these three modes of thought?

Today, our discussion turns to three concepts- the pre-modern, modernity and the post-modern. Why do we discuss these three? There are an infinite number of modes of thought, and you may ask what is the point of narrowing it down to three?

The answer is that there is no absolute justification of classifying thought into these three, but that thinkers of the past have largely been classified into one of these three, and so it helps with the organization of our thoughts. Despite the tremendous diversity of thought over the past thousands of years of human existence, it has been thought by many that a distinction with reference to the concept of modernity is relevant to discussion since it summarizes commonalities in the three phases quite well. We use these concepts as a vehicle of organization and a basis, a framework for our understanding. It is important to remember that generalizations are applicable to some thinkers and definitely not all. There is no black and white, and we must think in shades of gray.

A Postmodern Take: Chronology and Philosophy

A point on chronology and philosophy. The interesting part of philosophy is that philosophical dialogue transcends time. (This may be considered a postmodern thought.) You may think that sounds insane, but it is possible for you to have a dialogue with **Nietzsche**, even though he has been dead for over a century. Our continued interpretation of texts means that thought transcends chronology- past thinkers become relevant in the future and we can, in a metaphorical sense, *influence* past thinkers, not as human beings, that in terms of their "thinking".

Derrida may be able to support this point- he believes truth lies in *interpretation* of meaning through our thoughts about texts, rather than an absolute meaning that we seek to discover. You may recall how some literature professors may say "What is the intention of the author?" and you may think "Did the author really have a clear intention?" Postmodern thought directs us towards relative meaning rather than absolute meaning, and solves the dilemma we face- how do we possibly know what the author "intended"? It seems we are adding to the meaning of the text by our reading and interpretation. Reading is not a passive process of taking in information- whether we like it or not, even if we want to remain neutral, we are reading the text with a kind of bias our mind imposes on the text.

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For example, when Nietzsche finished writing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, your interpretation of it was not a part of the meaning of the book *yet.* Your interpretation of the text, your discussion of the text with others- these will change the text's meaning, in a postmodern sense. Hitler interpreted Nietzsche, philosophy students have interpreted Nietzsche, and you can interpret it too. Of course there are some interpretations better and more influential than others- and we want to believe that the better interpretations will remain. (Unfortunately, this is not always the case- the one-liner phrases, the easily understood meanings are usually remembered most.) By ignoring the absolute interpretation, some argue postmodernity simply justifies whatever is the case, whatever is the trend of the time, since reality is all about perception rather than absolute truth.

Since philosophical interpretation and dialogue transcends time, we can speak independently of chronology. We can say Confucius argues against Descartes, or Descartes argues against Nietzsche. Feel free to have the thinkers in your essays argue with each other, regardless of chronology. (Of course, mentioning chronology and talking about their historical context is important, but it is also possible to transcend chronology.)

The importance in emphasizing thought itself, as well as its context may be summed up in the following phrase- "Theory alone is useless and practice alone is useless". This is the basic premise that grounds the value of philosophy, which goes back and forth from the deeply theoretical to the deeply practical. Of course, when examples are discussed with too much emphasis on detail, it may be difficult to transition into philosophical thought, and thus philosophers tend not to talk too much about empirical detail. This leads to philosophers often being criticized for being too theoretical. However, what is important in philosophy is that when concepts are used, we imagine the pictures and history that ground the meaning of those words. This may help the philosophy feel less abstract.

Theory: Expanding our Field of Vision

Theory stems from the Greek theōria '**contemplation, speculation,**' from theōros '**spectator.**' It is something that goes beyond the immediate practical environment and the details in front of us.

A liberal arts education emphasizes the importance of theory- if we only discuss the practical side of everything, we can never transcend it. We are slaves to the world as it is unless our thought can find a way to go beyond it. Theory is a way to overcome.

By thinking about past thinkers, by attempting to understand thoughts that existed in completely different centuries, we expand our imagination. Imagination cannot be expanded if it is not given material to work with. We expand our field of vision- what we previously thought was the limit of our world is expanded. If language is the limit of our world **(as Wittgenstein suggests)**, understanding thinkers, philosophical concepts, how they are used, what they mean, how they can explain the world- these can expand the potential of our thoughts.

We can also understand what *methods* of thought there are, and apply that to our own thoughts to find new pathways of thought.

Theory- thinking itself- cannot be seen in space. Perhaps it exists as a material somewhere in our brain circuitry, but we cannot point to a *piece* of something and say "that's my thought!" What is interesting is that although we cannot see the thoughts, some thoughts become substantial and some do not. After years go by, people can still recite certain poems or remember something that happened if it is really ingrained in our memory. In your studies, pay heed to thinking deeply enough that they become engraved inside yourself.

