Lecture Note 12: Radical Individualism and Roots of Authentic Politics (8922 words)

The Novel as Art and Social Criticism

- The growth of cities and a new urban economic life helped to stimulate the development of new literary works. A modern 'culture industry' contributed to the evolution and popularity of the modern novel. It was perhaps the most important literary trend in European culture during the 19th century and also helped spread nationalism.

- The novels of the era became an innovative cultural form in which novelists increasingly viewed themselves as artists who depicted social reality in words. The novels of Charles Dickens represent a famous literary response to the social effects of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. In France, there was a strong sense that the older aristocracy had lost its significance and a new bourgeois social system had emerged

- Romanticism gradually lost influence as a literary genre, and was particularly challenged in France and England, perhaps because revolutionary political and economic changes were felt most acutely there. Many people decided that the age of political heroism was over.

- A new kind of novel gradually displaced the Romantic genre; where Romanticism stressed the exotic, the mysterious, and the world of nature, a new realist literature focused on the everyday life of everyday people. The problems of realistic fiction concerned the social world, social mores, and social relations.

- In fact, realist fiction often portrayed the boredom of everyday life rather than intense emotional life—Romanticism went out of vogue. The 'reality' that appeared in such works was the daily struggle to get ahead in bourgeois society; in this world, wealth became the main sign of social status. The 19th century French realist novel was partly a literary critique of post-revolutionary bourgeois society.

- Some novelists also saw their literature as an artistic alternative to urban money-grubbing. In this sense, an important Romantic theme reappeared in the belief that art can be better than bourgeois society. The view of 'art as an alternative to society' evolved in France from Stendhal (1783–1842) to Balzac (1799– 1850) to Flaubert (1821–1880); and many others. All three novelists developed critiques of the social world, even as they saw little chance that it would change in any significant way.

Marie-Henri Beyle, better known by his pen name Stendhal, was a 19th-century French writer.

Honoré de Balzac was a French novelist and playwright.

Gustave Flaubert was a French novelist and the leading exponent of literary realism.

- Stendhal portrayed a world in which everyone is on the make, trying to carve out a place for themselves and their ambitions. He said he felt like a stranger in his own time and in modern society, and he thought he was born too early for his writing to be understood. He assumed that it might be one hundred years before people understood him.

- Stendhal identified more with the aristocracy than with the bourgeoisie; and felt contempt for bourgeois society. Stendhal said that the people of the bourgeois age were boring (the salons had no wit anymore); they went into society to advance their self-interest or to gossip. This conception of calculated self-interest forms a major theme in Stendhal's famous novel *The Red and the Black* (1831). Stendhal wrote the story of a society that has gone hollow; this world is a pale imitation of a more authentic world and authentic people.

- Somewhat similar concerns emerged in the work of Balzac. In his many novels, Balzac developed the portrait of a society that had become obsessed with money. He portrayed a world that had lost its balance in the mad pursuit of wealth and status by suspicious or reckless economic speculations. All his descriptions came back always to a story of moral decline and corruption. Balzac was conservative in his politics, but his novels suggest a need for radical social changes.

- The problems of the bourgeois era also appear as a major theme in the works of Flaubert. Like Stendhal and Balzac, Flaubert thought modern society had fallen into a crisis, but he focused on something other than boring salons or destructive economic speculations. Flaubert was appalled by the mediocrity and clichés of modern bourgeois cultures, and he was obsessed with the problem of language.

- He was convinced that most conversation consisted of thoughtless clichés; these were inescapable, but they had lost all true meaning. Flaubert was the most extreme example of this view. The attack on clichéd uses of language is an important aspect of his famous novel *Madame Bovar*y (1857), which portrays the problem of stupidity and the clichés of adultery.

- Flaubert was put on trial for 'offending public morals' in *Madame Bovary*, but he was acquitted; modern critics argue that it was his language rather than his portrait of adultery that was truly subversive. By stressing the creative act of the writer, Flaubert offered art as an alternative to the corrupt world; the artist must struggle against clichés and the banal mediocrity of bourgeois society—language could create another world.

- Each of these writers saw the 19th century as the era in which bourgeois social and economic values had come to dominate all of social life. And criticized what they perceived as the 'hollowness' of modern, ambitious people.

The Heroic Critic in Mass Society

- Responding to the social and cultural tendencies in modern democratic societies, some intellectuals promoted a new belief in the importance of the heroic, isolated individual—though this new heroic individual lacked the sentiment or youthful virtues of earlier Romantic heroes.

- A new conception of the "heroic" in history and culture emerged among thinkers that sought to define the meaning of independent and even heroic individual action. As they wrote about history and modern culture, they expressed a kind of heroic quest for high cultural ideals amid the leveling cultural patterns of modern mass society.

- Over the 19th century, there was a growing belief in the value of majority rule and in the decisive shaping power of collective identities, such as nationality, class, or race. The older aristocratic European order had been challenged and radically altered by the expanding middle and working classes and by the spread of liberal democratic values. By the latter decades of the 19th century, the political and social tendencies of the post-revolutionary era had become well established in European society.

- The development of industry, cities, government bureaucracies, and other modern institutions was creating a modern mass society. Despite the liberal theories of individualism, the new mass societies embodied attitudes and behaviors that Tocqueville had discussed when he warned about a "tyranny of the majority." These attitudes and behaviors were most obvious in Britain, Germany, France, and the Scandinavian countries.

- This emphasis on the decisive political or social legitimacy of majority opinions entered most forms of political theory. Among liberals, the idea of 'majority rule' was used to support the gradual expansion of voting rights (moving toward universal manhood suffrage)

and the importance of constitutional government. J S Mill's liberalism generally advocated individual rights, but the social goal was basically utilitarian: "the greatest good for the greatest number."

- Conservatism after the mid-19th century also developed a new collective emphasis, though many conservatives continued to favor elite rule. Conservatives also took up the cause of nationalism and argued that the individual's interests were represented by the whole nation.

- Socialism also stressed collective identities, though the socialists focused on class identities rather than on nation or race. Socialists argued that individual identities reflected one's position in an economic class; each person was either bourgeois or proletarian.

