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# On the Art of Teaching and Learning about Civilizations: History, Diversity, and Plot

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**On the Art of Teaching and Learning about  
Civilizations:  
History, Diversity, and Plot**

**Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup> at 4pm in BH 151**

David L. Curley  
Professor Emeritus

Sponsored by the Department of Liberal Studies  
Western Washington University

Liberal Studies

Looking at Human Cultures  
Around the Globe

@ College of Humanities and Social Sciences

## **On Teaching and Learning about Civilizations:**

### **Histories, Diversities, and Plots**

David L. Curley

Lecture, Western Washington University, May 29, 2014

It is an honor to speak to you today. I thank my colleagues at the Department of Liberal Studies, and especially the Chair, Scott Pearce, for inviting me to give this lecture.

My lecture will be part memoir, part book review, and part a history of the department in our early days. There will be three sections: 'The History of Western Civilization' at the University of Chicago; Great Books and Teaching about Diversity; and Plots and Curricula in the Department of Liberal Studies. My fundamental idea is that a course about a civilization's history must be a kind of narrative, and that we can evaluate courses by thinking carefully about the relation between forms and purposes in their narratives; that is to say, about their plots.

#### **'The History of Western Civilization' at the University of Chicago**

I took this course in my first year in the College of the University of Chicago. I mean for us to ask, Why 'Western Civilization' and, why 'the history'? Did we students not confront cultures in the plural, and histories in the plural?

What do we mean by 'Western civilization', and 'the West'? Exploration of the terms the 'Occident', 'European civilization', and 'Western civilization' would lead us through a long history of shifting political and cultural boundaries defining 'us' and 'them'. In his recent book *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition*, David Nirenberg has traced the history of the idea of 'Judaism' as the foil, not just of Western Christianity, but also of ideals of the European Enlightenment, and of the modern secular West. Nirenberg acknowledges the influence of

Edward W. Said, who similarly traced a history of negative stereotypes of the 'East' in modern Western 'Orientalist' scholarship. For modern British political thought 'others' to the British also have included participants in the terrors of the French Revolution, Napoleon, and in fact the French in general, and the Irish, and Germans, and non-whites, and the lower classes—a long list. In the US during the Cold War, the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union was the enemy of 'the West'. Most recently, efforts have been made to replace communism with radical Islam, forgetting perhaps that just the other day Islam was an ally in the war against communism. Alastair Bonnett shows in his elegant book, *The Idea of the West*, how the term 'the West' has been used in reverse polarity by communists, Asians and radical Muslims. Their definitions of 'the West'—technologically advanced, materialistic, aggressive, sexually obsessed, and so on—are irrelevant to us only because we ignore how 'the West' has been thought about by others to define themselves.

In any case, the specific terms 'the West' and 'Western civilization' did not come into common use before the 1890s. In the eighteenth century 'European civilization' was the term commonly used by Europeans to name what was distinctive about their modern culture. By the end of the nineteenth century 'Western civilization' was used for the 'trans Atlantic civilization' shared by the 'advanced nations' of Europe and North America. The 'other Americans' in 'Latin America' were excluded from 'the West'—but why? In the second half of the nineteenth century 'white civilization' rather than 'Western civilization', had been the more common alternative to 'European civilization'. But a racial basis for 'civilization' could seem problematic. By 1900 most authors who used the term 'white civilization' thought that the greatest threat lay in uncultured and ungovernable white masses—not in dark skinned colonial subjects. Thus

‘Western civilization’ was used to emphasize the continuing role of classical education in shaping a ‘community of values’ among ‘Western’ elites.

‘Civilization’ is an equally problematic term, and as Fernand Braudel has demonstrated, its meanings multiply when we include ‘culture’ as a near synonym, and especially when we also include the plural, ‘cultures’. I want to discuss these problems in the second section of my lecture, when we will consider efforts to define universal moral standards, and the diversity of ‘cultures’ in the plural.

