Freud and Psychoanalysis

By any measure, Sigmund Freud was one of the most influential intellectuals of the 20th century. Although he was not explicitly preoccupied with articulating political principles and only rarely addressed questions of governance or policy, his assumptions, theories, and therapeutic techniques have fundamental implications for the basic questions of political theory—questions about, for instance, the sources of conflict and group cohesion, the place of reason, desire, fantasy, emotion, affect, and motive in the interpretation and explanation of human interaction, and the ways of living we might find desirable and attainable. This tutorial offers an in-depth exploration of Freud’s key writings and concepts, from his early work on sexuality and dreams through his final writings. While we will read some of the texts that most directly address conventional political topics, Freud generally has more to say to students of politics when he is formulating his fundamental views of the psyche (of the nature and role of the unconscious, repression, drives, etc.), and the syllabus will reflect that view. Over the course of the semester, we will consider some scholarly commentaries on the specific texts we are reading, or on the shape and implications of the psychoanalytic project, but the preponderance of the tutorial will be given over to your own careful reading, interpretation, and evaluation of many of Freud’s most important writings. With a few minor exceptions, the order in which we’ll work through them is chronological, but in selecting texts from Freud’s far larger body of work, I have sought not only to emphasize key works but also to cover the range of genres and problems he engaged, from case studies to metapsychological theorizing to speculative works on the origins and workings of culture.

The following required books are available at Water St. Books:

- The Interpretation of Dreams (Oxford, 2008).
- The Ego and the Id (Norton)
- Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (Norton)
- Civilization and its Discontents (Norton)
- Moses and Monotheism (Vintage)

Adam Phillips’s The Penguin Freud Reader (2006) is also required, but because of licensing issues cannot be obtained from bookstores in the U.S. It is available on Amazon, however. Please purchase it: it contains many readings for the semester in interesting translations and in the most affordable package. All other required materials are in the course reader. They are designated on the syllabus with an asterisk. Readers are available at 51 Park St., from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Please pick up yours promptly, as all of the first assignment is in the reader.

Requirements

—Timely completion of all work (no exceptions).
—Engaged participation in every session.
—Five tutorial papers, 5-7 pages each.
—Five partner response papers, roughly 1.5 pages each.
—One brief reading response paper (1-1.5 pages), posted to Glow, for final session.

Format

We will meet twice as a whole group, seminar-style, once in the first week of the course and then again in the final week. For each of the ten other weeks, I will meet for 60-75 minutes with each tutorial pair, in my office. For every tutorial session, one member of the pair will write a 5-7 page paper on the readings and the other member will write a 1-2 page critical response to his or her partner’s paper. The presenter should email the final version of the week’s paper by 5 p.m. the day before the session, so that the partner and I have adequate time to engage the work. The responding partner should bring a printed copy of his or her critique to the session. Since we will have already read and pondered the main paper, we will begin our meeting with the responding partner’s critique, which he or she will read aloud. For the rest of the session, we will have a sustained and substantive conversation about the key issues raised by the readings, by the paper, and by the response, and, along the way, I will give each of you a frank critical assessment of the arguments you’ve made. Of course, I can’t give you a frank assessment of your arguments if you haven’t made them, and nor can your partner present a critique of your paper if he or she hasn’t had a chance to read it. We can’t really have a proper tutorial session at all if the work has not been done, and done far enough in advance. To a unique extent, then, adequate preparation for and completion of work in a tutorial affects not only your own learning but also that of your partner. For these reasons, the deadlines for written work in this class are inflexible. Do the work on time!

Grading

While you will get assessments of your work in every session, I will not give you individual grades on your papers during the course of the semester. In addition to my weekly commentaries in our tutorial sessions, however, I will provide you with written comments on your papers. In addition, if you would like to have a mid-semester discussion of your work is going, I will be happy to meet with you. Your final grade will reflect the quality of (and your progress over the course of the semester on) your papers, your critiques, and your contributions to discussion in our tutorial and seminar sessions, with the largest weight placed on the 5-7 page papers.

Honor Code

The Williams Honor Code applies to all aspects of your work in this course. You are encouraged to discuss ideas with fellow students, and to have peers read drafts of your work, but you must be careful to cite all sources, and all essays must be written by you alone. If you are at any time uncertain about what this means or how the code applies, please ask me. And if you have concerns about your ability to do an assignment, please come talk to me—do not plagiarize.

Schedule of Assignments

2/4 Organizational Meeting
Week One: Thinking and the Unconscious (Seminar session with whole class, time TBA)

**“Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis” (1909) [Part I], in *SE* Vol. 10, 153-221.**
**“Repression,” (1915), in *SE* Vol 14., 143-158.**
**“The Unconscious” (1915), in *ibid.*, 161-185.**

Week Two: Dreaming: Some Specimens

*The Interpretation of Dreams*, I-III. (You may skim I; read II and III very carefully.)

Week Three: Distortion

*The Interpretation of Dreams*, IV-V.

Week Four: The Dream Work

*The Interpretation of Dreams*, VI-VII.

Week Five: Quite a Case

*Toril Moi, “Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud’s Dora” in *ibid.*, 181-199.

Week Six: The Freudian Body and the Theory of Sexuality

*Freud, “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes” (1925), in *ibid.*, 304-314.

Spring Break, 3/21-4/5

Week Seven: Primal Scenes


Week Eight: Drives and Objects

*Freud, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes” (1915), in SE XIV, 117-140.

Week Nine: A Swerve in the Road: The Death Drive

Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), in Phillips, 132-196.
Freud, “Negation” (1925), in ibid., 96-100.
Freud, “Fetishism” (1927), in ibid. 90-95.

Week Ten: Mass Psychology and Psychic Structure

Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921)
Freud, The Ego and the Id (1923)

Week Eleven: Repression, Civilization, Liberation?

Freud, Civilization and its Discontents (1930)
*Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 71-95, 117-143.

Week Twelve: Findings and Foundings (Seminar session with whole class, time TBA)

Freud, Moses and Monotheism (1939)

Recommended: