This semester will discuss some of the ways social theorists have grappled with the experience of modernity. The course will begin with three influential theories of the place of religion in a world where religious experiences have become increasingly problematic. We will then read about the seminal secular model of human life offered by psychoanalysis. In the following weeks, the course will consider family dynamics and the comparative family structures that shape a person's character, and will move on to a reading of a sociological theory that imagines human beings primarily as roles in a cultural play. The next four sessions will deal with some of the major questions that concern contemporary thinkers: sexuality and gender identity, colonialism and the colonial mentality, the rise of nationalism and ethnicity, and the appearance of totalitarian states. We will conclude with a discussion of present-day American society and character.


week 4 Sigmund Freud “The Dissection of the Psychical Personality” in S. Freud New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Also Peter Gay’s “Brief Life” of Freud.

week 5 Sigmund Freud Civilization and its Discontents.
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".


week 8  Erving Goffman The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life chap. 1 "Performances", chap. 6 "The Arts of Impression Management", chap. 7 "Conclusion".

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.

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

week 11  Ernest Gellner Nations and Nationalism. chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10.