Regardless of how ‘Western’ and ‘civilization’ were to be defined, the purpose of the course ‘The History of Western Civilization’ at the University of Chicago was not to teach students to know Western Civilization for the parochial reason that it is ‘our own’ civilization. I draw here on the brief and interesting account by William H. McNeil, professor of world history at the University of Chicago, and not irrelevantly, author of a global history called *The Rise of the West* (which once was used as a textbook in our department). McNeil served on the committee that designed this course at the University of Chicago, and in 1950 he wrote a brief account of the committee’s work.

Original course themes were markedly political. Thus, in the modern period the course covered nationalism, revolution, and experiments with autocratic rulers who embodied the ‘national will’ in France; and industrialization, economic progress, and reforms to benefit the working class in Great Britain. It ignored European empires and their relation to nationalism, but the course did consider illiberal nationalist and totalitarian movements in Europe after World War I. Thus the course included some of ‘the West’s’ own anti-rational and illiberal others. Key participants in the design of this course had come to the United States as Jewish refugees.

The committee quickly decided that to allow greater depth of coverage, the course would treat only selected ‘periods of concentration’. To decide which periods should be taught, and which themes would be used to unify the course, the committee asked which ‘ideas, attitudes, or institutions’ developed in the past would best help students ‘understand their contemporary society’. ‘Understanding contemporary society’ was from its beginning an important purpose.

The committee identified two approaches by which the course might help students understand contemporary society. Both approaches rely on the capacity of history to provide explanations. The first approach tried to find causal explanations in enduring social and economic processes and structures. (Critics on the committee called this a doubtful and ideologically freighted project.) To understand what supporters in the committee had in mind, we should recall that Fernand Braudel and others at the journal *Annales* were criticizing the unscientific ‘fictions’ of narrative political history, and especially histories of the decisive actions of ‘great men of the past under whose influence we all seem to live’, Braudel noted, ‘and no one more than historians themselves’.

Braudel and his colleagues opened up new avenues of quantitative, and ‘scientific’, and for them ‘value-free’ research. They fruitfully linked large units of space and long durations of time to the exploration of overlooked archives. Braudel argued that a historian should analyze quantitative data of anonymous and innumerably repeated actions: records of births and deaths, prices of food and labor, or deeds of inheritances and sales of land, for example. Through innumerably repeated actions a civilization ‘inscribes time in geography’—we should not forget the reference to scene in this powerful metaphor. Time ‘slowed down by space’ reveals long-term structures and rhythms that otherwise escape notice. Thus Braudel and his colleagues discovered several modern ‘conjunctures’ of demographic and economic prosperity affecting

vast spaces and lasting half a century or longer. If he had written a play instead of histories, it would have been one about scenes that are created by and contain ‘processes’ and ‘forces’. By means of those processes and forces, civilization acts upon the landscape as a vast collective, in comparison to which individuals are but fleeting shadows. Civilizations build their worlds as bees do bee-hives, in cycles of different lengths, long and very long—but suddenly the hive also can swarm or collapse.

Historians should think carefully about both necessary and sufficient causes—and perhaps we can return to this distinction in our discussion. But history, despite the common phrase, is never a laboratory, and we rarely can make conclusive statements about causal relations.

The committee’s second approach to integration relied upon the uses of human reason to define and solve common problems. This approach turns from collective agents, and processes and forces, to actions shaped by individuals and their purposes. Its explanations are teleological as well as causal, because human actions have purposes. This approach looks for assumptions used to define common problems and to form individual and common purposes. It attempts to understand actions sympathetically, in terms of shared languages and cultures, but also in terms of unique individual actors and agencies. With Hannah Arendt we may note parenthetically that all human actions do not attempt to solve problems. Their purpose may be just to appear in a certain way, to be beautiful or glorious. We recognize at least some virtues only by their appearance, courage for example, and virtues may well appear (and be remembered) in actions which create nothing and solve nothing.

