

## **SYLLABUS FOR OCCIDENTALISM**

Ian Buruma

### **DESCRIPTION:**

It has been claimed, with some justification, that stereotypical Western views of the Orient have diminished the humanity of non-Western people. The purpose of this course is to look at the other side of Orientalism and examine a particular view of the West which is equally dehumanizing: Western civilization as soulless, machine-like, rationalistic, and arrogant. An analysis of Occidentalism should not only put current political events in a historical, and philosophical context, but hostile notions of Western modernity – the Enlightenment, Anglo-Saxon liberalism, and so on – should sharpen our own idea of what might be worth defending.

### **REQUIREMENTS:**

All students will be required to read the material outlined in the syllabus, and express their reactions to the texts or films in short notes, to be sent to my campus mailbox. One or more students will also be asked to write a short text each week. Both the notes and these texts will provide the points of discussion in the weekly seminars. At the end of the course, all students will write a paper on the main issues of Occidentalism. Grades will be decided on the basis of class attendance, the quality of the weekly texts and notes, participation in class, and the end paper.

### **FEBRUARY**

3: Orientation. Occidentalism, NYRB, January 17, 2002, by Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit. General outline of the themes to be discussed during this course.

10: Overcome by Modernity, Harry Harootunian. Chapter 2. How Japanese nationalists in the 1930s tried to find a non-Western alternative to Western-style modernity. Militant Japanese nationalism as a model for other non-Western responses to Western imperial power.

17: Inventing Japan, Ian Buruma. Chapter 1. An introduction to the Japanese encounter with the United States in the 19th century. This will be compared to similar encounters in other parts of the world.

24: Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan, Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi. Harvard. Chapters 2,3. Continuing the same topic, this session will look in greater detail at Japanese responses to the West, and in particular at the mixture of emulation and hostility.

### **MARCH**

3: Scientism and Chinese modernity. Science and Dissent in Post-Mao China, Lyman Miller. Chapters TK. In Search of Modern China, Jonathan Spence. Chapter 13. A worship of science and rejection of tradition marked the thinking of many early 20th century Chinese intellectuals. We will discuss the idea of science as one of the main pillars of Occidentalism, both its positive and its dehumanizing aspects.

10: Attack on the City, Ian Buruma. Thomas Cole's paintings of the imperial city, in American Sublime, catalogue, Tate Publishing, 2002. Tower of Babel,

Genesis 11. T.S. Eliot: Choruses from *The Rock*. Old-Newland, Theodor Herzl. Hubris and arrogance are also identified with the West by its enemies. We will discuss the idea of the metropolis, as the symbol of decadence, imperial arrogance, materialism and god-less hubris.

17: *Merchants and Heroes*, Werner Sombart. Chapters TK The city is also identified with commerce, and commerce is often associated with greed. Carrying on the discussion of the city as a pillar of Occidentalism, we will examine how anti-capitalism, anti-semitism, and hostility to the West can coincide.

24: *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams. Chapters TK The city as the imperial metropole. How a Marxist critique of colonialism overlaps with Occidentalism.

## **APRIL**

7: MOVIE. *Home and the World*, Satyajit Ray. This film, and Tagore's novel, upon which it is based, dramatizes the conflict between colonial modernization and local revolutionary zeal. It brings together some of the topics discussed earlier: the city, Western imperialism, and violent non-Western responses.

14: *The Arab Radical*, by Adeed Dawisha. Chapters TK. A general introduction into Arab encounters with the West. How Western modernity provoked religious and secular revolutionary ideas in the Muslim world, and what this says about Occidentalism.

21: *The Failure of Political Islam*, Olivier Roy. Chapters TK. We will continue the discussion of Islamic responses to the West.

28: *Milestones*, by Sayyid Qut'b. CNN transcripts interview with Mohammed Bin-Laden. Following on from the previous two sessions, we will look at the ideological basis of Bin-Laden's hostility to the West. Qut'b is one of the most important thinkers in modern revolutionary Islam.

## **MAY**

5: Discussion on Baathism, Islamism, National Socialism and other Occidentalisms. In this session, we will attempt to tie all the various cultural and political strands of Occidentalism together and see what, if anything, Islamists, Nazis, radical Asian nationalists, and revolutionary Marxists have in common.