ECON/ENG/PHIL 357 - Topics in Humanomics – Spontaneous Order and the Myths of the American West

INSTRUCTORS: Professor Erik Kimbrough (ekimbrou@chapman.edu) and Professor Michael Valdez Moses (mimoses@chapman.edu)

COURSE MEETINGS: M-Th 1:00-3:50 – Location WH 220

OFFICE HOURS: We will have joint office hours by request. Try to give us some notice, but we will usually be available before and after class.

PREREQUISITES: None

RESTRICTIONS: Sophomore Standing or Faculty Consent Required

COURSE COMMUNICATIONS: The vast majority of classroom communications will take place through email (typically via the dedicated course Canvas site). YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING SURE THAT YOU RECEIVE THESE COMMUNICATIONS. We are a team, so if you email one of us, email both of us.

Description: The (re)settling of the American West during the 19th century has long been romanticized as "manifest destiny" carried out by "rugged individualists" who "pulled civilization up by its bootstraps" on the frontier. Embracing this narrative, some economists have looked to the American West as a paradigmatic case of spontaneous order, in which, despite the absence of centralized legal authority, a striking degree of economic and political order was quickly and enduringly established based on voluntary agreements. Revisionist accounts have questioned just how well that narrative fits the historical realities and just how spontaneous the emerging order actually was. Embracing the revisionists, other scholars have adopted an alternative economic account in which the settling of the west was rapacious and exploitative. This course will examine these economic accounts of the West, explore how they are related to the approach one takes to the West as a humanist, and attempt to resolve the seeming contradictions. We will watch, discuss and write about a wide variety of texts, including three seasons of the series *Deadwood*, Anderson and Hill's classic *The Not So Wild, Wild West: Property Rights on the Frontier* (2004), Patty Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987), and a series of academic papers on the notion of spontaneous order and on debates about the nature of social order as it emerged in the context of the 19th-century American Gold Rush.

Humanomics classes (like this one) adopt a distinctively interdisciplinary approach. Throughout the term, we will address these questions through the lenses of economics, philosophy, and art (particularly modern long-arc television and cinema). We will not just ask what these disciplines have to say about our topic independently of one another; we will also ask how these disciplines interact, enrich each other, and have unique ways of capturing different dimensions of reality. The overarching idea is that there are many ways of expressing important ideas and that focusing on any one form of expression (social scientific, philosophical, artistic) in isolation is bound to leave important aspects of those ideas unstated, or incompletely expressed. Moreover, by working with media situated in a variety of historical contexts, we will necessarily ask why a set of ideas have been expressed in different ways in different times and places, and how this form of expression affects what's being said. Below is a brief sketch of how we aim to fill out our study.

Value Inquiry: The problem of order is a fundamental question of political philosophy. We will study the origins of political order and the development of social institutions in the American west. In so doing, we will necessarily concentrate on a number of conflicts between opposing social values and

divergent accounts of where they come from. For example, we will consider theories that foreground the individual actor as the locus of normative judgement and contrast these to theories that identify values with a collective. We will consider accounts that understand economic life in the west as either zero- or positive-sum and emphasize either competition or cooperation as the generative force of social order. We will explore the extent to which order in the west derived from adherence to traditional moral norms or from radical social experimentation. Finally, we will ask whether the profit motive was a spur to the emergence of social institutions and communal values or rather eroded the social bonds that were necessary to life on the frontier.

Social Inquiry: Since Alexis de Tocqueville and Frederick Jackson Turner, social scientists have looked to the American West as the cradle of American democracy and a laboratory for experiments in modern republicanism. The absence of strong state power at the time of American expansion has led many theorists to offer the western frontier as a testbed for theories in which social order emerges *ex nihilo*. In this class, we will study historical and economic accounts of the American west that emphasize the mutually beneficial, cooperative outcomes of spontaneous order, as it emerged through the decentralized interaction of many individuals. We will contrast this with accounts that emphasize that any such order, was rooted in conquest and, at best, creative destruction of a pre-existing (indigenous) order. In addressing these issues, we will make significant use of economic theory, economic history, the revisionist New History of the American west, legal theory, and political philosophy.