When actions become our key term, we are led to think about appearances as well as intentions, about beginnings and endings that make actions visible, about the character of actors

as well as their thoughts—as well as about the scenes in which actions appear and by which individuals are constrained. And we think about all in relation to each other. Explanation takes place by means of relating actions to their purposes and consequences, and parts of actions to wholes, and thus beginnings to ends. One may recognize these terms as the components of ‘plot’ in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In *Time and Narrative* Paul Ricoeur argues that in life humans interpret and understand actions by the same terms and in the same way that we make and understand narratives. We use the forms and purposes through which plots are made to understand living actions, for a plot, as Aristotle said, is an imitation of an action, and like actions, plots reveal themselves, have purposes, and develop over time from beginnings to ends.

Does plot have any relevance to actions of the great collectivities that populate Braudel’s history—civilizations, peasants, or the bourgeoisie for example? How often do even modern nation-states act with coherent intention? Do we ever see absolute beginnings or endings for the actions of such collectivities? We may be skeptical, and I hope we discuss these difficult questions. Consequences of collective actions, on the other hand, are possible to trace. Thus we can trace, for example, how elite ideas about human society, and on the contrary resistance by marginal groups to those same elite ideas, together form enduring ‘identities and sentiments of the social bond in its plurality’, to use another formula that Paul Ricoeur often repeats in another work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

Let us summarize the curricular purposes and problems we have discovered so far. We can agree, perhaps, that through a history of Western Civilization students should become acquainted with at least a few great islands in the historical archipelago of their own civilization. Students should achieve thereby some historical understanding of their contemporary society. Necessarily that ‘understanding’ will come either by means of causal explanations or by means



of plotlike explanations, for these are the two kinds of explanation that history can provide. We have arrived at one standard for judging courses about civilizations, and again I acknowledge my debt to Paul Ricoeur. They should explain. They should deploy both the wide angle lens and the long expanses of time need to see and explain slow processes of change that result from innumerably repeated human actions that build up, and destroy our human world. Here the language of cause and effect is natural, whatever our difficulties may be in actually identifying causes and effects. But our courses also should use close-up lenses, short time spans, and local spaces to explore thoughts and actions of individuals. The close-up lens will be particularly valuable when we want to focus on marginal people and acts of resistance to dominant elites. The plot of a good course will shift back and forth between these different lenses.

Finally, please indulge me in a brief appreciation of the course as I experienced it. You may imagine me in my freshman year, 1963-64, being taught by the ‘Socratic method’ by Mr. Karl Weintraub, who called on students without waiting for volunteers (Mr. Curley), and could dismiss unproductive answers even when a student was (Miss Brown) midthought. Rational inquiry into human problems, construction of valid arguments based on good evidence, the great value of living in a state that protects individual freedoms, a corresponding obligation to pursue individual excellence, and the powers obtained by cultivating one’s native language were ideas and ideals that Mr. Weintraub incidentally shared with us. He first had come to the College as a student in his teens and as a refugee from Europe. I on the other hand had come from a family of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Spokane. In Mr. Weintraub’s course the excerpts from the great books that I read were entirely new to me—except for the Bible. By the way, I had problems with keeping up with the assigned readings, partly because I kept trying to read beyond the assignments. I gave up regular exercise (temporarily), and became a patron of Hyde Park’s

bookstores. But habits of deference to tradition and authority encumbered and often silenced me. Outside the class students were involved in passionate debates about the civil rights movement, about the meaning of President Kennedy's assassination, and about covert US involvement in Indochina. Outside the class I hardly knew what I thought, or why I had the few opinions that I did have. I was learning about the achievements and limits of reason and freedom in Mr. Weintraub's course as I tried uncertainly to instill them in my intellectual character.