The Three Concepts: The Pre-modern, Modernity and Postmodernity

In short, pre-modern thought believes absolutely in religious truth without logic necessarily. Modernity believes in rational thought as the best way of thinking. Postmodern thought thinks they are all relative- there is no hierarchy that can be absolutely proven. A metaphor can be equally valuable (or useless) as a rational explanation- it depends on the context and the use of it.

Pre-modern thought believes in myth, in religious truth, without requiring any rational justification. Shinto believers may think that a storm comes because the wind god is angry. There need not be a rational justification for the god's anger- he just is angry. Or some Greek myths believed there is a God **Helios** with a chariot that runs across the sky every day and that is why the sun rises.

Modern thought believes that there is a rational explanation to everything and this must be sought first and foremost. Perhaps the image of the chariot is beautiful, but does not really help us understand anything useful about the sun that could help us understand the universe in a scientific sense. Modern (Enlightened) thought about the sun is represented by people like Galileo (1564-1642) or Copernicus (1473-1543) who thought about a **helio**centric model of the world rather than a geocentric one. (Interesting that the root "**helios**" remains in this "rational" explanation too.)

The good thing about this is that we are interested in cultivating new scientific or rational ways of thinking about the world that are consistent and logical. We may come up with new scientific theories or organize our own thoughts in a more logical way.

The bad thing about this may be that we believe in **the *supreme importance of reason above all else.*** Reason is placed at the top, and we trust it the most. As the ***Dialectic of Enlightenment*** mentions, this is a problem since reason itself (logic itself) cannot dictate a "direction" of our thought. **We mistake the efficiency of logic as something that can be substituted for its direction.** So, Adorno and Horkheimer thought, the faith Germans had in the Nazis partly came from their "appearance" of rationality and organizational efficiency. Logic doesn't care about what content it is dealing with- the code used to make a computer virus uses the exact same logic as a computer program that is useful for us. Logic is neutral and does not care about what it is used for. This is why it is so valuable and also why it can be extremely dangerous.

The aforementioned problem raised by the Dialectic of Enlightenment leads into postmodern thought. **Postmodern thought** has no real definition because it resists definition. It does not believe in definitions that are set in stone, so it is difficult to explain it simply. Essentially, postmodern thought believes in a **relative** meaning of everything. There is no clear-cut definition. Everything is open to interpretation and questioning. In a good sense, this means getting rid of dogma. In a bad sense, it means we don't know what to believe.

Justification of Violence: Three Perspectives

Let me also give some more vivid examples related to the three modes of thought concerning violence. Violence has existed and can exist as a subset of any of these three ways of thinking.

1) An example of violence stemming from Pre-modern thought may be how the **Aztecs** (14th-16th century, central Mexico) used to have ritual killings of thousands of people as part of their sacrifices to the gods. They also mistakenly thought that the Spanish people who arrived- a bearded man who had strange beasts (horses) clad in iron- was a legendary Aztec man-god who died three hundred years ago[2]. Then Hernando Cortes, who came from Spain with his expedition trying to find gold, massacred the Aztecs.

2) An example of violence stemming from "Modern" violence may be Nazi concentration camps, which were organized based on "claimed" scientific thinking related to eugenics (the belief that there is

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[2] P. 11- Zinn, Howard. *People's History of the United States*

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scientific justification that suggests some races are better than others) . The atomic bomb could also be a form of "modern" violence, which came about through scientific research, or a utilitarian calculation for a quicker Japanese surrender.

"Modernity" is not free from context, and it has been criticized for "claiming" to be so free from bias and religion, while not being free of it at all.

It is strangely believed that **Christian** forms of violence are modern, while other "lesser" or "more barbaric" religions' violence is pre-modern. The United States, for instance, is a supposedly "modern" country which was initially created through a wiping out of the majority of the Indian population. Columbus Day is celebrated in America even though Columbus was responsible for genocide of Indians- some figures say there were 60,000 people living on Hispaniola in 1508, and there were 3 million around 1494 after Columbus' men massacred them, or they died through slave labor, war and working in mines.

Inherent in modernity is the scrambling of philosophers and scientists to reconcile their religious belief in God (Christianity- which is monotheistic, at least more logical than polytheistic) with their belief in science and rationality.

Armies of academics were all working at this problem- trying to answer questions like-

1. Why is there so much evil in the world if there is God?
2. Did God create the universe?
3. How can we rationally prove God?
4. How can the Bible and Darwin both be right? Did the Lord create human beings, or have we just evolved from apes?

Most of the religious training that went on in Oxford or Cambridge- the predecessors of the modern "university" as we know today- came about as an attempted marriage of reason and religion. This obsession has generated much confusion as well as a richness of thinking about the world.

