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 three discussions about the quest for certainty in the modern world. Then 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 following five weeks will deal with specific identity issues involving social roles, gender, race and nationalism. The next two weeks are case studies of the relationship between individual and society in Nazi Germany and the contemporary United States. The course ends with a debate about the values of America.

PART I: LOOKING OUTWARD: RELIGION AND SCIENCE

This section consists of readings from influential theorists who have discussed the ways in which faith can be understood in the modern world. Does human society require some sort of religious underpinning? Can that role be filled by science? Is religion eternal?

week 1  William James  *Varieties of Religious Experience* Lectures 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 20.

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  Max Weber  *From Max Weber* 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.

week 3  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.

PART II: LOOKING INWARD: PSYCHOANALYSIS
Freud argued that understanding human development 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**  
Sigmund Freud *Autobiographical Study*; Calvin Hall and Gardner Lindzey  
“Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality” (handout)

A short account of Freud’s life and a basic outline of his theories.

**week 5**  

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", chap. 4 “Fishermen Along a Salmon River”.

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* chaps. 1, 6, 7.

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 performance.

**Week 8**  
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 9**  
Spring Break

**week 10**  
Frantz Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks*  
Introduction, chaps. 1, 2, 5, 8.

Fanon, a black French psychoanalyst born in Martinique, dissects the destructive psychic effects of colonialism and racism. Racial categories, he asserts, should be discarded for human freedom to be experienced.

Loury is an economist who uses case studies to show how culture and history ought to be factored into an economic analyses of race. His claim is that such an approach leads to a more just understanding of racial inequity.

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

Gellner argues 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. The dialectic between collectivist and individualist forms of social organization, which has been a unifying theme throughout the course, is here made concrete.

week 13  Max Weber  *From Max Weber* chap. 9 "The Sociology of Charismatic Authority"; Erik Erikson  *Childhood and Society* chap. 9 "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* 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.


In this final week, we will investigate the stability and moral authority of American values in the modern context.