### **'The Great Books' of Western Civilization, and Teaching about 'Diversity'**

About diversity first of all, I can say that in 1963-64 there were no women in the History of Western Civilization at the University of Chicago. I mean, we did not read a single primary source or secondary work of scholarship by a woman. We also did not discuss sexuality and gender roles of women in the ancient Mediterranean lands, and despite reading Plato, we did not discuss ancient Greek ideas about the male body, male sexuality, and education, ideas that obviously encouraged erotic relations between adolescent and more mature men. These topics and many more have been opened by the entry of women and of gay women and men into university faculties. Similarly, we did not discuss the long history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery in the New World. Here also, we now can draw on much new research about New World diasporas of African cultures, about consequences of slavery, and about the contributions of African-Americans to American, Brazilian, and West Indian cultures. I should add that other immigrants with their own homelands and hybrid cultures have demanded and contributed histories of their own. Moreover, most colleges now teach histories of 'non-Western' civilizations—in fact, a fairly standard set—where each civilization has its own difficult definitional problems. Should we still teach Western civilization in the singular? Should

we include the topics of diversity, and if so, which ones? Or should they be relegated to courses that are specifically about women, or African-Americans, for example? How can we teach students about people who are different from them, whether ancient Greeks or contemporary Muslims?

I will only open a discussion of these issues. I begin with Alan Bloom's fierce book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, a defense of teaching great books in the Western philosophical tradition. With and against it I want to consider Martha Nussbaum's response, *Cultivating Humanity: a classical defense of reform in liberal education*. Nussbaum defends a certain kind of teaching about gender, ethnic minorities, and other cultures to prepare students for citizenship in a global world. She also acknowledges that many of the classical texts of a liberal arts education continue to be important. What will be most interesting to me, therefore, are some important points of agreement between Bloom and Nussbaum.

Bloom's book takes as antagonists left-wing academics of the 1980s who, according to him, would either eliminate teaching 'great books' or would teach them only as a platform for criticizing them. Nevertheless, his book is not a defense of all traditional 'values'. Rather, the teacher's task, according to Bloom, is 'to assist his pupil to fulfill human nature against all the deforming forces of convention and prejudice', including contemporary Western ones. About 'convention and prejudice', perhaps I should note that Bloom was gay man with a complex critique of 'gay culture'. Bloom also expresses the purpose of education another way: the teacher must 'help students pose the question to themselves, "What is man?" in relation to each student's highest aspirations'. His discussion is framed by ideas about human nature, about individual human differences, and about moral purposes for a liberal education.

Why is a program of reading great philosophical books in the classical Western tradition necessary for a liberal education? The simplest answer is that, in Bloom's view, contemporary culture fails us because it has replaced universal moral virtues with culturally relative 'values'. In contemporary culture, 'values' are not derived from rational arguments about human nature. We cannot justify our values because they are not based on reason. Values are not universal. They cannot be reduced to any set and rank order to which everyone will agree. In contemporary culture, all we can do is practice 'value clarification' in our communications with others about values, thus preparing for efficient social and political bargaining. The only absolute values perhaps are tolerance and the willingness to compromise. (By the way, for a defense of the virtue of allowing for different values in a society that values individual freedom, you may want to read Isaiah Berlin's famous essay, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'.) According to Bloom, students who return to great philosophical works of the Western tradition, down to Kant at least, enter an alternative tradition of thought about universal moral standards based on reason. In any case he found that the great books inspired his students with love of truth and a passion to live a good life. Reading them, students, according to Bloom, feel they are doing something independent and fulfilling; they feel that they are getting something from the university that they cannot get elsewhere.

Bloom, I hasten to add, did not want the great books 'forced into categories that we (that is, we teachers) make up', any more than he wanted them to be trivialized 'as historical products' of their own societies and cultures. He wanted students to confront great books directly, for their ideas, 'as their authors wished them to be read', and he does not seem to have wanted a curriculum that imposed a single view either of human nature, or of morality. Students should

read conflicting philosophical accounts, make their own discoveries, and make up their own minds.