Descartes obsessed over trying to prove a certainty to knowledge, which he thought would then prove the certainty of God. Here is an example.:

Descartes' proof of God from his idea of God

Premise 1:
"There must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause"

Ex. I can draw a triangle because I have a more perfect version of a triangle inside me. (The triangle in me is more real than the triangle I draw.)

Premise 2:
The infinite idea of God (which I have in myself) which represents infinity must have something infinite as its cause.

Premise 3:
An infinite being must be perfect.

Premise 4:
A perfect being could not be a deceiver. (Deception would be a defect.)

Conclusion: Therefore, God must exist.

Descartes' concept of "reality" is strange to us since it is Aristotelian, but at the time, this kind of proof was considered at least somewhat viable.

Currently, it is generally believed that rational proofs of God generally fail since God is meant to be "beyond our comprehension". If He can be comprehended, He seems not to be much of a God.

3) **Postmodernity** does not really justify anything. The world is as it is. There is no ultimate truth. (Perhaps some similarity to Zen Buddhism?) Positively, this means that if all people accept that there is no ultimate truth and meditate all day, there would be no war. However, if people take this to be a value statement or an excuse to do what they like, bad things happen. It is difficult for people to come to accept that labels and concepts are ultimately meaningless and become dust- and especially difficult to accept that even the "self" is an illusion.

Nietzsche would fit into this postmodern train of thought when he claims "God is dead."

He says God is an invention that humans have made in order to explain reality or give us excuses for things. God is also used by authorities to justify their actions. For example, kings may be crowned by the Pope to show that God is on their side and whoever disagrees with them will be beheaded. The Crusades (1096-1291) could be another example of how God seems to have been used as a human construct to justify killing.

It is difficult to talk about a postmodern justification of war since postmodernity does not believe in absolute justification. However, our general feeling that world conflict is based on differing perspectives and we can understand both sides- this feeling that we cannot come up with an easy answer as to what the solution is- this feeling of ambivalence and uncertainty could be considered a deeply postmodern one. This is contrasted to the modern belief in reason, that actions can be justified absolutely- whether through God (one God) or rationality or both.

Conclusion

In summary, the three concepts- the Pre-modern, modernity and postmodernity-can largely be differentiated with regard to their trust or distrust of rational thinking (or reason). In Japan, there seems to be an emphasis on rational thought above all other modes- how do we feel about this? What is the light and dark inherent in these three modes of thought? What is your view?

THE LIGHT AND DARK OF MODERNITY:
Max Weber and the Concept of Rationalization

Christopher S. Gibson

Rationalization in Modernity: A new prison in a free world?

The calculating mind which we have inherited from the industrial revolution, from the rise of capitalism- the modern, rational way of thinking- is still with us today. We see it in advertisements. We see it in how we rank products and calculate cost-benefit. We use rationality to calculate our futures- decide what school to attend, what profession we may have, and even make personal decisions about friends or family.

Modernity promised us freedom from the clutches of tradition- we need not obey Confucian rules that are unfair to women or children- and yet we have at the same time been chained to a new set of rules we have imposed onto ourselves: rationalization.

Adorno and Horkheimer echo something similar in their book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment.* Although rationality has emancipated us from the pre-modern unfairness, rationality has invented its own myth and has made us enslaved to it. We are in awe of the tremendous power of rationality and forget the subject that must make the ultimate decision.

Max Weber called the modern man as a "cog in the machine." He said man is one of the many many turning wheels that are part of an enormous machine of Modernity. Perhaps this was more appropriate in the early 1900s, but we still see something similar in today's work environment. People working for large corporations or enormous governments often do seem like cogs in a machine. You might imagine the worker going in to try to fix the Fukushima nuclear power plant after the earthquake- hired by a company, that was hired by a company, that was hired by a company to take care of the mess, risking his life to act as one of many hundreds of people sent in to work for 20 minutes at a time. Soldiers going off to fight in wars, suicide bombers- all these people seem to be in some ways a "cog in the machine." They are not *entirely* responsible for anything- they are treated as a part of a whole. A soldier is a part of the army, which is part of the nation. The businessman may be part of a department, which is part of a company, which is part of a national economy, which is part of a global economy. Each individual seems to be subordinate to the system. The system runs rationally, and often does not care about the many individuals that the system is comprised of. Weber's analysis seems to hold for the economic structure and government structure of today, although probably individual human rights have improved to an extent.

An interesting question to ask may be- to what extent has the advancement of technology actually improved the treatment of humanity itself? To what extent has it damaged it?

We may imagine the damage done by nuclear power plants, which are supposedly more advanced than other forms of energy. We could also imagine how so many wars have been fought in order to obtain oil. (including one of the main reasons Japan fought in World War II)

If greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise and Global Warming takes full effect, there could be catastrophic consequences to the world even if we have all the most advanced electronic gadgets to support it.