Artistic Inquiry: Our primary artistic "text" for this course will be the ground-breaking HBO television series, *Deadwood* (2004-2006), created by writer, director, and showrunner, David Milch (who not incidentally, holds a Ph.D.in English from Yale University, where he studied with the distinguished literary scholars, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren). One of the earliest television series to adopt an exclusively long-arc narrative format (as opposed to the "one off" episodic format associated with broadcast television), Milch's series revolutionized the genre of the Hollywood western. This course will give considerable and sustained critical attention to the distinctive aesthetic achievements and attributes of Milch's highly influential neo-western. Among those artistic features are: 1) its long-arc format across three seasons (and a later made-for-tv film) which successfully mimicked the sustained narrative of the triple-decker mid-Victorian novel, 2) its extensive multi-plot story that distinguished the show from the traditional 90 minute Hollywood western, 3) its focus on an ensemble of more than twenty major characters --- something which departed from the traditional focus of the Hollywood western on the single individual western hero, 4) its unique and controversial employment of a mixture of vernacular (obscenity-laced) and elevated "Shakespearean" dialogue and soliloquy, 5) its engagement with the historical and archival records of life on the 19th-century American frontier rather than hewing to more conventional and fanciful Hollywood "myths" of the American West, 6) its abandonment of the "epic" visual style of the Hollywood western (made famous by the director, John Ford) in favor of a curious mix of cinema verité and noir techniques not usually associated with the genre, and 7) its adherence to a form of cinematic realism that traditionally did not characterize more traditional Hollywood westerns.

Required Texts:

Allen, D. W. (2007). Information sharing during the Klondike gold rush. *The Journal of Economic History*, *67*(4), 944-967.

Allen, D. W. (2019). Establishing economic property rights by giving away an empire. *The Journal of Law and Economics*, *62*(2), 251-280.

Anderson, T. L., & Hill, P. J. (2004). *The Not So Wild, Wild West: Property Rights on the Frontier*. Stanford University Press.

Birzer, B. J. (1999). Expanding Creative Destruction: Entrepreneurship in the American Wests. *Western Historical Quarterly*, *30*(1), 45-63.

Cantor, Paul A. (2012). Order Out of the Mud: *Deadwood* and the State of Nature. *The Invisible Hand in Popular Culture: Liberty vs. Authority in American Film and TV*. University Press of Kentucky, Ch. 4, 97-130.

Clay, K., & Wright, G. (2005). Order without law? Property rights during the California gold rush. *Explorations in Economic History*, *42*(2), 155-183.
Kimbrough, E. O. (2020). Ecological Influences on Informal Property Rights. *Available at SSRN 2804870.*
Limerick, P. (1987). *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past Of The American West*. WW Norton & Company.
Luban, D. (2020). What is spontaneous order?.*American Political Science Review*, *114*(1), 68-80.
Milch, David. (2006). *Deadwood: Stories of the Black Hills.* Bloomsbury (Ch. 2, 38-63; Ch. 6-7, 118-149)
Moses, Michael Valdez (2023). "Growing up with the Country:' *Deadwood* and the Business of America." Alberto Mignardi and Maria Blanco, eds. *Show and Biz.* Bloomsbury, 2023.
Smith, V. L. (2003). Constructivist and ecological rationality in economics. *American Economic Review*, *93*(3), 465-508.
Sugden, R. (1989). Spontaneous order. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *3*(4), 85-97.
Turner, F.J. (1893) "The Significance of the Frontier in American History".
Zerbe, R. O., & Anderson, C. L. (2001). Culture and fairness in the development of institutions in the California gold fields. *The Journal of Economic History*, *61*(1), 114-143.