Perhaps we all can agree that we should teach books that are worthwhile in themselves. Teachers can keep in mind that when we do not teach great books, our students are likely to learn only the relatively shallow thought that we ourselves can impart. According to Bloom, great books that form the core of the Western philosophical tradition provide the student with an ‘intimation that great mysteries might be revealed to him, that new and higher motives of action might be discovered within him, that a different and more human way of life can be harmoniously constructed by what he is going to learn’. But in an important passage Bloom also acknowledged that there is a role for good books, not just great ones, and that there can be no single ‘canon’ of great books in the Western tradition. We need not follow his ill-considered opinion that only in Western philosophy is there inquiry about a basis for moral virtues in human nature—for what else is Confucian ethics? Nor is another opinion valid: that only in the West does one find the ideal of intellectual freedom from ethnic and cultural chauvinism. What else is the Indian moral virtue of ‘equanimity’, seeing everyone, friend or enemy, with mental balance? As Nussbaum shows, shortly after Bloom wrote, a few teams of philosophy teachers were designing rigorous courses that explored and compared philosophical works on ethics from different civilizations.

Bloom, however, also argues that reading deeply in any one of a number of traditions is good in itself. In a remarkable passage he remembers his grandparents, ‘ignorant people by our standards’ but believing and observant Jews:

My grandparents found reasons for the existence of their family and the fulfillment of their duties in serious writings, and they interpreted their special

sufferings with respect to a great and ennobling past. Their simple faith and practices linked them to great scholars and thinkers who dealt with the same material, not from outside or from an alien perspective, but believing as they did, while simply going deeper and providing guidance. There was a respect for real learning, because it had a felt connection with their lives. This is what a community and a history means, a common experience inviting high and low into a single body of belief (60).

Thus Bloom sets reading practices of orthodox Judaism somewhat uncomfortably alongside a strictly rational ethic, and individual freedom from the deforming forces of convention and prejudice. In this passage Bloom suggests, I think, that a good life also requires community, and community requires a shared faith and history. My experience reading and teaching great and good books from ancient South Asian traditions has helped me to understand this suggestion.

An unconsidered cultural relativism is the enemy of both goals: to have a new philosophical understanding of universal moral virtues, and to experience the bonds of ‘community and history’. In any case Bloom hoped that by teaching the Western tradition, the relativism of ‘values’ can be replaced, at least briefly in young adulthood, by ideals of virtue and excellence. It is also true that for Bloom the equality of democracy, where everyone’s opinion counts, should be limited by a frank acknowledgment of the intellectual and moral superiority of a few, who alone might take up the work of philosophy.

Briefly I want to compare Martha Nussbaum’s defense of teaching about diversity, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Unlike Bloom, Nussbaum sees practical value in an education that includes knowledge about women, minorities, and other cultures. Our students, she assumes, must become citizens ‘in a diverse and

global world', to use a common phrase that Bloom would have criticized. On the other hand, she is interested in a capacity for moral reasoning that she thinks is common to all humans. She describes college programs that teach students from a wide range of backgrounds and with very different academic preparations and abilities. And, she outlines a special role for literary fictions in her own program of careful reading (members of book clubs, take note).

Nussbaum argues that there are three capacities that a contemporary liberal education should teach student so that they can be 'citizens of a diverse and global world'. The first is the 'Socratic' capacity for 'critical examination of oneself and one's traditions'. This capacity requires that we 'accept no belief as authoritative simply because it has been handed down by tradition or become familiar through habit'. This is a breathtaking proposal, but it would apply equally to the unconsidered moral relativism that Bloom condemned. Nussbaum certainly wanted teachers to help students identify and correct shallow and poorly thought out criticisms of traditions. Critical examination of oneself and one's traditions requires training in rational inquiry: the ability to assemble and weigh evidence, to reason logically based upon evidence, and to recognize the false logic of formally bad arguments.