Has technological advancement improved our lives or worsened it? What will happen in the future? This may be a question we should ask ourselves.

Who was Max Weber?

Max Weber (1864-1920) is considered one of the founders of modern sociology along with Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. His method focused on antipositivism- based on the belief that we cannot understand reality through merely objective means, and instead require interpretive means. His main focus was understanding the process of **rationalization, secularization**, and the **"disenchantment"** of the world which accompanied the rise of **modernity**, and the capitalist world. This capitalist world that he focused on is in many ways similar to our world today although there are notable changes such as the vastly improved technological apparatus we have at hand. He also analyzed capitalism not simply as something which grew out of rational calculation, but something which had religious roots in the Protestant Ethic- hence the name of his famous work entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* When we talk about "work ethic," some argue that this is in accordance with Weber's idea of the Protestant ethic accompanying capitalism. Indeed, there is no inherent need for capitalism to be "ethical," and the phrase "work ethic" itself seems to imply some other root of capitalism other than a rational-choice model.

Weber was an academic and at the same time was political. He criticized the Kaiser's expansionist policies, and was active at the Paris Peace Conference after World War I ended. He ironically helped institute Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution later used by Adolf Hitler to impose his rule by decree. (Wikipedia, Political Involvements)

Weber's Thought

Inspiration

Weber was influenced by German idealism, especially neo-Kantianism, although he was also influenced by Nietzsche.

Kantianism says that reality is basically incomprehensible since our rationality is limited by the limits of our cognition. Therefore we cannot assume that rational principles hold beyond our perception. While Kant was hopeful of the existence of God beyond the rational realm, Weber was more skeptical of this answer. In this sense he was more in line with Nietzsche's philosophy which questioned the validity of assuming any kind of God.

He was also influenced by Karl Marx, and shared his opinions about the problems of bureaucratic systems which advance their own logic against human freedom and autonomy, he did not agree that class struggle was forever inevitable. In this way, Weber may be more of an optimist than Marx.

Methodology

Whenever we speak of analysis, the question becomes the "unit" of analysis. Depending on the unit, the analysis becomes completely different, even with a similar line of logic.

Units of analysis may include the following

Ideal
Ideas, Concepts

Material
Government, Law
Political Leaders
Corporations
Individuals

For example, Marx placed more emphasis on the material world (the concrete world we actually see) rather than the ideal world (of ideas). Weber thought that ideas were important, and analysis of society must focus on understanding culture and other "subjective" issues to see more deeply into the individual.

Rationalization

Weber analyzes the modern world in terms of a process of rationalization. What is meant by this? It is an "individual cost-benefit calculation and at the same time a wider, bureaucratic organization, which pursues its own interests.

Humans create the organizational structures like corporations or governments, and yet by assigning functions to each department, deadlines, regulations, we end up being strangled by the system we ourselves created. We tried to control everything using our reason, and ended up being "disenchanted" since no magic or mystery remained in the world.

Although cold calculation does drive this disenchanted society, Weber says that it has roots in religion, in particular, capitalism. He considers Protestantism to be setting the European West from a part of the world. He discusses how the originally religious conception of work and piety became secularized and became the "spirit" of the capitalist system.

Sociology of Religion

Weber sees religion as progressing from many gods to one god, to the godless truth of modernity. There was a progression from magic to polytheism to pantheism to monotheism and then ethical monotheism.

Particularly in the case of Protestantism, he says that the Protestant ethic gave capitalism a "clear conscience"– that the Protestant ethic in a sense camouflaged the self-interested nature of capitalism. Employees could think of their wages as compatible with a notion of ascetic devotion, and the capitalists could focus on how they are investing further in society and not spending the money on themselves. By aiming at such ideals, people could work towards the prospects of their eternal salvation.

Politics and Government

Weber defines the state as the entity which monopolizes the legitimate use of physical force.

The state has monopolized its use of force previously through charismatic (familial and religious) domination or traditional (patriarchs, patrimonialism, feudalism) domination and legal (modern law and state, bureaucracy) but has tended towards legal domination.

Bureaucratic domination is different in that it is a domination through knowledge, as opposed to family lineage.

While the ideal type of bureaucracy would prevent power struggles by bureaucratic officials narrowly focusing on their "neutral" role, Weber also realizes that the kind of bureaucratic organization can trap individuals and put them in an "iron cage".

Economics

One of the important concepts Weber discusses in relation to economics is the emergence of the modern economy analyzed in a historical context.

Weber focused on the importance of historical and cultural roots of economics, rather than assuming our ideal understanding matches the models created artificially.

He also made some interesting criticisms of socialism, showing why from a strictly rational standpoint, a socialist system would not be able to determine "value" of goods (if the value was decided by a central office) and therefore the notion of "central planning" itself would become meaningless, or extremely inefficient.

