

Political Science 399: Seminar in Political Theory
The Psycho-Dynamics of Modernity

This seminar is devoted to psychoanalytically-informed social theory in general and the contribution it can make to the critical comprehension of modern western societies in particular. It is based on the assumption that modernity both feeds off and reinforces defense mechanisms identified by psychoanalysis and that psychoanalysis is therefore indispensable for a critique of modernity that accounts both for its reproduction and the possibility of its transformation.

All the required readings are available for purchase at Circle Center Bookstore. These readings are very difficult and it will require sustained effort to understand them. Reading them *prior to* the class during which they will be discussed is essential for the informed discussion to which all students are expected to contribute. If you find that you do not understand the material well enough to contribute to that discussion, do not hesitate to seek clarification, either in class, during my office hours or via e-mail.

There are two different ways to fulfill the written requirements for this course. The first way is to write a term paper (on any topic that pertains to an issue raised in the course) of from 15 to 20 (double-spaced typed) pages that is due on the last class of the semester, Tuesday May 1. Students who elect this option must hand in, and discuss with me, a brief (one to two page) paper proposal no later than Tuesday February 27. They are also obliged to hand in (an ungraded) one-page memo every week (beginning the fourth week) in which they identify a central claim in the text and summarize the arguments made on its behalf. The second way is to write *four* 5-7 (double-spaced typed) papers devoted respectively to the four required texts following Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*; Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, Brown's *Life Against Death*; Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, and my *Mourning and Modernity*. Each paper should summarize and evaluate a central claim and its supporting arguments located in the text. These papers are tentatively scheduled for the fifth, ninth, twelfth, and last Tuesday of the semester: February 13, March 13, April 10, and May 1. Students who elect this option are not obliged to hand in weekly memos.

Although oral participation is (as was already said above) expected, that participation will only figure into your grade if your written work does not yield an unambiguous evaluation. In other words, I will only take the quality of your

participation into account if the grade on your paper or papers is, in my judgment, marginal between an “A” and a “B”, a “B” and a “C”, etc.

I. Introduction: Why Psychoanalysis?: Variations on the Psychoanalytic Theme (Week I)

II. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (Week 2)

III. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Weeks 3-5)

IV. Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (Weeks 6-9)

V. Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (Weeks 10-12)

VI. Isaac Balbus, *Mourning and Modernity* (Weeks 13-15)

Office Hours: Friday from 1 to 3 or by appointment in 1102-A BSB. My work phone number is 413-2185 and my home number, where I can be reached on an urgent matter, is 312-455-0860. My e-mail address is Balbus@uic.edu.