- All these popular ideologies—majority rule, nationalism, and socialism—contributed to what might be called the new mass society, but this new society was also increasingly shaped by a modern culture industry. Popular cultural publications and entertainment (e.g., newspapers, magazines, theaters, concerts) now catered to the middle class. The middle class replaced the aristocracy as consumers of culture, and culture itself became another component of the market system.

- This 19th-century movement toward the democratization of both politics and culture provoked discomfort among many intellectuals (Tocqueville was one example) and elicited a new philosophical defense of the exceptional or the heroic individual. Although many intellectuals supported the development of modern social equality, there was also a growing critique of middle-class conformity or the cultural mediocrity of modern bourgeois life.

- The concept of the heroic individual was, of course, an old Romantic theme, but the new idea of cultural heroism lost its earlier Romantic sentiment.

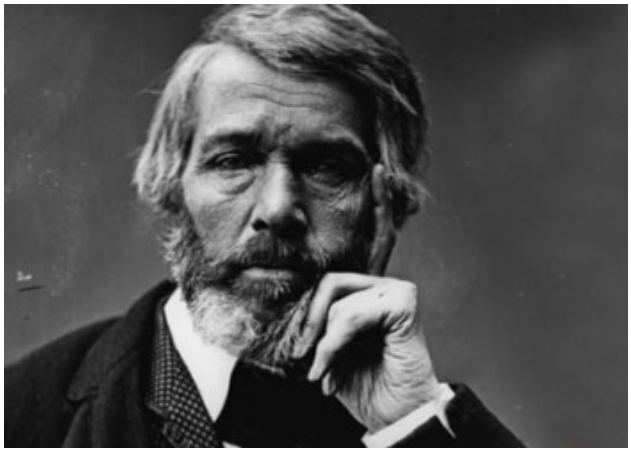
    - The new heroic individual in bourgeois society did not affirm the beauty of nature, frustrated love, or an early poetic death.

    - Instead, the new heroic figure was seen as someone who recognized the crisis and mediocrity of the modern age or the emptiness of its culture.

    - The new heroic figure would see the dangers of modern politics and culture but also create a new higher 'self' through personal will or a rejection of bourgeois culture.

    - Such persons did not flee, as Romantic heroes had done, into nature or exotic cultures; they affirmed their heroism in modern mass society.

- Three writers promoted the idea of the new heroic figure in different ways in mid-19th century Europe: Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), and Matthew Arnold (1822–1888).



Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish philosopher, satirical writer, essayist, translator, historian, mathematician, and teacher was one of the most important social commentators of his time.

Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author, who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher.

Matthew Arnold was an English poet and cultural critic, noted especially for his classical attacks on the contemporary tastes and manners of the "Barbarians" (the aristocracy), the "Philistines" (the commercial middle class), and the "Populace." He became the apostle of "culture."

- Despite their differences, each of these writers argued that modern societies needed persons who would affirm their cultural independence or defend exceptional cultural values against a leveling mass society.

- This affirmation of the exceptional person's essential cultural role reached a philosophical culmination in Friedrich Nietzsche, whom we will discuss later.

- The heroic, struggling individual was an old Protestant theme, but the theme was now more secular.

- All these thinkers shared a horror of what modern society did to the heroic, exceptional individual; they called modern times 'the age of mediocrity'.

Thomas Carlyle

- Thomas Carlyle was raised in a strict Presbyterian family and grew up in rural Scotland. He wrote a history of the French Revolution, but did not like the Revolution's egalitarianism. Carlyle believed in the "Great Man" interpretation of history and argued that all great historical developments occurred because of exceptional, forceful leaders.

- He developed these themes in a series of famous lectures in London, which were soon published as a book, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841). Carlyle assumed that the mass of people were lazy or weak; they acted creatively only when mobilized by heroic or great individuals. The proper subjects for historical study were the great men who moved history forward; great events reflect their leadership.

- The great men in Carlyle's view of history included writers (e.g., Dante) and religious leaders (e.g., Luther), as well as political leaders (e.g., Cromwell). His theory of history looked only at cultural or political elites, and it could be used to justify rule by elites—the people who make history. In England, this historical theory offered an alternative to the demand for more democratic voting rights, which was a major political issue in Carlyle's era.

- Historical examples seemed to show that great men should rule the masses because most people were either lazy or lacking creativity. The more general point in Carlyle's theory is his claim that only a few exceptional people made the decisive contributions to history or culture. This was a historical argument for ignoring the masses or for believing that exceptional persons must always stand apart from the masses.

Søren Kierkegaard

- Danish religious philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was the most prominent critic of rationality in modern philosophy and was an important influence on later existentialism.[1] He found Hegel's attempt to integrate faith and Reason with individual and community, all in a grand unity, completely wrongheaded. Kierkegaard claimed that human life is marked by discontinuity between differing ultimate perspectives that cannot be integrated, and among which we must simply choose. These are the aesthetic, or sensual; the rational; and the religious.

[1] *Existentialism is a philosophical movement focused on the analysis of individual existence and the individual's thought and responsibility. Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche were 19th-century sources of existentialism in the 20th century*.

- Kierkegaard once famously quipped that "If Hegel had written his whole *Logic*," one of the crucial works of Hegel, "and in the preface disclosed the fact that it was merely a thought experiment," then Hegel "would have been the greatest thinker that has ever lived; as it is he is merely comic." That's about the worst put-down one can hear of one philosopher by another.

- He believed that modern society had become hostile to all expressions of true individuality and true ethical action. The business dominated social relations, and the values of individuals simply reflected public opinion or external social codes. Individuals had to conform to the political and social majorities in this modern era, but the conformity denied a true inner life. Kierkegaard said that this flight from inner life to public conformity resulted from modern attempts to live without God.

- In such works as *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), Kierkegaard argued that the modern age was profoundly anti-Christian, though Europe's political leaders called themselves Christians. European Christians did not live like Christ. He argued that the true inner life must cultivate a connection to the infinite, which means it must transcend the material world.

- Confronting the inner life, however, means that one must confront the absurdity of existence—an absurdity that comes from the conflict between individual aspirations for life and the inevitability of death. When people look honestly at this inner dilemma, they feel great anxiety and despair; therefore, they prefer to ignore it.