Legacy

He is most often referred to as one of the founders of sociology and has influenced European and American thought substantially. When he was alive, he was thought of more as an economist and historian. He influenced thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas.

As for criticism, there have been disagreements as to the exact moment in time that capitalism emerged, and the thesis that Calvinism leads to capitalism has also been disputed. However, his analyses may be more historically specific than interpreted, and it may be difficult to abstract to a general thesis applying to all situations.

References:

Max Weber: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Adorno and Horkheimer: The Dialectic of Enlightenment

Modernity: Toward a New Conception

TODAY'S CLASS

1. **Brief review of past topics: Pre-modern, modern, postmodern**
 (30 minutes)

As we review, think of your midterm paper topic/philosopher in context.

2. **Midterm paper topics**- do outline for each student paper in class (90 minutes- 15 minutes each)

Review
1. Pre-modern, Modern, Post-modern

2. Confucius, Descartes, Nietzsche

3. Max Weber

4. Karl Marx vs. Adam Smith

MIDTERM PAPER TOPIC

Modernity: Toward a New Conception
Lecture 3
Three Perspectives: Why should we obey?

1. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT (ROUSSEAU)
2. OUR RIGHT TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (THOREAU)
3. TRADITION IS OUR GUIDE (Burke)

Introduction

Why should we obey anyone? **Why should we obey the government?** This was a question that needed to be answered especially in the 18th century since there were new ideas of democracy coming into Europe. The old idea that kings were given their god-given right to rule was being overturned by the new idea (or actually rather an old idea- dating back to ancient Greece) of democratic rule. The French revolution commenced under this basic belief in the right of self-rule by the people for the people. A similar belief echoed in the establishment of the United States. In the occupation of Japan, too, it was argued that it was important for there to be democracy rather than to have a dictatorship, or emperor worship.

Now it seems obvious that democracy is a good thing. Few people dispute this today- and yet not many ask the question "why is it a good thing?" Why should we have democratic governments instead of other governments? And importantly, when exactly are we required to follow the government's orders? Even if we have democracy, what does it mean for "the people to rule the people"? There are a lot of people in this world, and they often disagree with each other. Exactly which people are we to follow and which are we to ignore? When should we have the right to "civil disobedience"- when should we rebel against the state?

1. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT (ROUSSEAU)

Many have thought the state of nature to be evil, and many still do. The political philosopher Hobbes said that the state of nature was "nasty, brutish and short." It was believed, in the time of the Enlightenment (18th century), that it was rationality (reason), and civilization that resulted from it, which made man overcome the state of nature, and attain a state of perfection. The basic belief of modernity is the belief born in the Enlightenment- through rationality, we can overcome our "animal" circumstances.

Rousseau (1712-1778) disagreed with this idea that humans in the state of nature needed to be "corrected" by civilization. In

contrast, John Locke, for instance, believed in the idea of the "blank slate"- that we are born as white sheets of paper and ideas are added to us through education. Locke believed that humans needed to be educated to become "real". On the other hand, Rousseau believed that the hypothetical state of nature (noble savage stage) was a time of innocence that gives us inspiration. This way of thinking influenced the development of romanticism in literature and the arts as a whole. (romanticizing nature)

Rousseau's work *The Social Contract* begins with the phrase **"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. Those who think themselves the masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they."** This phrase epitomizes his belief that those who think they are masters (in civilization, or over-civilized society, are in fact slaves themselves.)

Also he believes that private property is the beginning of civilization, in its negative sense (It may remind us of the European conquest of the Americas).

"The first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said "This is mine," and found people naïve enough to believe him, that man was the true founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: " Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody."
— Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Discourse on Inequality, 1754

We need to have the social contract between us (an imagined contract that we "sign" to be living in civilized society) in order to live and cooperate with each other. We can remain free by subjecting ourselves to the rule of the general will, which will prevent us from having to follow the rule of others. He approved of a republican government of a city-state, but not for a massive country like France since he thought that an ideal state would not be possible with so many people.

2. OUR RIGHT TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE (THOREAU)

Thoreau talks of the importance of non-violent civil disobedience (of the kind that Gandhi 1869-1948 is famous for) in times of need. While for the most part, democratic governments can provide a good method of rule, when the government invades the sovereignty of the individual, Thoreau believed that it was necessary for the individual to resist through non-action or non-violent means.

When would such a situation arise? Basically when an individual feels that his basic rights are violated, or the actions of the government are violating others' rights, which raises his concern. For instance, a draft could be an example of the violation of the rights of young men who are sent to war. A government's decision to go to war could be important. Also, economic policy could result in measures that lead to the demise of certain parts of the population.

When do you think is an appropriate time for civil disobedience?