Nussbaum's second required capacity is the ability to see ourselves not simply as 'citizens of some local region or group', but also as human beings bound together 'by ties of recognition and concern'. A capacity to be concerned for others requires above all 'broad historical and cross-cultural understanding'—of ethnic minorities within our own culture, of people with different sexual orientations, and of entire cultures different from our own. To develop this capacity education must address the problem that, generally speaking, we see mostly what we like to see; that is, whatever confirms the opinions and beliefs that we already hold. Most often, failure to see others as they are involves seeing too much in them of virtues

that we recognize in ourselves, or too much of vices that we do not recognize in ourselves.

Nussbaum calls this double error 'descriptive chauvinism'. There is, however, an opposite error, seeing too much of what is different in others because we value the exotic. She calls this error 'descriptive romanticism'. In either case failure to see supports exaggerated judgments of approval or disapproval.

Nussbaum's third required capacity is skill in using 'narrative imagination'. She recognizes that cultivation of alternative sentiments is needed to counter inherited group loyalties and identities. In particular students should cultivate a universal and disciplined sentiment of 'sympathy'. Sympathy in turn best can be cultivated by developing 'narrative imagination'. Nussbaum argues that students learn to 'read' people unlike themselves by reading great works of literature about such people. Sympathy, however, should not preclude judgment, either in reading or in life. Citing both Kant and contemporary moral philosophers, Nussbaum argues against 'normative skepticism' in the same way that Bloom does against cultural relativism. Accurate descriptions, and sympathetic understanding based on 'narrative imagination' can prepare ordinary people to make moral judgments about people who are different from themselves, and to make and defend those judgments by reasoning with others unlike themselves. In well designed classes students can learn to examine issues from the perspectives of others, and they can learn to discuss their moral judgments with other students, who will have different identities, beliefs, and sentiments.

Again we have come to standards for judging courses about civilizations. Students should read some 'great books', but we do not have to restrict ourselves to an established canon. On the contrary, our courses can and should represent diversity. Nussbaum provides us with characteristics that describe the full complexity of cultures by which we can examine our



courses. Cultures are formed through histories of argument and resistance. Important cultural activities are often condemned by some elites, but we should not censor those activities in our courses. (I am thinking, for example, about realistic portraits of men and women in Islamic visual arts.) Cultures borrow from other cultures and continually change. In particular, they have a modern present. We should study the present as well as the past. Courses that treat internal arguments as well as criticisms from the outside, and the present as well as the past naturally will present students with problems for moral judgment.

Nussbaum and Bloom agree that teachers should prepare students to engage in sound moral reasoning. We can prepare students by providing great books that teach them to think universally about human nature, that engage their imagination and sympathy for people who are different, and that deepen and expand their sense of what is moral and virtuous. We can consciously teach them to recognize and use sound logic and good evidence. But we should not censor or indefinitely defer the moral judgments of our students.

### **Plots and Curricula in the Department of Liberal Studies**

The final section of my lecture will be about general features of a course design developed in our predecessor, the General Studies Department of Western Washington University in the early 1970s. I will acknowledge its great success, but I also will suggest that one feature of the department's structure has produced a significant weakness.

In evaluating curricula I will return to the role of plot in history and in courses about history. Let me say, first, that I doubt very much that human history has an overall purpose. Instead I will use the word 'plot' only with acknowledgement that there can be histories of the same subject with many different kinds of plots. Some will emphasize harmony and resolution,

for example, while others will emphasize enduring conflicts. Second, I will try to be guided by the advice of Donald McCloskey, an economic historian, who announced to his field: ‘we need better stories’. I think in my case if not in his, better stories often are more complicated ones. Plots of our histories often must begin and end, without clarity, in a kind of middle. The closer we come to the present, the more our histories should recognize our limited perspective, and our ignorance about the future, even though concern for the future necessarily will shape what and how we teach.

In this section I will describe curricular development in the Department of General Studies, as the Department of Liberal Studies was known in the 1970s. In its early years the Department of General Studies completely re-organized a sequence of three courses they had been asked to take over. The department called them ‘The Western Traditions’: ancient, medieval and early modern, and modern. How many of you have taken at least one of these courses? The department also created historical courses about art, myth and religion, and the humanities of China and Japan, India, and Africa. I want to consider relations between form and purpose in ‘plots’ of both the Western and the ‘non-Western’ courses. I will argue that the department achieved a common course design that has great power.