Films and TV Shows:
Deadwood Seasons 1-3

Course Schedule (subject to change, assignments updated as we go):

Date	Readings	Assignment
2-Jan	Poems, Sugden 1989, Schelling, Deadwood S1E1-13	Writer's Workshop 1
3-Jan	Clay and Wright 2005, Zerbe and Anderson 2001, Allen 2007, Deadwood S2 E1-3	Experiment
4-Jan	Kimbrough 2020, Allen 2019, Deadwood S2E4	Writer's Workshop 2
8-Jan	Birzer 1999, Smith 2003, Luban 2020, Deadwood S2E5-7	Writer's Workshop 3
9-Jan	Anderson and Hill, Ch. 1-3 (52pp), Deadwood S2E8-10	Screening
10-Jan	Anderson and Hill, Ch. 4-6 (67pp), Deadwood S2E11	Draft of Paper 1 Due
11-Jan	Anderson and Hill, Ch. 7-11 (91pp), Deadwood S2E12	**Project 1 Due**
16-Jan	Limerick, Intro & Ch. 1-3 (80pp), Deadwood S3E1-3	Debate Club
17-Jan	Limerick, Ch. 4-5 (82pp), Deadwood S3E4-6	Writer's Workshop 4
18-Jan	Limerick, Ch. 6-7 (80pp), Deadwood S3E7	Screening
22-Jan	Limerick, Ch. 8-10 (91pp), Deadwood S3E8-10	Writer's Workshop 5
23-Jan	Deadwood S3E11, Milch 2006	Screening
24-Jan	Deadwood S3E12, Cantor 2012, Moses 2023	Writer's Workshop 6
25-Jan	Final Exam	**Project 2 Due**

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Challenge and deconstruct the perceived tensions between economics and the humanities.
- Ask cogent, thought-provoking questions based upon critical reading of texts across a range of artistic, philosophical, and historical genres—film, television, and non-fiction.
- Explain theories of spontaneous order, including their assumptions and their implications.

- Examine how our notions of history shape our behavior, our understanding of the world and our relation to social structures.
- Explain the relation of notions of spontaneous order to systems and structures in historical, political and social context: the American West
- Explain methods used to study spontaneous order (e.g. experiments, simulations, histories, fictional/cinematic representations).
- Explore the relationship between spontaneous order, economic institutions and economic decision-making.
- Examine formal and aesthetic characteristics of film and long-arc television (particularly choices in lighting, editing, cinematography, music and soundscape, performance, screen writing)
- Explain how artistic works may reflect spontaneous orders of people, institutions, and societies in their historical context.
- Articulate how texts across the disciplines are co-constitutive of knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics.
- Demonstrate thoughtful rhetorical choices in creative and expository prose.

Program Learning Outcomes:

Economics

- Knowledge of Economics: Each student will demonstrate knowledge of modern microeconomic theory and apply it to analyze economic policies and problems.
- Communication: Each student will be able to communicate clearly, concisely and professionally in both written and oral forms.

English

- Skill in critical reading, or the practice of identifying and interpreting the formal, rhetorical, and stylistic features of a text (whether written or "visual" --- i.e, cinematic).
- Write demonstrating proficient use of genre elements, techniques, and conventions to produce a defined work: story, poem, or creative non-fiction.

Philosophy

- Ability to reason logically, effectively, and respectfully about ethical matters
- Writing ability to state and support a thesis, apply knowledge of critical reasoning, accurately interpret philosophical sources, and clearly communicate a balanced account in writing.

General Education Learning Outcomes:

- **AI/Artistic Inquiry:** Student composes critical or creative works that embody or analyze conceptually an artistic form.
- **SI/Social Inquiry:** Student identifies, frames, and analyzes social and/or historical structures and institutions in the world today.
- **VI/Values/Ethics Inquiry**: Student articulates how values and ethics inform human understanding, structures, and behavior.

Grading:

Because of the interactive nature of the class, attendance is an essential component. Excessive "tardies" constitute absences; three absences may result in failure (Undergraduate Catalog, "Academic Policies and Procedures.") Please keep this in mind. Missed in-class work cannot be made up.