3. TRADITION IS OUR GUIDE (BURKE)

While the rule of the people is important, Edmund Burke warns us against over-reliance on the "general will". As the French revolution demonstrated, the general will of the people can lead to a repetition of tyranny. Great revolutions that have occurred, say in Russia or China, have lead to unstable or autocratic governments that have not benefited the people.

Burke says that tradition is an important guide. Perhaps a bit of a Confucian, he believes that if we have a choice between following tradition or inventing something new, we should tell ourselves that something traditional is there for a reason and should not be violated just because of a whimsical notion given by the majority opinion.

Of course, critics of Burke say that if we follow this philosophy, no change can ever really happen, and people in power will remain unchecked.

To what extent do you think tradition is important? To what extent can the general will of the people be trusted?

When should we disobey our government?

Response Topic:

-In what situation should we exercise our right to civil disobedience in Japan? Why?

Modernity: Toward a New Conception
Lecture 4

PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF MODERN ENLIGHTENMENT:
PLATO VS. ARISTOTLE

"There have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams- not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. **It had gone beyond her, beyond everything.** He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. no amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart."
> – F. SCOTT FITZGERALD "The Great Gatsby" (62)

The Ideal and the Real

The above quote is from the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The quote is about romantic feelings that Jay Gatsby has towards a girl called Daisy. He has created an illusion of her "that had gone beyond her, beyond everything." This particular section of the novel captures something close to the idea of Forms. In a sense, Gatsby has envisioned a "Form" of perfection that he has imposed on the girl Daisy, which may involve ignoring the actual person she is in the flesh. To what extent should we think about abstract Forms or ideas that capture people?

Perhaps at certain times we have created illusions about people or things that go beyond their actual reality. We may fall in love with someone and think that they are absolutely perfect. We may impose our ideals onto others, ignoring the person that they are. Humans create symbols that attempt to capture the essence of something, distilling something complicated into a simple form. An icon, a mathematical equation, a brand logo, a national flag, a photograph. These may all be examples of such symbols of perfection.

Abstract Reality vs. Empirical Reality

You may feel that these symbols are more real than the actual objects, or you may feel that the symbols are less real.

If you answered the former, you may be more of a Platonist, especially if you like mathematical (or logical) simplifications. If you answered the latter, you may agree more with Aristotle, and believe that reality exists in the empirical world.

Plato believed that truth resides in the realm of the Forms (an abstract realm which transcends the empirical world) while Aristotle believed that universal truths are to be found in nature itself- in the empirical reality we can observe around us. Hence Plato points towards the heavens, while Aristotle points to the earth.

Should we label people as "good" or "evil," "beautiful" or "ugly" even though these words are quite abstract? Probably no one can clearly define what they mean when they say "good". Yet, Plato thinks that through philosophizing we can arrive at a more satisfactory idea of what "Good" (capitalized for him– because it is a Form) means, although we may never reach a final conclusion as to its definition. The process that we take to try to answer questions about such abstract notions, for Plato, is vital to have a fulfilling life. Plato inherits Socrates' ideal. Socrates believed that the unexamined life is not worth living.

Aristotle's Version: Our Purpose of Existence

Aristotle believes that our purpose of existence can be determined through our "Final Cause" or purposiveness in nature. What are we good at? What kind of physical properties do we have? What is our nature? If a person is simply terrible at mathematics by birth, it does not seem to make sense for that person to aim at becoming a mathematician. He probably would not want to become a mathematician anyway, even if that was a lucrative career. Perhaps he has the nature of a writer. In that case, thinks Aristotle, the man should not "dream" about what he could do, but find exactly what it is that he should become by examining evidence, and find out what he must do to be true to his nature. Finding one's nature is something that is done through empirical means, not by thinking abstractly about the nature of "the good" or "the good life." This thinking contrasts with Plato's emphasis on finding the abstract Form of the "Good."

Understanding reality: The Four Causes (P.61)

Aristotle thought it was necessary to conduct a scientific inquiry into the nature of existence. In order to understand ourselves and the reality around us through science, he came up with four types of "causes" that could be used to explain reality.

Today, when we use the word "cause" we usually mean something that "caused" something. What we mean when we use this word is that there was an Event A which seemed to have triggered another Event B. So Event A caused Event B. (If I let go of a pen and it falls, the "letting go" action "caused" the pen to fall.)

For Aristotle, this kind of cause that we use in daily language is the "efficient cause."

He lists four causes in total:

1. Material Cause
The material cause is what the object is made out of. For example, wood could be the material cause for a desk.

2. Formal Cause
The formal cause is the "arrangement" or "shape" of the object. In the case of the desk, the "desk-like shape" (say, of having four legs holding up a desktop) is the formal cause.

3. Efficient Cause

The efficient cause, as mentioned earlier, is the event that led to the object's current state. For example, a carpenter may be involved in the efficient cause of the desk since he builds the desk.