- They ignore the despair by public conformity or by public displays of religion, but they try to avoid the dreadful truth of their lives. Kierkegaard said that the true Christian does not conform; he or she looks at the absurdity with honesty, and then takes a leap of faith toward the infinity of God. This leap of faith, however, doesn't occur simply by going to church.

- True Christians will not be understood in the modern world; they'll be ridiculed, ignored, or persecuted—as Kierkegaard was—for challenging the clichés of the so-called Christian culture. Kierkegaard said that only the solitary Christian could recognize the emptiness of modern European culture and takes the heroic leap of faith that led away from modern conformity (but toward God). For him the heroic figure makes an irrational leap of faith to connect with the infinite God.

- Kierkegaard wrote that rationality is fundamentally social, but religion is a matter of the individual's relation to the Absolute. The name of that relation is faith, and faith is literally irrational and asocial: The knight of faith cannot explain or justify herself. For Kierkegaard, the role of philosophy is to bring us to the point of recognizing the mystery of faith, not to explain it.

Matthew Arnold

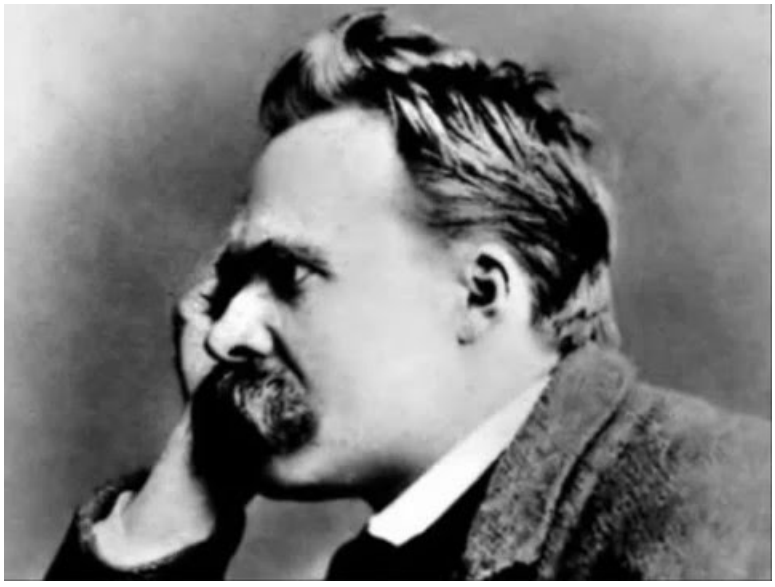
- Matthew Arnold shared much of Kierkegaard's concern about the numbing mediocrity of cultural life in modern middle-class societies. He was a major cultural critic, especially after publishing *Culture and Anarchy* (1869)—a book that condemned middle class 'Philistines'.

Arnold wanted people to draw from great cultural achievements "the best which has been thought and said in the world," to rethink all "notions and habits."

- To him a passive middle class that accepted conventional, conformist ideas dominated Victorian British society. Condemning this dull conformity, Arnold called for a kind of heroic pursuit of high cultural traditions. He was one of the originators of distinguishing between high culture and popular culture.

- The call for an intellectual resistance to modern mass society thus appeared in literary critics, such as Arnold, as well as in the history of Carlyle or in the cultural critiques of Kierkegaard, and it vehemently reappeared in Friedrich Nietzsche. Theirs was a further advance upon of the earlier tradition of the "novel as art and social criticism."

Nietzsche's Critique of European Culture



Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher, cultural critic, composer, poet, philologist, and Latin and Greek scholar whose work exerted a profound influence on Western philosophy and modern intellectual history.

- The philosophical quest for a critical or even heroic position outside the European middle class reached its culmination in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). He challenged the scientific confidence in reason, the expanding modern belief in democratic political institutions, and traditional Christian conceptions of morality.

- Nietzsche was the most radical philosophical critic of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and arguably of morality itself. Trained as a student of ancient languages, he identified with pre-Christian ancient values. Chronically ill and fated to become insane at age 45, Nietzsche cut a tragic figure, writing voluminously and brilliantly.

- His work represented a transitional moment in intellectual history, which began in the optimism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and ended for some radical late 19th-century thinkers in skepticism and pessimism about both the nature of truth and the democratic values of modern liberal political cultures.

- The bulk of Friedrich Nietzsche's mature work is an unrelenting critique of Judeo-Christian morality. He attacked the religious tradition and its morality as injurious to the greatness, power, and health of Western civilization. Nietzsche contrasts aristocratic morality with slave morality, the morality of honor and power versus the morality of meekness, for which power itself is evil.

    - The slave morality, which invents the term evil as a label for those it fears, is fueled by resentment. It creates God as a beloved judge who will reward the weak and downtrodden in the next life and torture the powerful eternally in the fires of hell.

    - This view gives the slaves and the poor a meaning for their suffering and a way to live with it. Those defeated by life, those lacking in strength or creativity, must find a meaning that will make their suffering bearable—hence, Judaism and Christianity.

- Nietzsche's critique of the Western philosophical tradition and the Enlightenment anticipated major themes in 20th century thought. His death in 1900 may be taken as a symbolic ending point for 19th-century European intellectual history, but his significance as a transitional figure in European thought goes well beyond the date of his death. He had stopped writing in 1889 after becoming insane.

- Nietzsche's work marks a transition from the 19th century into a series of intellectual concerns that dominated many 20th-century cultural debates: the importance of language, the nature of power, the relativism of truth, the meaning of ethics, and the critique of democracy. In these respects, Nietzsche represents an exceptionally influential example of the modern critique of Enlightenment thought.

- Nietzsche accepted a number of Enlightenment assumptions about the flaws of traditional religion, and he shared the 18th-century confidence in the great potential and power of human creativity. On the other hand, however, Nietzsche rejected the philosophes' faith in reason, denied the existence of universal truths, and described the will to power (rather than the use of reason) as the key human trait.

- In many ways Nietzsche marks a starting point for the intellectual history of the 20th century. Many later philosophers would embrace his critique of reason and his epistemology. His fascination with the "will to power," his critique of democracy, and his praise for the "noble few" would be embraced and distorted by 20th century fascist political movements.

