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## Course: The Strategist

### Educational Goal

The goal of this course is to improve our ability to think and act as strategists. We will develop a particular view of what it means to be a strategist and we will practice being strategists of this type.

### The Premise

In this course, we define a strategist to be someone who asks questions — but not just any questions in any fashion. The strategist recognizes that the way people, organizations, businesses, and other entities act depends importantly on *the assumptions they make* about how the world is or could be. The strategist asks questions about the *validity* of these assumptions. The strategist realizes that if our assumptions are invalid, we may fail to see opportunities or fail to see threats that are in front of us.

Strategists, under this view, think and talk in terms such as *current assumption*, *working hypothesis*, *provisional knowledge*, and similar. Strategists are never certain and are always open to revising what they believe. In this sense, strategists follow the scientific method of inquiry in constantly seeking to test their current thinking about how the world works. In the course, we will practice this type of thinking.

### Course Content

We will begin the course by discussing some arguments for adopting, as strategists, a mindset of *constructive ignorance*. We will also examine a number of definitions of strategy itself, and relate these to the mindset we are promoting.

Much of the remainder of the course will be devoted to studying a number of dualities relevant to strategists. A dictionary definition of the word *duality* is “an instance of opposition or contrast between two concepts or two aspects of something” (google.com). Examples of the dualities we will consider are: competition vs. cooperation, the bigger picture vs. the smaller picture, trade-off vs. trade-on, my mind vs. your mind, and weakness vs. strength. There will also be some more technical dualities, such as: the Prisoner’s Dilemma vs. another game and the Normal distribution vs. another distribution.

As strategists, we will reject the view that a particular situation must be understood solely in terms of one side of a duality. We will ask if the situation can be better understood in terms of the other side of the duality, or whether it can be even better understood in terms of *both sides of the duality* at once. We will cover many examples of how openness to thinking this way has yielded important advances by strategists.

In addition to these topics, the course will bring in a number of experts to talk about issues of current importance in the world where good strategic thinking is needed. This way, we will learn to be strategists not only in principle, but in practice here and now.

### Format

The course will be multimodal, involving reading, discussion, video, and exercises. A significant amount of class time will be devoted to group work on each of the dualities we will cover. Students, in groups, will create posters arguing for one or other side of a duality, and there will then be debate between sides. Posters will be captured and available at a class site. Between classes, students will be responsible for: (a) commenting on posters; (b) uploading a report (viewable by all of us) on something they have read, seen, etc. since the previous class and which they argue is illuminated by the course; (c) contributing to comment streams on (a) and (b). At the end of the course, each student will write a brief postscript.

The course will ask for a spirit of adventure and experimentation on the part of students.