4. Final Cause

The final cause is the purpose of the desk. Why does the desk exist? Well, it seems to exist so that we humans can write on it. That is why it is designed in that particular way. (A desk for aliens may be designed differently because the purpose would be different.)

It seems useless to ask "what is a good desk?" in an abstract way since it is easier simply to see if it works in real life. We need not define what "good" means- we just have to see if it works.

Aristotle thinks that this kind of thinking can be applied to people as well, and that the purpose of humans (a subject for ethics) is similar- that we must find out the purpose for which we are alive by examining evidence. By having wisdom, we understand ourselves, and are thus able to fulfill our purpose or "final cause".

Our Priority Today: Efficient vs. Final Cause

The idea of the "final cause" or purpose of humanity is often overlooked because we are more and more focused on the "efficient cause" when we think of explanations. The Final Cause looks forward into the future, but the efficient cause is in the past. By focusing on the efficient cause, we focus more on short-term issues and less on long-term thinking. Today, we may have become even more scientific than Aristotle since we focus on the efficient cause. On the other hand, our lack of emphasis on the "Final Cause" may lead to many issues.

For instance, digging up oil can be important as an "efficient cause" for our cars to run, but it seems harder to answer whether the purpose or "final cause" of that oil is simply to fuel our cars. It seems that if oil is only used for fuel, the cycle would stop at some point since oil will run out- it does not seem that oil has been kept for millions of years to become fuel for our cars. We may be ignoring the "natural" Final Cause of the earth's resources when we embark on energy projects.

Plato's Theory of Innate Ideas: The Doctrine of Forms

In contrast to Aristotle's emphasis on empirical reality, Plato focuses on the abstract knowledge that we seem to already have within us. Later philosophers think of this as "*a priori*" knowledge or something that is "prior to experience."

For example, we are able to know certain things without ever being taught it. We seem to know right and wrong (or at least have opinions about it) pretty strongly without seeing many examples. We seem to be able to extend mathematical knowledge from simple principles quite quickly. After you teach 1+1 and 2+2, many kids are able to do very complicated operations, as if they already had some ability inside of them that made them capable of performing the calculations.

There are child prodigies that sit down at a piano and suddenly start to play without training. (Mozart may be an example) Einstein was not educated much in school and worked at a patent office. Yet on his own, he was able to come up with some amazing scientific theories including the theory of Relativity that transformed Physics forever. If all of our knowledge came from experience, it seems difficult to account for these things. (Contrary to philosophers like Locke who argued that our knowledge is like a "blank slate")

So, says Plato, there must be Forms within us already. When we see material objects, we actually remember the Forms that are already within us. Forms exist somewhere far away from this reality and Forms are eternal. They are not existing in space and time. Mathematics is a good example of the eternal quality of the Forms. The "perfect triangle" only exists in the realm of the Forms- we can never actually draw one. We can also never draw a "dot" as it is mathematically defined since the dot is not supposed to take up any space! We are able to perform operations with numbers and symbols that are far beyond the reality we inhabit- and Plato thinks that this points towards the necessity of Forms that must already exist within us.

Conclusion

A myriad of debates take place as to the degree of abstraction we humans are permitted to perform, or what kind of abstraction is meaningful. This debate is very much a debate between Plato and Aristotle that still continues after more than a couple thousand years.

For example, the field of finance today, global trading that takes place electronically is done in an extremely abstract manner to the point that most investors do not understand what exactly they are trading. They are trading based on complicated mathematical models that link up a wide variety of indices and assets. We have far surpassed the days of the "Town Market" where we took our physical goods and traded them for other physical goods. We are making trades on computer screens that deal with extremely high levels of abstraction- no human mind is capable of actually understanding the complexities involved in the billions of trades that take place and we often cannot pinpoint what exactly is being traded.(In economics, there is the debate as to how "real" the economy should be- and after the 2008 financial crisis, there was a move towards making the economy more "real".)

The same goes for religion- whether we should worship "figures" or just the "idea" of God. Are we allowed to have a cross to worship, or should we have no symbol at all? Should we pray to the Buddha or not? Can actual trees be gods? These questions all relate to the issue of abstraction.

In philosophy, we must be aware of the trends in both directions. Often we perform both operations. We abstract, then come back down to reality, check evidence, then abstract again, and come down to reality, ad infinitum. Through dialogue, this cycle can continue- and the dialogue between Plato and Aristotle which never seems to end may itself be the truth that philosophy invites us to participate in. The dialogue

continues since there are good reasons for both sides and valid criticisms against both.

What reasons do *you* find for each side? Is there something that transcends empirical reality, or not? Can we answer ethical questions scientifically? Or must we ask abstract questions? What is "the good life"? Or is it just up to each of us? What are your answers?