- Nietzsche shared much of Kierkegaard's view of modern human societies and religion, but he pushed his analysis of modernity in another direction. Although Nietzsche agreed with critics who condemned the emptiness and mediocrity of modern European culture, he decided that the individual must make a heroic leap toward the self rather than toward God or high culture.

    - Nietzsche said that God was dead and that an excessive respect for high cultural traditions destroyed creativity and life itself.

    - Nietzsche stressed that human beings were biological creatures (not part of a divine order) and that the human will was the only real force in personal and cultural life.

- As Nietzsche described it, only human drives and human will, could overcome the hollowness or emptiness of modern life.

- Neither religion, nor traditional philosophy, nor modern democracy, nor German nationalism could destroy the empty, mediocre conditions of 19th century culture.

- Only a few, strong, lonely new thinkers could move beyond the mediocrity of the times; they would have to think "with a hammer" to smash the reigning pieties of the day.

- Nietzsche's rejection of traditional religion, morality, and German nationalism was at radical odds with his own background because he was born into an extremely pious and patriotic family. His father was a Lutheran minister (as was his mother's father); young Friedrich was named for Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the King of Prussia.

- Nietzsche's father had a mental breakdown and died when the young Nietzsche was only four years old. His mother, grandmother, and two aunts raised him; he also had a younger sister. Some scholars have argued that this upbringing contributed to the hostility for women that appear in his later writings. He never married, and he never really lived in close relationships with women later in life, though he had some close male friends.

- Nietzsche studied philology and the history of ancient languages; he was named professor at the University of Basel in Switzerland at age twenty-four. He was considered a brilliant young philologist, but he had constant health problems and eventually resigned when he was only thirty-four.

- Some historians think that he was infected with syphilis when he visited a brothel as a young man, but nobody can prove this; his health problems included stomach disorders and severe headaches. After resigning from the University of Basel, Nietzsche wandered about southern Europe, living alone, and writing books about the crisis in European civilization; he said that the European tradition was basically exhausted.

- He tried to develop both a critique of the tradition and a new philosophy of heroic individual morality. Nietzsche went insane in 1889, perhaps because of syphilis, perhaps because of the physical and mental problems that struck his father. He spent his last eleven years in asylums and never wrote another page.

- Nietzsche sought to analyze the whole foundation of European ethics and philosophy. He argued that modern European culture was filled with social masses, which followed what he called a 'herd culture'; material comforts were the main priority. He also said that this culture suppressed challenges to mediocrity.

- In contrast to this culture, he described the cultural ideal of a few, heroic, life-affirming individuals who created their own values. He said that the ancient Greek ideal of independent, strong willed persons had been destroyed by bourgeois materialism and post-revolutionary democratic culture.

- More generally, this democratic celebration of the common person was a secular version of Christian concepts of charity and humility. He thought that such Christian values had impoverished life and dehumanized individuals by denying their healthy will to power.

- Nietzsche sought to understand this cultural process by analyzing the two major sources of the Western tradition: Greek and Judeo- Christian thought. He argued in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), that early Greek culture was heroic in affirming the human condition and the deep instinctual drives of human beings.

- The Greeks had accepted that part of life that was passionate, or what he called Dionysian; this was the genius of pre- Socratic philosophy. Dionysus is the god of wine and dance, of irrationality and chaos, and appeals to emotions and instincts. But with Socrates and Plato, that instinctual side of life was repressed; the passionate Dionysian gave way to the calculating Apollonian approach to life—and reason became exalted. Apollo is the god of the sun, of rational thinking and order, and appeals to logic, prudence and purity.

- European culture turned to abstraction and metaphysics, thereby fleeing the conditions of a healthy life. The purpose of life is to be lived, not reasoned metaphysically.

- Nietzsche went on to explain this 'flight' from human life in later works, such as *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). He claimed that the rejection of a healthy, instinctual life culminated in Christianity, which fused Judaism with Platonic metaphysics. The Judeo-Christian ethical system, as Nietzsche described it, favored the weak over the strong or the healthy. According to him, Christian philosophy's view of human instincts was anti-human and escapist.

- Although Nietzsche assumed that Christianity expressed a deep, healthy instinct—a 'will to power'—he said that the instinct was distorted. Christianity became the triumph of weak people's will to power over the strong and noble; therefore, Western culture turned to God over humans.

- Modern science, however, had destroyed the classical explanations for God, and modern people no longer really believed in God. This was why Nietzsche said God was dead. Yet most people refused to accept this fact; they denied it with their formal religion and with moral clichés that they didn't really believe.

- Modern Europe had entered an age of nihilism because it no longer really believed in its older foundations for truth or morality. To achieve cultural or personal health in the face of this illness, Nietzsche thought that people must accept that the old truths were dying. The world lacks inherent meaning and it lacks God, but there are still strong human beings who can heroically affirm their lives. These people must create a new morality—beyond the categories of good and evil and religious truth, as we have understood them. They must define truth for themselves.

- Very few people can face these realities or take the heroic steps to create their own morality and truths—only the elite, strong thinkers, whom Nietzsche called the Overmen or the "happy few," can create their own morality. The Übermensch (overman or superman) creates his own values, lives heroically, and ignores the ideas of the masses or the democratic "herd."

- He is lonely, but he lives honestly and strongly; he returns to the heroic affirmation of life that existed in pre-Socratic Greece. The key point for all such heroic persons was that they must move beyond the clichés, values, and assumptions of the modern European culture that had descended from the French Revolution.

- In Nietzsche, we can see themes that will emerge in 20th-century psychology and in later critiques of reason and classical philosophy. At the same time, we see the end of a cycle in intellectual history that began in the optimism and aspirations of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. Nietzsche argued that this tradition was deeply flawed, but the debate would continue because many others saw this tradition as Europe's most valuable political and cultural inheritance and as the starting point for a better future.

Was Nietzsche a Nihilist (虛無主義者)?

- Nietzsche's philosophy is sometimes associated with nihilism, or the rejection of all values, but Nietzsche claims that it is Judaism and Christianity that are nihilistic; they devalue humanity, nature, and life. They are anti-life, against the will to power or expression of instincts that is the essence of life. For Nietzsche, the greatest nihilism is devaluing man, considering human beings incapable of greatness. This is the doing of Judaism and Christianity, the 'slave' religions, and they have made Western society sick.

