CS 208F
FOUR THEORIES THAT SHAPED THE 20TH CENTURY:
MARXISM, NIHILISM, PSYCHOANALYSIS, STRUCTURALISM.

CS Requirement! In order to attend the course students must have taken <u>at least one</u> of the required CS courses from sequence I before taking this course

Course Description

The course intends to acquaint students with what in general agreement have been four of the most influential trends in contemporary thinking: Marxism, Nihilism, Psychoanalysis, and Structuralism. The four sequences are introduced through some of the most representative original texts of the philosophers concerned, followed by literary texts that uniquely allegorize aspects of the theories in question. In the first sequence we will read texts by Hegel, Smith, Marx, and George Orwell (we will conclude the sequence by watching the film-adaptation of Orwell's *1984*). In the second sequence, we read Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Samuel Beckett (we will also watch a theater adaptation of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*), and in the third, Freud, and Mann (we will watch L. Visconti's adaptation of Mann's *Death in Venice*). Finally, in the fourth sequence, we read texts by Saussure, Levi-Strauss, & Barthes. The course repeats some of the issues already present in CS 204 & 206, but more systematically and in depth. It also, for the first time, introduces Structuralism into the CS program.

Learning Objectives

Three major 'learning' objectives of the course are to teach that: (1) Theories are social and context-dependent entities; involving that they emerge in a context of several other theories. For example: Marx would have been impossible, and is nearly incomprehensible, without knowing some of his predecessors like Adam Smith and Hegel; Nietzsche did not come up with a criticism of Christianity entirely on his own, but participates in a discourse that goes back to (at least) Feuerbach. (2) Theories can be, should be, and is being criticized, and/or modified, by successive theories—this criticism thus changing (perhaps improving) what objectively has already been achieved. For example: most implementations of Marxism in the 20th century were aberrations that Marx would never have endorsed; are therefore best being criticized. (3) Theories are general (therefore abstract) explanations of a human life-world that is of immediate concern for everybody; that they are not just abstract curriculum stuff, but are interactive in our formation and understanding of the surrounding life-world. They are instruments of rationalizing a chaotic life-world.

Teaching resources:

(1) BOOKS

> Marx & Engels: *A Marx-Engels Reader* (W. W. Norton, 1978).
> George Orwell: *1984* (Penguin Books, 1990).
> Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* (Grove/Atlantic, 1974).
> Thomas Mann: *Death in Venice* (Vintage).
> Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals.*
> Freud: *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*

2) COPIED SELECTIONS FROM

> Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations*
> G. F. W. Hegel: *The Phenomenology of Spirit* ('Londship and Bondage')
> Ludwig Feuerbach: *The Essence of Christianity.*
> Ferdinand de Saussure: *Course in General Linguistics*
> Claude Levi-Strauss: *Structural Anthropology* ('The Structural Study of Myth').

(3) MOVIES RELATED TO MATERIAL:

> Radcliff's *1984*
> Lindsay-Hog's *Waiting for Godot*
> Visconti's *Death in Venice*

Syllabus:

4 Weeks: MARXISM: THE ANALYSIS OF CAPITALISM AND THE PROMISE OF COMMUNISM

> G. F. W. Hegel: From *The Phenomenology of Spirit* ('Londship and Bondage')
> Marx & Engels: *The Communist Manifesto* (in A Marx-Engels Reader)

Smith: Excepts from *The Wealth of Nations* + Marx: Excepts from *Capital*, (A Marx-Engels Reader)

George Orwell: *1984* (+ movie: *1984*)

3 Weeks: NIHILISM: REEVALUATING VALUES IN THE FACE OF THE DIMINISHING AUTHORITY OF GOD

Ludwig Feuerbach: Excepts from *The Essence of Christianity*

Friedrich Nietzsche: *The Genealogy of Morals*

Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* (+ theater play, *Waiting for Godot*)

