Spring 2018

Core 152

Robert E. McVaugh
Colgate University, rmcvbaugh@colgate.edu

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CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY

Course Description
A matrix of intellectual social, and materials forces that have transformed the world over the last quarter millennium, modernity has introduced new problems and possibilities into human life. It was initially articulated in the West, yet its developments have not been limited to any particular culture or segment of the globe. Nor have its expressions been limited to any particular discipline or medium. Fields of learning and expression associated with the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences have all contributed decisively to modernity's power as well as to its critique. Core Modernity encourages students to think broadly and critically about the world that they inhabit, asking them to see their contemporary concerns in the perspective of the long-standing discourses of modernity.

Within modernity, issues of meaning, identity, and morality have been critiqued in distinctive ways. People of different social classes, racial groups, ethnic backgrounds, genders and sexual identities have contributed to an increasingly rich public discourse. The human psyche has been problematized, and the dynamic character of the world, both natural and social, has been explored. Urbanization and technological development have transformed the patterns of everyday life for many. Imperialism has had a complex and lasting impact on the entire globe. The human capability to ameliorate social and physical ills has increased exponentially, and yet so has the human capacity for mass destruction and exploitation.

Texts
You should purchase the following works at the Bookstore:

• Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species (1859)
• Elizabeth Kolbert, The Sixth Extinction (2014)
• W. E. B. DuBois, Souls of Black Folk (1903)
• Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto (1848)
• Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morality (1887; Clark/Swensen translation)
• Virginia Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (1925)

Texts available on Moodle or Experiential Texts

• Gilo Pontecorvo, Battle of Algiers (1958)
• Cornel West, "Lecture at Colgate University" (VIDEO, 1996)
• Georg Simmel, Metropolis and Mental Life (1903).
• Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1914)
• Alban Berg, Lyric Suite (1914) PERFORMANCE
• Pablo Picasso, Demoiselles d’Avignon, Guernica and other work (PDF).
Learning Goals for the Course:

- To learn that many ideas that may seem natural or self-evident can be usefully questioned and critiqued.
- To honor the complexity of issues and ideas and realize that comprehensive understanding necessitates moving beyond particular or individual “disciplinary” perspectives, which themselves tend to yield incisive but partial understandings.
- To realize that the rigorous analysis of ideas requires that we explore the ways that such ideas or issues cut across modes of thought and across time.
- To acquaint ourselves with the value of close reading, focused thought, and clear writing.
- To demonstrate the continued relevance of historical thought to contemporary circumstance.
- To gain experience in writing precisely across a variety of analytic forms.

Meetings
Class: MWF: 8:20-9:10 Little 207

Required Extra or Evening Events (Material to be included in the examinations):

- **March 9 (Thurs.):** 6-7:30 PM Chapel. Webern, *Five Piece for String Quartet.* Manhattan String Quartet lecture/concert.
- **March 19 (Tuesday)** Little 207. Film: Pontecorvo, *Battle of Algiers.* 7-9 PM
- **March 27 (Tuesday)** Little 207. Cornel West, *Lecture at Colgate* (1995) 7-8:15 PM

I do not take attendance, but you are expected at all course events. A pattern of irregular attendance, or passive involvement, will have serious impacts on your participation grade. Moreover, you are responsible for obtaining information – including changes regarding assignments – for any class or event you cannot attend. I urge you to develop a kind of buddy-system to assure that you keep up with course adjustments.

Participation is a major part of evaluation in this course, and you should be aware that participation is more than simple attendance. Attending all events earns a minimal B (83). Excellence in participation embraces consistent preparation for class and positive contributions to the learning of the class as a whole, in addition to regular attendance.

Office Hours
I teach this course at 8:20 MWF and then an Introduction to Architecture Course course at 11:20-12:10 MWF. I teach Campus Architecture from 2:45-4:00 MW. Finally, Tuesday and Thursday afternoons are often committed to archival works related to the University Architectural History.

So Monday and Wednesday are devoted to classes and class preparation. Office hours will be Tuesday and Thursday morning, and Friday afternoons (though there will be several weekends when I will need to leave campus at around 12:30 for some travel).

Generally speaking, I am very happy to schedule meetings outside office hours as my schedule permits. I cannot guarantee immediate response to emails, though I try to keep up.
**Evaluation**

**Participation:** 15% of course grade.

Participation is assessed on grounds that extend beyond simple attendance. It also involves positive contributions to the learning of the class during discussions and projects. Perfect attendance without positive participation will be assessed as an 84 (B). The grade will shift up or down from that point.

If, in my judgment, a significant part of the class is not keeping up with the reading or preparing insufficiently for class, I may include unannounced quizzes, which will be folded into the participation grade.