- From Nature's point of view, Nietzsche is an atheist: There is nothing outside this world of Nature; there is no God outside this world. From his perspective, anyone who says this world is a mere precursor to the next; the true world is someplace else; this one is a mere shadow or sham—that person is a nihilist, because they are disparaging the reality and value of things in this world.

- Nietzsche was virtually the first major intellectual to see that Western society was abandoning God and becoming more and more secularized. He was the most radical critic of Judeo-Christian, and to some extent Greek, sources of Western civilization. But what values will replace Christian values?

- He believed both classical philosophers and Western religious traditions had abandoned the healthy aristocratic values of the ancient world in favor of a life-denying idealism. In his philosophy, Judaism and Christianity endorse a "slave ethics" that denies natural instincts and the power to create in favor of the next world. Nature is the only world, and it embodies the will to power, the sheer will to produce, a notion he took from Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), the famous German philosopher of pessimism who influenced existentialism and Freudian psychology.

- He hoped for the Übermensch (overman or superman), who could live with this and affirm it, to create meaning and value despite it. He imagined the prophet of the Übermensch as his character Zarathustra in his anti-Christian mythical tale, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1891). Zarathustra is the spokesman for finding meaning in the cold world of power without any telos (目的) or God.

- Nietzsche did not, as some thought, endorse power in the sense of domination; for him, power is the creative expression of a thing's nature. He was the earliest analyst of the

growing secularism of the modern age, famously declaring, "God is dead," meaning that humans who had invented God were now turning from their creation. Nietzsche asked deep questions about all civilizations: What are the conditions that will maximize the power and health of a culture? What makes a culture great? His greatest question was, what values would Western humanity adopt to replace the withdrawing Judeo-Christian God? Writing feverishly in a life of chronic illness, he became insane at the age of 45 and died at 56.

Freud, Weber, and the Mind of Modernity

- The modern world brought higher standards of living, unprecedented scientific knowledge and technological achievements, more rational law and politics, and widespread literacy. It remade the world. But it also generated constant change, the undermining of tradition, and the loss of community for many.

- The classic social thinkers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries recognized the unique impacts of science, individual liberty, capitalism, industrial technology, growing social equality, and urbanization. They called attention to the loss of community and tradition in modern liberal society.

- In the midst of such change, Nietzsche told us that the belief in unlimited progress, in the rational perfectibility of man, is an illusion, that in our hearts or unconscious, we are still primitives. They undermined the Victorian conception of rational man and endless improvement of society. Many were influenced by Nietzsche's "death of God" and reversion to the "will to power."

- Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Max Weber (1864–1920) to some extent took the discontents brought by change and explained them with a new pessimism about the limits of reason. These thinkers reflected the unease many people felt about modernization and explained it with a new background pessimism that would fuel political movements in the decades to come.

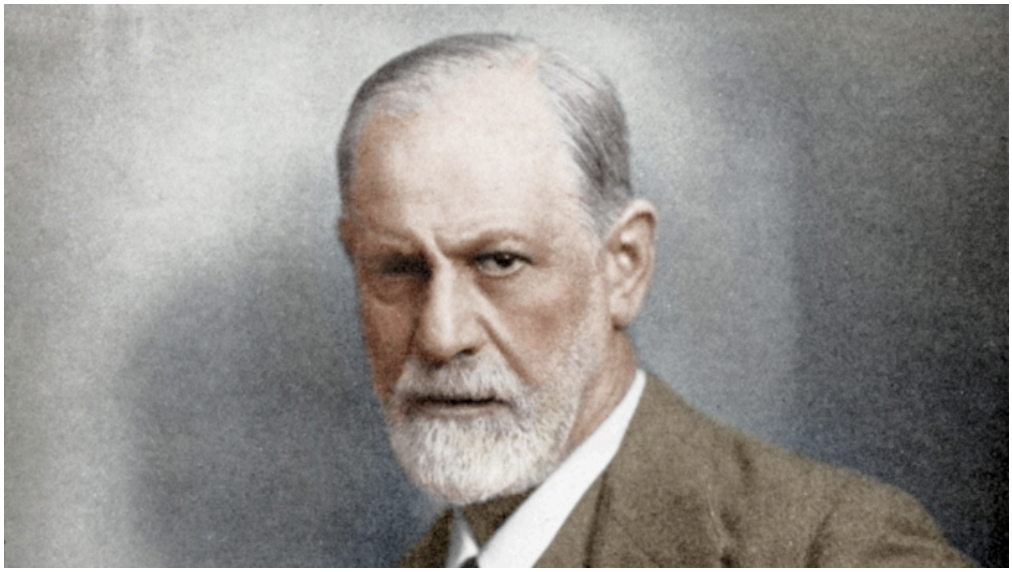
- Freud saw in civilization the accumulation of guilt due to the progressive restriction of instincts. Perhaps the most influential of these thinkers was Weber, who analyzed the unavoidable rationalization, pluralism, freedom, and alienation of modern society.

Freud's Unconscious Mind

- Austrian medical doctor Sigmund Freud argued in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that dreams reveal the workings of an unconscious mind that drive consciousness. His theory held that our consciousness is not all there is to our mind. Consciousness is one system in the mind, but there is an unconscious mind; and in that unconscious mind there are the energies driven by instincts, and especially by sex and aggression.

- Sigmund Freud's theory famously held that consciousness is driven by unconscious instincts, particularly sex and aggression. The ego or self must, while trying to deal with reality, defend itself from both the instincts and the superego (i.e., the internalized censorial voice of our parents). The instincts are dangerous to the ego, and it resists them through a variety of defense mechanisms while expressing them in sublimated or displaced forms. Repression

of instincts is good and necessary, but if it is too extreme, neurotic illness results. The general picture is of the human psyche in permanent conflict.



Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis.

- In his, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud argued that the growth of civilization must bring with it an ever-increasing sense of unhappiness due to guilt. The reason for this is that social advances require more complete suppression of instincts, particularly aggression. The unconscious psyche, however, remains aware of the now-unfulfilled instincts. This awareness causes the superego to generate guilt, redirecting the aggression toward the self.

Max Weber's Rationality and Its Consequences

Max Weber was a German sociologist, philosopher, jurist, and political economist. His ideas profoundly influenced social theory and social research.