Let us take ‘The Western Traditions’ first. Course descriptions stated that all three courses would feature close reading, discussion, and expository writing about texts that have been ‘formative for Western civilization’. This language suggests both the enduring influence of great books, and their ability to speak directly to new generations. You will recognize similarities to Alan Bloom. When William Stoeber became Chair, the department’s self-description began to stress the model of German *kultur-geschichte*; that is, ‘cultural history’. Our colleague Rodney Payton had studied the discipline of cultural history in a doctoral program at the University of

Chicago taught by Karl Weintraub. (Of course we already have met him!) ‘Cultural history’ in Weintraub’s program was considered both broadly, in the American and anthropological way, and narrowly, in the German way, to emphasize humane culture and the arts. For our department the term allowed instructors to choose from a wide range of topics that are ‘cultural’, including material and popular culture, and a corresponding freedom to de-emphasize political narratives of dates and facts. Course descriptions of the department promised attention to contexts as well as to great books and works of art. Books and other works of art would be analyzed and discussed, not for what they immediately said to students about their own lives, but within the problems and assumptions of their own ‘historical and cultural contexts’. The past would be allowed to be a different country, or rather a series of different countries, each with its own language. Students thereby would learn to consider texts from a certain distance, one that allows more accurate perceptions and more nuanced judgment. You will recognize similarities to Martha Nussbaum. A third and final purpose, at least implicit in the chronological organization of courses, was to help students set texts in a broad narrative framework, and see long term changes in the history of a particular civilization. Thus William McNeil’s goal of explanation also was present. All three purposes shaped the department’s new courses on Japan and China, India, and Africa, and its courses on the Western Traditions.

Allow me to describe a few courses offered in ‘The Western Traditions’ series. The department experimented with four Alternatives beginning in 1972-73. Each Alternative was designed and taught collaboratively by its group of faculty, and each had different integrative themes, methods, and purposes. The theme of the first Alternative was political thought about ‘the relations of the individual with the state’, and because the course was organized through a set of problems, faculty could introduce thinking in ancient Chinese philosophy about those same

problems. The second alternative offered to study the relation between ‘individual and society’ using methods taken from the history of ideas. Ideas about individuals and societies would be treated in two phases: first, in the specific societies where they were created, and second, in quite different, later societies where they were combined in new ways and acquired new meanings. So, for example, we could move from the ancient Greeks and Hebrews to the Christian Roman Empire. The third alternative was concerned broadly with ‘culture’ and ‘meaning’, and the instructors added, invitingly, they hoped, ‘not with *fact* or historical *chronology*’. This strand emphasized humane culture—‘art, music, drama, literature, science, theology, and philosophy’. It explored different cultural periods, each one displaying common problems, themes, and styles in different fields, as in medieval theology and cathedral architecture, for example. The final Alternative concentrated on changing relations between philosophy and the visual arts, and it promised to teach students enough about philosophy and the visual arts to be able to write good essays about relations between them. So, beginnings can allow great creativity.

Working from the ‘Four Alternatives’, individual instructors developed their own interesting and powerful versions of the Western Traditions courses. The 1971 syllabus for Alternative IV announced, in relation to the development of early modern science and its optimism about human progress: ‘We are coming to see more and more, however, the immense anguish which accompanied the rational triumphs of Newton’s and Galileo’s time, anguish reflected in witchcraft, sexual obsessions, religious fanaticism, and human butchery’ (I do not have a reading list). William Stoever’s 1976 version of this same course correlated ‘problems of perception’ in *Don Quixote* and *King Lear* with Galileo’s new scientific instruments and observations. Using the same central theme of doubtful and misleading perceptions (for the sun does not go around the earth, as it always has seemed to do), Stoever’s course then examined

thinking about political power by Machiavelli, and about proper limits to the state by Locke. Rodney Payton's 1976 version of the modern course introduced students to Rousseau, and thereby to the 'noble savage', racism, and 'nature as God'. Payton then taught Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in relation to the 'creative unconscious', and her novel in turn introduced Freud and Jung.