**Exams:**

- **Mid-Term:** 15% of course grade. March 26
- **Final Exam:** 20% of course grade. Exam Period

**Papers:**

- **Darwin Paper:** 15% of course grade. Feb. 12
- **Nietzsche:** 15% of course grade. Feb. 26
- **DuBois Paper:** 20% of course grade. April 30

**Guidelines for Written Work.**

I am willing to look at one draft per student per paper assignment so long as they are submitted AT LEAST 4 days prior to the due date. I may or may not be capable of looking at or returning any received after that time.

It is a good idea to use *A Writer's Reference*, or some such grammatical and writing guide, in all your papers. Such guides are available online. In this course, your writing is about persuasion more than it is about personal expression. Grammar and presentation are crucial to communication. What matters is what your reader understands you as saying - NOT what you mean to say. As you edit, you must work toward clarity for someone who does not inhabit your own head. Always ask, yourself if you have provided clear enough information and logic to be persuasive for someone else. Control of grammar is a good way to assure that the reader understands what you have to say. Also, a reader should be able to summarize your main point (thesis) and main arguments clearly when she or he puts down your paper. This is also true of each paragraph.

In-text citations or footnotes are both acceptable. You may use the conventions (Chicago, MLA, etc.) that are common to your fields of potential major. The key is that you are consistent in your use of either technique.

I do have some quirks regarding writing. I warn you now that respect of these guidelines will enhance the clarity and precision of your work.

- Unless otherwise directed you will be submitting papers as Word Documents by means of Moodle. Do not submit PDFs or Google Docs or other formats. It is your responsibility to do the conversion to Word prior to submission.
  - Always put in your name and the page number as part of a header or footer. Including a date within the footer is also a good habit.
  - When making a submission you must name the file in the following manner: [Your Last Name][Paper Topic or Focus]. Receiving numerous files titled "152 Paper" or "Darwin Paper" but without the name of the author makes filing on my end extremely difficult.
- Use the past tense for past actions. The artists, writers, and thinkers we consider in this course acted in the past (most are long dead!). Therefore, you should employ the past tense when discussing their actions. On the other hand, a work of art or piece of writing engages its audience in the present and so may be written about in
the present tense. Thus Darwin, the man, should be discussed in the past tense. However, *The Origin of Species* can be encountered in present. Therefore it and its ideas can be discussed in the present. (Of course if discussing the reception of the *Origin* at some point in the past then it is best referred to in the past tense.)

- **Never use a contraction.** These papers are formal expository prose, not the transcription of conversation. Violation of this will automatically mean a *3 point reduction in your paper grade.*
  - The possessive of “it” is “its.” “It’s” is a contraction for “it is.” Do not make this mistake. Given the point above, "it’s" should never appear in your papers for me. **Violation of this will involve a five-point reduction in your paper grade.**

**Deadlines and Grading**

- I do not give extensions except for medical/family **emergencies.** Work may be submitted late, but every day (including weekends and holidays) an assignment is late, you lose 3% of the assignment grade.
- When you submit a draft or paper electronically, be sure that your last name is in the title of the file.
- Grading runs on 10 point increments. For example: 80-82.49=B-; 82.5-87.49 = B; 87.5-89.99 = B+.
- My grading philosophy for papers (and for the most part for exams as well) is as follows:
  1. The full completion of all requirements of assignments yields a good or very good assessment (B- to B+).
  2. Excellence (A- to A+) requires work that addresses all stated requirements and demonstrates a coherent and articulate argument that builds upon, or extrapolates from the stated requirements. [Keep in mind this must take place while all requirements are also addressed].
  3. Incomplete, cursory or slovenly engagement with the requirements of the assignment yields a grade within the C range.
  4. Active neglect of the requirements and goals of the assignment results in a D or F.

**QUIRKS REGARDING CLASS DISCUSSION and BEHAVIOR**

- “LIKE” - Is a much-abused part of language today. You should be able to curtail its use in class.
- I recognize that some of you will want to bring a computer to class for notes. That is fine. However, you should do so with full awareness of the importance of not distracting others or being distracted yourself by it in class - no matter how boring things get, do not check your email, surf the web, even if you believe you are doing the latter to support the discussion. This also applies to working on homework or assignments for other courses.
- Multitasking is a nice euphemism but to engage in it is a discourtesy to me and to your colleagues. If I detect or sense your use of the computer or smartphone to engage aspects of life beyond the course during the class period, the penalty will be the loss of half a grade after the computation of your average, which will already include a low participation grade.
I do not have problem with coffee/tea, water and even food in class. I often bring coffee myself. Just make sure that you clean up completely after yourself and put any containers, etc. in the trash.