- Weber was one of the great German sociologists who tried to account for the development and direction of the modern world. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), Weber argued that capitalism evolved and thrived only in Protestant countries, where Calvinism had made worldly accomplishment a sign of membership in God's elect.

- For Weber, in modernity, all activities, institutions, and areas of life tend to be "rationalized." Each enterprise tries to make itself more efficient and, hence, independent of the social whole. This requires the separation of facts from values; to make your business more efficient, you must ignore or replace old ways of doing things that embody other values, such as traditions or social interaction among workers. Rational self-control replaces tradition or custom.

- In his 1918 lecture, "Science as a Vocation," Weber develops a rather philosophical extension of this analysis. Rationalization leads to value pluralism. Human values are polytheistic, meaning that we have no way to integrate them. The aims or ends of life are in competition, and we must simply choose among them. There is no comprehensive or unifying perspective unless we adopt an all-encompassing religious view.

- In his, "Politics as a Vocation," Weber distinguishes between what he calls the ethics of ultimate ideals and the ethics of responsibility. The former seeks the ultimate goals announced by political movements without concern for the concrete steps that must be taken to achieve them or for their unintended consequences. The latter requires that leaders not ignore such consequences. As a result, politics is not a matter of self-righteous positioning—it is a slow boring of hard boards (硬板上慢鑽孔).

- Weber likened life in bureaucratic structures to living in an 'iron cage'. Scientific and economic rationality, individual freedom and equality, and material progress all come at a price: alienation. In response, Weber saw only two options: 'bear the fate of the times like a man' or return to the 'open arms' of the old churches.

- Freud and Weber did not have the philosophical breadth of Hegel, or the extremism of Marx and Nietzsche. But they were social-scientific theorists who saw modern science, equality, freedom, and endless progress—however good they are—bring with it a cost: guilt, bureaucratic control, and alienation. In modernity, every silver lining has a cloud around it. We may say that they put the final nails in the lid of Hegelian optimism. Both Freud and Weber diagnosed a structural downside to modernity.

Fleeing Liberalism—Fascism and Carl Schmitt

- The roots of fascism, like Bolshevism, lie in the First World War. The war provoked dissatisfaction with the status quo but also gave large numbers of rural peasants and low-wage urban workers the experience of serving a nationalist cause on equal footing with others of their nationality.

- Many people in the years 1918 to 1933 became convinced that liberal capitalism and parliamentary democracy were unjust and inadequate, a view that was exacerbated by a worldwide economic depression starting in 1929. The Weimar Republic, the German democratic regime between the wars, was buffeted by disaffection on the right and left. Many accepted a socialist critique of liberal capitalism and joined socialist parties, but some turned to a nationalist version of socialism.

The Rise of Fascism

- During the interwar years, especially in the Weimar Republic, the critique of limited government, representative institutions, and civil liberties was intense from right and left. Constitutional governments in many countries were weak, and many factions competed for power, including communist and new nationalist parties. Political gridlock had paralyzed the parliamentary democracy.

- An intellectual defense of extremism and even violence seemed attractive. Even before the war, Frenchman Georges Sorel (1847–1922), in his *Reflections on Violence* (1908), had supported "anarcho-syndicalism" or "revolutionary syndicalism." Sorel specifically approved of revolutionary violence against parliamentary socialism.

- The new answer to the malaise of the war first took concrete shape in Italy. Benito Mussolini and his Fascists took power in 1922. As he argued later in "The Doctrine of Fascism" (1932), fascism is a spiritual doctrine. The individual must devote himself to a higher goal, which can only be the nation. Fascists endorsed the term totalitarianism, only that would satisfy the spiritual needs of the people. The state was the saviour, and commitment to it should be total.

- Marxism is wrong because it is merely an economic doctrine and also internationalist. It was clear that the international Allied powers could not be trusted. The war and its aftermath convinced many socialist critics of the *status quo* that a nationalist rather than internationalist form of socialism was the answer.

Carl Schmitt

Carl Schmitt was a German jurist and political theorist, who wrote extensively about the effective wielding of political power. He had a close association and juridical-political allegiance with Nazism; known as the "crown jurist of the Third Reich." After the war, he never recanted.

- Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) was the most serious of the German political theorists who supported Nazism. He joined the party in 1933 when Hitler became the German chancellor, but long before then, starting in the early 1920s, he had begun to lay out the rationale for a kind of politics that was incompatible with the struggling liberalism of the Weimar Republic.

- Schmitt presented a critique of liberal republicanism, or what he called 'parliamentary democracy'. First of all, he pointed out that parliamentarism is not, as its advocates believed, a discussion about truth; it is a negotiation over interests. In other words, it is about partisanship and not the common good.

- He recognized that democracy and parliamentarism (or liberalism) are in conflict. Democracy is about power, and its purest form is direct democracy. Parliamentarism is about limiting power.

- Schmitt accused liberal parliamentary government of relativism; that is, it relativizes all interests and claims. He quoted Karl Kautsky: "The awareness of relative truths never gives one the courage to use force and to spill blood." The implication here is that politics is about making an ultimate decision, declaring an absolute commitment. Liberalism pretends that politics can avoid such decisions.

- Schmitt argued (in 1923) that parliamentarism was bankrupt, destined to be superseded in one of two directions: by Marxism or by the viewpoint of Sorel and Mussolini. Marxism, he claimed, is a rationalist Enlightenment educational dictatorship; Mussolini's is an irrationalist, mythical approach to politics.

- At this point, Schmitt was, before the Nazis, a supporter of the temporary dictatorial powers of the president, not to supplant but to protect democracy. His practical goal was to increase executive power against Parliament, which he saw as unable to deal with Germany's problems.

Foundations of Politics

- Liberals tend to think of politics as a servant to economics; parliamentarism considers the essence of politics to be law. But Schmitt argued that the very concept of the political is not moral, legal, social, or economic. Politics is deeper and more profound than all of these.

- In an interesting argument, Schmitt says, "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception." Even proto-liberals, such as Locke, admitted that the executive must be permitted the power to suspend the laws if necessary, for the good of the polity, particularly in an emergency. The concept of prerogative (特權) was seen in the republican tradition as a kind of safety valve for use in occasional extreme cases.

