The effects of modernity have been both emancipating and disintegrative. Emancipating in the sense that individuals are free to pursue their own destinies within the framework of an expansive capitalist system. Disintegrative in the sense that the sacred world order of the past has been lost, leaving people with the task of creating their own identities for themselves. This semester will use material from a number of different disciplines to delineate some of the ways in which thinkers have tried to make sense of this liberating but fragmented universe. It begins with theories about the nature of religion and its place in the modern world. The we will consider psychoanalysis, which turns inward to seek answers to the human condition, and go on to explore other influences on individual identity such as family dynamics, social institutions and cultural pressures.

Having established some general approaches to the problem of self-understanding, the next sections will deal with specific challenges to our notions of who we are. We move on to a multidisciplinary inquiry into the relationship between the individual and society using case materials from Nazi Germany and the contemporary United States. The course ends with a debate about the future of America.

**PART I: LOOKING OUTWARD: THE MEANING OF RELIGION**

This section consists of readings from three very influential theorists who have sought to understand the nature, purpose and meaning of religious belief in the modern era.

**Week 1**


Relying on extensive case studies, William James derives religion from the disturbed psychology of prophetic individuals. Because religion is primarily a state of mind, it is eternal.

**Week 2**

Emile Durkheim "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions" (handout); *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* Book I chap. 1 "Definition of Religious Phenomenon and Religion", Book II, chap. 7 "Origins of These Beliefs".

Durkheim uses anthropological data to argue that religion emanates from a primal experience of the collective. This is the source of all morality; without it, civilization is impossible.

**Week 3**

Max Weber *From Max Eber* chap. 13 "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions", chap. 5 "Science as a Vocation".

Weber sees religious creeds as ways to explain human suffering and provide meaning in life. As such, they can have a profound effect on cultural processes, but in the modern world they are challenged by science, which offers a new and disenchanted worldview.

**PART II : LOOKING INWARD : PSYCHOANALYSIS**
Freud argued that understanding humanity requires understanding the unconscious workings of the mind. This section outlines Freud's basic theory and its application to modern social conditions. It concludes with Erik Erikson's effort to bring culture into the Freudian model.

Week 4 Calvin Hall and Gardner Lindzey "Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality" (handout)

A basic outline of Freud's theories.

Week 5 Sigmund Freud Civilization and its Discontents (entire book).

Freud argues that modern civilization demands a high degree of repression and creates great anxiety. Why do people accept the authority of the collective, and what are the consequences?

Week 6 Erik Erikson Childhood and Society chap. 7 "Eight Ages of Man", chap. 3 "Hunters Across the Prairie".

Erikson brings a new perspective to psychoanalysis, declaring that cultural values and the lifelong pursuit of meaning are crucially important in the construction of character.

**PART III : IDENTITY IN QUESTION**

If social circumstances have a great part in constituting the self, then aspects of identity formerly thought permanent and solid may actually be contingent. In this section, we read some modern writers who have challenged our taken for granted sense of reality.

Week 7 Erving goffman The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life chap. 1 "Performances", chap. 6 "The Arts of Impression Management", chap. 7 "Conclusion".

Goffman turns psychoanalysis on its head, arguing that human beings are motivated not by inner drives but by the roles they play. There is no self, only performances.

Week 8 Spring Break

Week 9 Margaret Mead Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies Introduction, chaps. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, Conclusion.

Mead, an anthropologist, draws on her data from New Guinea to demonstrate that gender roles are not innate, but are culturally constructed.

Week 10 Philippe Aries Centuries of Childhood Part One "The Idea of Childhood".

Utilizing records and literary accounts, the French historian shows that our understanding of childhood has transformed significantly over time.

Week 11 Frantz Fanon Black Skin. White Masks Introduction, chaps. 1, 2, 5, 8.
Fanon, a black French psychoanalyst born in Martinique, dissects the psychic effects of colonialism and racism. Racial categories, he asserts, should be discarded.

Week 12 Ernest Gellner Nations and Nationalism chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10.

Gellner shows that national identity is not primordial, but is a modern creation, and he outlines the transformations in the world order that led to its development.

**PART IV : CASE STUDIES**

This section brings a number of disciplinary perspectives to bear in considering the complex interplay between political and personal life in two modern societies: Germany and the United States.

Week 13 Max Weber From Max Weber chap. 9 "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority"; Erik Erkson Childhood and Society chap. 9 "The Legend of Hitler's Childhood".

Weber's theory of charisma helps explain Hitler's rise to power while Erikson's essay places him in context. Together, they aid us in understanding why Germans lost themselves in the Nazi movement.

Week 14 Erik Erikson Childhood and Society chap. 8 "Reflections on American Identity"; Robert Bellah, et al Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life chap. 3 "Finding Oneself", chap. 4 "Love and Marriage".

Erikson provides an historical and cultural overview of the American psyche, while Bellah and his colleagues contribute a sociological perspective. At issue is the ambiguous relationship between the person and the wider community in the individualistic world of the United States.


How secure and well integrated is American society? Are we in danger of being destroyed by our absence of collective values? Students are invited to join the debate about this issue, using the knowledge gained during the semester.