1. <u>Participation in Class Discussion and In-Class Experiments</u> [10%]

   Class discussion provides an opportunity for students to explore questions about moral development. Through this shared inquiry, students gain experience reading for meaning and communicating complex ideas; thinking reflectively about an interpretive problem; and supporting and testing thoughts through dialogue with peers. Class discussion fosters the flexibility of mind to consider problems from multiple perspectives and the ability to analyze ideas critically. Students must enter the discussion with specific questions generated by the texts as well as a

desire to probe and reevaluate ideas. It is essential that students bring texts and questions to each class session. Also includes grades based on participation in in-class experiments.

2. Written Questions [10%] - Guidelines for Asking Questions

Shared inquiry is a process for exploring the central ideas of the course. This means students must read for meaning, identifying possible interpretative problems they would like to address in discussion. For each class period with an assignment, students will word process in advance two questions to be handed in before class starts. Asking a good question is harder than providing a good answer. The student's task is to delve into a claim or idea they find puzzling, exploring what has unsettled them. When writing the second paper, we will periodically use the writer's workshop to provide waypoints on the path from research questions to the completed paper.

3. Writer's Workshop [25%]

The writer's workshop is based on the idea that students learn to write when they write often; in this case, focusing their attention on ideas from the readings and discussions immediately preceding the workshop. An important component of these assignments is to understand each week's media in their social scientific, philosophical, and/or artistic context. Students will encounter a variety of writing assignments for the workshop, including both critical and creative works. Students will be asked to produce a number of papers, of approximately 250 words, and submit a polished piece at the end of the hour. Also includes grades for other in-class activities (e.g. formal debates, group work).

4. Projects – Expository and Creative [40% = 2 x 20% each] - Guidelines for Paper Formatting

In addition to the writer's workshop papers, students will complete two major projects in the course, one expository/critical and one creative in nature. These projects will provide opportunities for students to explore ideas and use texts to add to the ongoing discourse.

- Expository project: Students will produce one essay of 1,000 words (maximum) answering a question prompt provided to the class by the instructors. The question will pertain to the topic of spontaneous order as we have been analyzing it conceptually and via social scientific methods in our discussions and readings. Critical projects will be evaluated for their rigor, concision, and structure in building their analysis.
- Creative project: Students will produce one work of art in answer to a question prompt provided to the class by the instructors. The aim of this project is to utilize the question as a vehicle for exploring one of the art forms that we have been engaging with in our discussions, readings, and encounters with visual art. Students are invited to choose the form they wish to explore among painting, sculpture, film, poetry, monologue, screenplay, theatrical play or tragedy, dance, photography, music, short story, or graphic novellette. This list is not intended to exhaust possibilities, and students are welcome to consult with the instructors in their ideas of forms to explore. Demonstration of an understanding of the skills involved in the creative process will be evaluated, as will the final product. In particular, creative projects will be evaluated for their depth and breadth of engagement, including sophistication of deployment of techniques special to the selected form of expression.

5. Oral Final Examination [15%]

Students will consider the course objectives and respond to questions posed by the professors in an oral examination during the exam period. More details will be given towards the end of the class.

Academic Integrity:

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the university Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions including expulsion. Please see the full description of Chapman University's policy on Academic Integrity at www.chapman.edu/academics/academicintegrity/index.aspx.

Chapman University's Students with Disabilities Policy:
In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services. If you will need to utilize your approved accommodations in this class, please follow the proper notification procedure for informing your professor(s). This notification process must occur more than a week before any accommodation can be utilized.

Please contact Disability Services at (714) 516-4520 if you have questions regarding this procedure, or for information and to make an appointment to discuss and/or request potential accommodations based on documentation of your disability. Once formal approval of your need for accommodation has been granted, you are encouraged to talk with your professor(s) about your accommodation options. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Equity and Diversity Statement:
Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman's Harassment and Discrimination Policy. Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.