- But Schmitt takes this more seriously. To alter the laws or suspend them in an extreme situation is an awesome power. He suggests that whoever decides the exception and can impose that decision on the polity is, in fact, the sovereign. Everything else is window-dressing and mere discussion. For Schmitt, the limit or border of the political constitutes what politics is.

- What if we press the argument another inevitable step: Who gets to decide when there is an emergency? Schmitt says, that, too, must be the sovereign. The implication is that the essence of political power is the ability to suspend normal law and declare martial law. For Schmitt, the law is not sovereign. Laws do not rule us. We follow laws and are obligated to do so in normal social conditions. But that is not "ruling." For the sovereign, the answer to "Who decides the exception?" is the precondition of the law being obligatory and being, in fact, obeyed.

- Schmitt is searching for foundations for everyday politics and finds them not in natural law or rational ethics but in those ultimate decisions that initiate and maintain the state. He is also pushing the notion of the political to the point of a pre- or nonrational existential decision on which all other political rationality, law, and structure are based.

- Rational arguments are always based in premises or presuppositions. What gives us the truth of the presuppositions? Presumably another argument, with other presuppositions. But what comes first? Whatever it is cannot be the product of a rational argument. The first presupposition can only be a nonrational decision, a pure commitment without argument. Schmitt is saying that the constitutional legal state must ultimately be based in something pre-constitutional, pre-legal, and pre-rational.

- If nonrational, this begins to sound a bit like religious faith. And indeed, in his essay "Political Theology," Schmitt argues that modern political concepts are essentially earlier theological concepts secularized. That is, the politics of the modern sovereign state takes the place of religion in declaring the fundamental grounding and legitimation of any social form of life.

What Is Politics?

- Finally, in his essay "The Concept of the Political," Schmitt deals with the interstate context of sovereignty. What is politics itself? It is not economics, culture, law, or society. It has its own unique character, which has something to do with power and something to do with membership in a political community.

- Politics, Schmitt claims, is the relation to a public enemy; it is based in the will to fight for one's existence. This is a real relation to a real outside power. The two communities are mutually exclusive; the question is: Which will continue to exist? That is politics.

- Politics is inherently dangerous because human beings are "evil," by which Schmitt means "dangerous and dynamic." They are not pacific or law-governed. Without a willingness to fight, there is no politics.

- Failing to recognize the true nature of politics, liberal internationalist parliamentarians, who try to decide all questions by law, try to defang and tame politics, but in so doing expose the state to the dangers of factions, such as Bolsheviks and fascists. Schmitt is literally arguing that liberal republicanism is not a political doctrine or view; it is a negation of politics, an attempt to replace politics itself with law, morality, or economics.

- In fact, Schmitt argues, liberal parliamentarians are more brutal and exclusive without admitting or recognizing that fact. Because they regard themselves as representing moral,

legal humanism, liberal societies regard their enemies as anti-human—to be treated as enemies of all of humanity.

- Schmitt is one on a short list of 20th century political philosophers that explores the deep issue of what grounds or validates politics itself, given the rejection of any natural law tradition. In effect, what justifies it is something like Nietzsche's will to power. Schmitt goes outside the modern tradition that has based itself in finding ways to limit the political to yoke the political to the service of society in definite ways. He wants to release the political; the political is the power to create or change society.

The Appeal of Fascism

- The combination of constitutional republicanism with regular submission of party officials to free elections; government limited by, and subjected to, the rule of law; a largely free-market economy; and broad civic freedoms of individuals and civil society associations makes liberal republicanism appear weak and ineffectual.

- Theoretically, liberal republicanism seems groundless. The search for a ground to political life leads to power, existential decision, and a theology of the nation-state that is unlimited. This is to some extent Hobbesian in that all political community, political power, and law are rooted in the absolute power of the sovereign. But Hobbes did not found the sovereign on a nonrational basis; for him, the sovereign is the creation of rational, self-interested people.

- As sociologist Edward Shils wrote later, fascism was nationalist but not simply nationalist. Shils believed that fascism transcendentalized the nation, treated the nation as if it were a transcendent, divine source, unifying the two. This is a nice reflection of Schmitt's notion that sovereignty is a quasi-theological idea; the political community, as sovereign, is a theological notion of the nation-state.

- The martial aspect of fascism is somewhat reminiscent of civic republicanism, except now in a bureaucratic, non-egalitarian, and far more extreme form. As noted by Peter Drucker, the fascist response to the inadequacy of socialism or Marxism to cure capitalism's ills is to put the nationalist, military life above the economic. Economics is now in service to a higher ideal. Totalitarianism (極權主義), Drucker says, is a Wehrwirtschaft ("war organization") of the business of society. This will bring a new equality of all citizens as soldiers in the national fight.

- We should remember that fascism and Nazism had two roots, one idealist and one realist, in the political sense.
    - The realist is easy to see: The world is made by power; all political order is based in an act of power; and liberalism cannot "defang" the political world.
    - But at the same time, in the demands made on citizens, fascism and Nazism are highly idealistic. They are calls to sacrifice, to turn away from petty personal demands, to the glory of the whole.

Totalitarianism and Total War

- Totalitarianism, fascism and communism are intrinsically a modern form of social organization. Coupled with Japanese authoritarian militarism, nations operating under these doctrines conquered much of the developed world and killed untold millions between the 1933 and 1953, from Hitler's ascension to the chancellorship of Germany to the death of Stalin, were arguably the worst 20 years the human race has experienced. The World War II is the only truly "total" war in modern Western history, in which all sides violated just war doctrine.

- Fascism ruled in Italy starting in 1922, then in Germany in 1933. Fascist parties and near-fascist parties surged in many countries. At the same time, Stalin had occupied parts of Eastern Europe. The Japanese empire, close to fascist itself, conquered China and most of East Asia. In those days, an impartial observer of international politics might well have concluded that liberal republicanism was over.

Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism

German-born American political theorist Hannah Arendt is widely considered one of the most important political philosophers of the 20th century, especially her work on totalitarianism.