Papers:

1) **Have Humans stepped outside Darwin's evolutionary framework?** (750 – 1000 words) Feb. 12 at 5PM.
   In much of contemporary parlance, "Nature" and "man-made" are seen as separate categories. This presumed separation between the two that fuels the belief that technology either eludes or cancels out the dynamics that are fundamental to the evolutionary process. In your paper, I ask you to discuss the question of whether, and/or to what degree, the human animal is outside the evolutionary framework. You should incorporate idea regarding evolution presented in the Darwin and Kolbert texts in your discussion.

2) **Making Promises and Positing Ideals** 750-1000 words. Sept. 29 at 5PM.
   Within the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche casts light on both the human capacity to promise and the human capacity (indeed propensity) to invest in ideals. These capacities are central his 2nd and 3rd Treatises. Explicate what he means by each capacity and outline the significance of each within his thinking. Finally reflect on the relevance of these capacities for human attitudes, morality, and behavior, as you encounter it today. Reference to specific passages within the Genealogy is expected.

3) **W. E. B. DuBois's The Souls of Black Folk as a lens on contemporary social justice issues.** 1250-1500 words. Nov. 17.
   You will identify an incident of recent experience (your own or publically engaged) in which diversity and social justice issues are central. Take no more than 1.5 pages to outline the incident and the issues that you think are pertinent to it. Where appropriate, cite news sources on which your understanding is grounded.
   Then review *Souls of Black Folk* and identify three quotations and discussions within it that cast valuable light on an understanding of the incident that opened your paper. In each case you will write about a one-page nuanced reflection on the particular values and ideas embedded within DuBois' writings as manifest within the quotation and how awareness of those values and ideas augments your capacity to understand or engage the incident.
Course Outline

Week One (Jan. 22-26) Introduction
Mon: Half-Period class.
Wed: Making Sense of Change - Coping with Change. The condition of modernity.

Week Two (Jan 29-Feb. 2)
Mon: Darwin, *Origin of Species*, Chapters 3 & 4: (60-130)
Wed: Darwin: *Origin of Species*, Chapters 4 & 6 (80-130; 171-206)

Week Three (Feb. 5-9)
Mon: *Sixth Extinction*, Chapters II & IV (70-111)
Wed: *Sixth Extinction*, Chapters XI & XII (217-259)
Fri: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Introduction and First Treatise (15-56)

Week Four (Feb. 12-16)
Mon: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Introduction and First Treatise (15-56)
    D ARWIN PAPER DUE BY 5PM
Wed: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Second Treatise (57-96)
Fri: Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Second Treatise (57-96)

Week Five (Feb. 19-24)
Fri: Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Intro., Parts I & II

Week Six: (Feb. 26-March 2)
Mon: Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Intro., Parts I & II
    N IETZSCHE PAPER DUE BY 5PM
Wed: Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Intro., Parts I & II
Fri: Marx & Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, Intro., Parts I & II

Week Seven (March 6-10)
Mon: Kandinsky, "Concerning the Spiritual in Arts" (1912) Moodle.
Wed: Webern, Five Pieces for String Quartet

Fri: Webern, Five Pieces for String Quartet

Week Eight (March 10-18)
M ID T ERM B REAK
Week Nine (March 19-23)
Mon: Basic Cinema Concepts
TUESDAY EVENING: Pontecorvo, Battle of Algiers. 7-9 PM
Wed: Pontecorvo, Battle of Algiers - Documentary Form: Truth and Illusion
Fri: Pontecorvo, Battle of Algiers - Social Goals and Means

Week Ten: (March 26 - 30)
Mon: Exam
TUESDAY EVENING: LITTLE 207. CORNEL WEST, LECTURE AT COLGATE (1995) 7-8:15 PM
Fri: Cornel West, Race Matters, Intro. and Chapter I (1-31) (Moodle).

Week Eleven: (April 2-6)
Mon: W. E. B. Dubois, Souls of Black Folk, Chapter I: “Of Our Spiritual Strivings”.
Wed: DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, Chapter III & IV (skim II)
     B. T. Washington Atlanta Address (http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/39/)
Fri: DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, V & VI

Week Twelve: (April 9-13): Course Registration Week
Mon: DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, VII, VIII, IX.
Wed: DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, XI, XII
Fri: DuBois, Souls of Black Folk, XIII/XIV

Week Thirteen (April 16-20):
Wed: Georg Simmel, “Metropolis and Mental Life.”
Fri: Georg Simmel, “Metropolis and Mental Life.”

Week Fourteen (April 23-27):
Mon: Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (The Day up to Noon)
Wed: Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (The Afternoon)
Fri: Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway (The Evening and the Party)

Week Fifteen (April 30 - May 4):
DUBOIS PAPER IS DUE
Mon: Picasso: Cubism and Demoiselles d’Avignon (Moodle PDF)
Wed: Picasso: Cubism
Fri: Picasso: Guernica

May 5-6 Review Period
May 7-8 Examination Period
May 9 Review Period
May 10-11 Examination Period