I turn to the 'non-Western courses. When Ulrich Mammitzsch came to the department in 1970-71, he introduced a series of brilliantly designed courses about East Asia. Each compared different aspects of Chinese and Japanese culture—the first course treated Literature, the second Mythology and Religion, and the third Artistic Expression. For China and Japan separately, each course first discussed ancient culture in relation to 'traditional' society. Mammitzsch then compared ancient culture changes that were introduced to China and Japan by new ideas and institutions of Buddhism from South Asia. Finally, Mammitzsch also compared the 'impact' of Western scientific, technological and military superiority, and movements to 'catch up' by introducing modern change in China and Japan. By 1973 he had introduced a similarly organized course, Humanities of India. In the same year Milt Krieger introduced 'Humanities *in* Africa'. Krieger has told me that he chose the title 'in' Africa rather than 'of' Africa in order to circumvent opposition to the idea that Africans had a 'humanities' of their own before contact with the West. His course included traditional works of visual arts, myth, oral poetry, history, and religion, and by 1976 he was able to change the title to Humanities *of* Africa. As he and his wife Judy Krieger developed their research in Cameroon, Krieger introduced material about contemporary gendered divisions of space and labor. Some of you may remember the African hoe he used to bring to class, a woman's tool. When Michael Fisher arrived in 1978, he introduced a new version of the 'Humanities of India' course, one which began not with the

‘traditional world’ of Vedic India, as Mammitzsch’s course had done, but with an almost silent film about gender and caste in a north Indian village, a film made in the 1950s.

Most courses in the department followed a basic model: analyzing important texts or works of art, considering their historical and cultural contexts, and placing them in an explanatory chronological sequence and narrative. But at least when I was a member of the department, instructors on the two sides of the ‘Western’/‘non-Western’ border occupied their own territories, with little or no cross-border trade. Our modern courses seem to have assumed that we can understand modern change in the West without having to consider the cosmopolitan dimensions of modernity. And on the other side of this border, from personal experience I have no doubt that more collaboration would have helped me create better curricula about the British empire, not just in India, but as a global event.

I think that the criterion of providing adequate explanation reproves us. Global events require global explanations. I want to conclude by suggesting ways our modern courses might consider more fully the cosmopolitan nature of modernity. We might reconsider the theme of ‘individual and society’ by exploring global circulations and cosmopolitan ironies in modern novels from Africa and Asia. We might reconsider not just how and why twentieth century European artists explored and borrowed from traditional arts of Africa, but I also how contemporary African artists have reflected on and criticized racial and gendered stereotypes in the West’s borrowings. Let me conclude with one familiar example of cosmopolitan modernity from India, and one that no doubt will be unfamiliar. Bikhu Parekh has argued that Gandhi changed the traditional Indian virtue of ‘non-violence’ to make it active rather than passive, and in so doing, he deliberately infused non-violence with the Christian virtue of ‘charity’. At the same time Gandhi disciplined Christian charity by adding to it the traditional Indian virtue of

equanimity, a disciplined and dispassionate mental balance. Of course, Gandhian ‘non-violence’, while almost forgotten in India, has enjoyed cosmopolitan employment (and transformation) in many parts of the modern world, and most recently, in environmental movements throughout the global south. Last, we may pause to consider this painting, ‘Hannah and Her Goats’, by A. Ramachandran (1994). We can note the painting’s cosmopolitan borrowings from several artistic traditions, and its complex and unsettling reversals of at least some expectations.

Current instructors, and some students in the Department as well, will have your own ideas for what should be included in courses about a more cosmopolitan and global modernity. I can only hope that this lecture will lead to many fruitful, further conversations.

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