- The most famous philosophical analysis of totalitarianism is by political philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975), found in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Arendt points out that the totalitarianism of Hitler and Stalin was unlike any earlier political regime. Dictatorship and tyranny have always been with us, but totalitarianism is the total organization and mobilization of society in service of the state. Economics, religion, culture, and society all become political. There is no difference among these spheres; the state embodies and rules all.

- The totalitarian state aims to embody a direct relation to each citizen that transcends any other relations the citizens may have to family, locale, church, profession, or party. In totalitarianism, life must be turned upside down, which means that nothing can be assumed. "Truth," including all empirical truth or concept of the "facts," is completely relativized to the needs of the party or state. Nothing is too ridiculous or farfetched to be believed, including confessions coerced under torture.

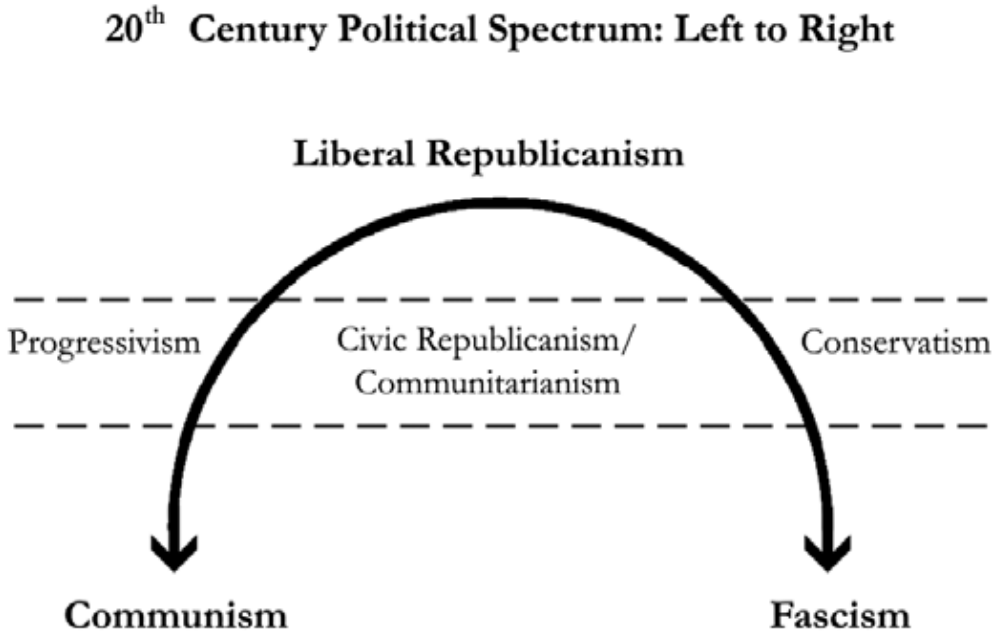
- Totalitarian movements and states inherently insist that their goal is to conquer and remake the world, not merely their own states. Further, Arendt claims that places of complete

terror, such as the Nazi extermination camps and the Soviet labor camps, are necessary. Their point is not so much to kill human beings but to establish a form of nonexistence, in which humans are no longer treated or seen as humans at all.

The Post-war World

- The war and its resolution created a stylized '20th century arc of international politics', with communism on the far bottom left can be viewed as an incomplete circle, in which the left-right extremes tend to get closer to each other by being at the bottom: liberal republicanism in the top middle, with communism and fascism together at the bottom but one on the left and the other on the right.

- Each position, however, tends to see the continuum in a different way. The right (conservatism and fascism) saw liberalism as a weak-kneed fall guy (弱跪的替死鬼) for communism; the left (progressivism and communism) saw fascism as an intensification of liberal capitalism; liberals saw fascism and communism as equally distant from a free society.



The 20th-century arc of international politics can be viewed as an incomplete circle, in which the extremes tend to get closer to each other.

- Fascism was destroyed as a political movement after 1945. European world power was severely truncated, leaving the United States and the Soviet Union as the "winners." In 1949, the Soviets acquired the atomic bomb. The Cold War between the US-led West and the Soviet-led East was a confrontation between liberalism and socialism in the arenas of ideology, economics, politics, and military capacity. It would last for 44 years until the fall of the Berlin War. Communist Soviet Union lost because of a failed economic model—Adam Smith was correct after all. Ideologically socialism, or more precisely communism, lost.

- There are many lessons to take from the years 1933 to 1953, but one is simple: No matter how difficult our problems seem today, no matter how much brutality and suffering we see in the world, things have been much worse. We may disagree about the nature of the Good, but we already have seen what Evil looks like.

Essential Reading:

Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, pp. 67–97, 169–209.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear And Trembling*.

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 3–27, 66–86.

R. J. Hollingdale, *Nietzsche: the Man and His Philosophy* (revised edition), pp. 125–192.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, pp. 2–76, 145–170, 201–237 (preface, parts 1–3, 7, 9).

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Max Weber, "*Science as a Vocation*."

Max Weber, "*Politics as a Vocation*."

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Peter Drucker, *The End of Economic Man*.

Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism*.

Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*.

Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*.

Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*.

Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*.

Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*.

Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think that literature can provide a more persuasive account of social and cultural realities than historical studies or social theory?

2. In what ways did Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert want to change modern views of the world? Can literary language change the social world?

3. Is the middle class more prone to cultural conformity than traditional aristocracies or the modern working class?

4. Does history really move forward through the actions of exceptional individuals (as Carlyle suggested)?

5. What would be examples of the “will to power” in human relationships and human societies?

6. Do you think that Nietzsche’s ideas have contributed to a general cultural relativism in the modern era?

7. What is in common among the great German sociologists’ analysis of the new way of life we call modern?

8. What implications do Nietzsche’s critique of Judeo-Christian morality and Freud’s basis of human behavior in the irrational have for politics?

9. Why was morality invented?

10. What would it mean to go “beyond good and evil”?

12. How, for Freud, is guilt increased by the suppression of aggressive instincts by advancing civilization?

13. Why, for Weber, is alienation the inevitable cost of freedom and equality?

14. What are the similarities between the socialist/communist and the emerging fascist criticisms of liberal bourgeois society?

15. What makes the fascists different?

16. How can we explain how the most “enlightened” civilization, with the highest level of science, political equality, and widespread material well-being, led to totalitarianism?

17. Is the mass killing of civilians justified if they are being led by the devil?