Reference:
The Philosophy Book
-Plato (p.51-55)
-Aristotle (p.56-63)

Modernity: Toward a New Conception

December 2014 Schedule

Sunday, December 7th
18:00-20:00

1. Introduction: The Power Notourselves
2. Writing the final essay. Making an outline.

Saturday, December 13th
16:30-20:30 (make-up class)

Bring at least a finished OUTLINE to class.

16:30-19:00 Individual writing and tutoring
19:00-20:30 Presenting essays and receiving feedback from class.
 SUBMIT to instructor before leaving.

Final Essay due
4-5 page (double spaced). Personal pronouns (I, We, etc.) allowed.
Topics:

1. In your view, **what could be a new conception of Modernity?** How could
 you argue for the importance of your conception (definition) based on
 philosophical, political, economic or historical reasons? Defend your
 conception.

2. **What thinker** covered in the course so far **do you identify with the
 most?** Defend his position while using your own ideas and examples.

3. Topic of your choice (needs approval from instructor 2 weeks in
advance)

Sunday, December 14th
18:00-20:00

Final essays corrected and returned by instructor

Sunday, December 21st (Final Class)
18:00-20:00

Final presentations and Questions

Conclusion

<div align="center">

Final Essay (Sample)

Title: "Modernity as a White Rabbit"

</div>

Introduction

(Background: how your thesis fits into place) In this course, we have discussed three types of thinking. The first is pre-modern thinking, represented by thinkers like Confucius that believe in the importance of family tradition. The second is modernity, represented by thinkers such as Adam Smith who believe that we must believe in the free market rather than in family authority. The third is postmodernity, represented by thinkers such as Derrida, who believe there is no singular truth, and the best that we can have are various interpretations. **(Thesis) Since I consider myself to be a modern thinker, I would like to think about what my new conception of modernity might be. I believe modernity <u>is a white rabbit</u>.** It is a pure white, free from colors of the past. It jumps from place to place quickly, like rationality, which can jump from topic to topic. Modernity is also always in a rush- like capitalism- to make more profit or to make better use of time. I believe that thinking about modernity as a white rabbit allows us to understand the advantages and disadvantages of modernity.

Body

1. Pure white (free from colors of the past)

I believe that the pure white of a white rabbit represents modernity well since modernity is free from past traditions. By using rationality, we can be free of all the colors or biases of the past. Mathematics, for example, is very rational and modern. It does not judge. We are all represented equally by an "x" or a "y". I think this can be an important advantage compared to traditional pre-modern ways of thinking. For example, in Confucianism, women are thought of as inferior to men automatically, regardless of their skills. Rationality allows us to judge people objectively, and I believe that this neutrality- or "whiteness"- is an important advantage.

2. In a rush (like the speed of capitalism)

Modernity, like a rabbit, is in a rush. Like the Shinkansen (or bullet train) invented in the modern era, capitalism keeps trying to find a faster, more efficient solution. This has improved our lives tremendously. If we said we must stick to walking or riding

<div align="center">37</div>

on horses, it would still take days to go from Tokyo to Kyoto. A rabbit can hop and jump in new directions when it pleases, and I feel that it is therefore representative of the tendency of modernity to jump towards the next best solution.

3. Criticism of modernity (counterargument)

What could be a problem with such tendencies of modernity? Perhaps some things are better in the short term, but not in the long term. For example, when investors focus on their monthly returns, they may make decisions that damage them in the long term. Also, traditions can help bond and unite people, and that may be a reason there is still religion in the world today, very strong still in certain regions. Rationality does not seem to be able to tell us the span of time (1 year? 50 years? 1000 years?) we should think about in formulating our plans.

To provide a counterargument to my thesis, modernity may not be considered a rabbit because of the tremendous damage modernity has done to the world that a rabbit (at least in its current form) could not replicate. Modernity is not just neutral and innocent-it has caused tremendous human suffering. Technological innovation and the government-military industrial complex has led to wars and disaster. The rabbit, can, however bite off one's finger, and this may help to sustain my analogy, and show how modernity can be dangerous.

Conclusion

Overall, if modernity were likened to an animal, I would choose a white rabbit. In comparison, I think that the pre-modern era is like a tortoise because life in that mode of thought stays in one place. Thinking stays in one place and does not jump around. This may provide stability, but also does not provide the kind of freedom and flexibility that is necessary for success in the capitalist, modern world. The rabbit, however, is an animal, and modernity is not. Modernity is constantly changing, and therefore it may be impossible to understand what animal it is at any certain point in time. **However, there seem to be sufficient reasons why this analogy may be useful in understanding the modern world.** No thesis is completely true, and thus all we can hope to do is to add to the myriad of interpretations already present. **I conclude by stating that modernity, at least partially, resembles features of a White Rabbit.**