

BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	Formation for a dying world: how young university students navigate the socio-ecological crisis and perceive their role in the future
Student's name:	Anna Bruno
Referee's name:	Jakub Franěk

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	50	46
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	15	13
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	15	13
Total		80	72
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	9
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	4
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	4
Total		20	17
TOTAL		100	89

Plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score:

[NB:] If the plagiarism-check (URKUND) match score is above 15%, the reviewer has to include his/her assessment of the originality of the reviewed thesis in his/her review.

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria (min. 1800 characters including spaces when recommending a passing grade, min. 2500 characters including spaces when recommending a failing grade):

L Let me start by stating that the reviewed thesis is very unusual. And I mean that, at least for most part, positively. It is, in more than one way, highly original, and testifies to the author's ability to think out of the box, to ask important questions without necessarily offering clear answers. Nevertheless, while it is in many ways original and thought provoking, it fails to be fully persuasive. Its argumentative line strikes the reader as often extremely one-sided. Moreover, the very premise of its main argument (or thesis) seems to be at least highly questionable.

The theoretical section of the reviewed thesis examines the nature and implications of modernity. Nevertheless, the author's approach to this central topic of her thesis, appears as questionable and ultimately even untenable. While initially lamenting the (over-

)simplifying nature of the mainstream accounts of modernity, the author proceeds to provide her own account, which however, appears to be even more oversimplifying and one-sided than those provided e.g. by Weber or Adorno and Horkheimer. Modernity for our author apparently equals coloniality or global hegemony of originally Western rationality. As such, it is apparently the root-cause of all problems of the contemporary world – and nothing else. In other words, the author portrays modernity (and implicitly also Western rationality as such) in an entirely negative light. It almost appears as if she wanted to trump the *Dialectics of the Enlightenment* with its complete and unequivocal rejection.

This style of argumentation occasionally leads to claims that, when taken literally, can only be described as absurd. Take for instance the arguments related to the “theory of basic needs” in section 1.3: While at first it may appear as a “*theory that claims universality for what each human needs*” ... in fact “*the (hi)story of basic needs is one of neocolonialism, hidden behind the mask of development. It is a story of exportation of Western standards of living in all the places where they needed to be ‘raised’, namely the ‘underdeveloped’ world.*” It would be one thing to note “dialectically” that decolonisation of the third world countries was paradoxically followed by “coloniality”, i.e. their further modernisation (and hence Westernisation) in the form of developmentalism. Our author however apparently rejects such “dialectical” approach and makes a bolder (and more one-sided) claim, according to which the discourse of basic needs is nothing else than a tool of neocolonialism. How are we supposed to understand the implications of this claim? Does the author mean that without the imposition of “Western standards of living” the denizens of the underdeveloped countries would not experience their basic human needs (such as food, water or shelter)? Or, rather, that had it not been for modernity, they would not frame the demand of satisfaction of such basic needs in terms of *rights* (apparently another deplorable modern/colonial concept)?

But what is the alternative? Stoically accepting as a fact of life, that most people will be always needy? Perhaps, but I am not sure, because the author does not offer any alternative, any way out of the trap of modernity. The hypothetical scenario described in the “vignettes” or prompts provided to the subjects of her research interview – i.e. choosing life in an apparently self-sustaining agricultural community instead of finding a standard job – can be described as a partial personal opt-out from capitalist economy and modern civilisation rather than a way of overcoming the impasses of modernity. For some, it may offer an opportunity of a less stressful life and at the same time an opportunity to unburden their conscience; nonetheless, it does not present a way out of the impasse of modernity, i.e. it cannot save the world or change the course of its development.

The main aim of the reviewed thesis is to explain why today’s university students who are aware of “the current socio-ecological crisis” nonetheless continue perpetuating it by acting according to the expectations of the system. The author then suggests four major factors responsible for the perpetuation of the current system, three of which – work, isolation and comfort – are confirmed in the research interviews as responsible for the perpetuation or reproduction of the current social system. The only initially proposed factor that was not confirmed was “control” defined as “regulation and restraint of action based on standards of order and security”. The absence of clear awareness of such control among the majority of respondents could, however, be explained simply as just another proof of effectivity of the hegemony of modernity.

At a couple of occasions, the author appears to suggest, that the root-cause of this success is the lack of imagination, or the capability to even imagine any alternative to modernity. But this lack of imagination may not be a result of the lack of audacity of today’s

university students to “exit conditions of isolation and, whenever possible, to reconnect to the soil and the knowledge to live with what surrounds us” but rather by a lack of vision of an alternative social system.

A couple of additional notes: It is unfortunate that the did not include transcripts of her research interviews as an appendix. Page numbers are likewise omitted, but I guess that this must be a result of some technological glitch.

Despite the critical notes above, I really enjoyed reading the thesis and I recommend it for defence without reservation.

Proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F): B

Suggested questions for the defence are:

The author mentions that the use of “language modified to be gender neutral” might have driven away some of the potential respondents. I am wondering why then the author insisted on using gender-neutral grammar. Was this choice in any way related to the subject-matter of the thesis?

I (do not) recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.