3 Weeks: PSYCHOANALYSIS: TOWARD A THEORY OF HUMAN IRRATIONALITY

Sigmund Freud: *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*

Thomas Mann: *Death in Venice*

2 Weeks: STRUCTURALISM: THE UNCONSCIOUS STRUCTURES THAT FORM OUR BELIEFS

Ferdinand de Saussure: Excepts from *Course in General Linguistics*

Claude Levi-Strauss: "The Structural Study of Myth" from *Structural Anthropology*

INTRODUCTION TO NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY
FROM *BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL*

1) TRUTH AND REVALUATION

• Nietzsche is criticizing 'Truth' understood as a universal and metaphysical notion (not as a pragmatic notion). This notion originally derives from Plato. Plato splits the world up into two: the 'true' world of forms representing perfection, and the 'untrue' world of appearances representing imperfection. The idea continues in Christianity, where the 'true' world becomes the world beyond, and the 'untrue' world, the existent world. Nietzsche most general objection: there is *no 'true' world, no world beyond, no hidden world*. The invention of a 'true' and perfect world is human self-deception. Therefore Nietzsche can say that "the 'will to truth' is 'will to deception.'" (BGE 2).

• In that sense, the traditional value-opposition 'true versus false' is not obvious any longer. If so-called 'Truth' is illusion and self-deception, and the so-called 'un-true' is our actually existent world, then what is traditionally called 'true,' is false, and what is traditionally called 'un-true,' is true. Therefore, Nietzsche asks: "why do we want 'truth'; why not rather untruth?" (BGE 1).

• Turning the value-opposition 'true versus false' around is an example of one of the most general themes in Nietzsche: *to revaluate all values*. Nietzsche believes that philosophy always thinks value-oppositions *hierarchically*, implying that one term is always positive and appreciated, while the other term is negative and depreciated. The table below lists some typically value oppositions in Western thinking:

Appreciated:	**Truth**	In-itself	Reason	Soul	Good	Unselfish
Depreciated:	Appearance	For-us	Desire	Body	Evil	Selfish

• Nietzsche's so-called 're-valuation' questions the order of rank of these terms. Is reason for example superior to desire, or is it not rather in the service of desire? Is it at all possible for act unselfishly, or is selfishness not constitutionally necessary in our preservation of life? Briefly, ought not the depreciated term to be appreciated, 'turned around'? (BGE 2).

2) CHAOS AND WILL-TO-POWER

• Another fundamental assumption in Nietzsche: The universe is originally chaos; there are no laws, rules, or principles guaranteeing order in this chaos. The universe is not a *cosmos* (harmonious, orderly), it is rather a *chaosmos* (disharmonious, disorderly). The only principle working in this chaotic universe is the principle of *will to power*. Will to power does not work according to pre-determined designs or intentions; it works as power-struggles where something ends up victorious and something as defeated. These power-struggles are random processes, and their outcome is random.

• Still, in the history of civilization, humans have attempted to control chaotic nature; our sciences are manifestations of this attempt of control. By means of sciences, we add some order into original chaos; this means, we simplify something that is extremely complex. In logic and mathematics, we invent artificial languages by which to control and manipulate nature. They bring nature *under control*, ergo, they are manifestations of our fundamental *will-to-power*. Still, they simplify, and therefore falsify, chaotic nature. For example, in nature there are no self-identical thing (as in logic); and there are no straight lines (as in geometry). The straight line is a *simplification* of something that does not exist in nature (BGE 4).

3) HUMANS CAN ONLY UNDERSTAND A *SIMPLIFIED* WORLD

• In Nietzsche, whatever we do, we always *simplify*, therefore *falsify*. We do so out of necessity, since we cannot process the abundance of information that impresses itself upon us. When we look at a tree, we do not see every branch and every leaf; we at best see a 'shape,' a 'shadow,' or a 'gestalt' of the tree. When we read a page, we do not read every sentence, we see a few words, and start guessing at the meaning. In brief, we simplify, thus falsify, the external world. *Our mind is a 'simplification-apparatus.'* (BGE 192).

• The same is the case, when we confront our inner-mental world. Our inner world of desires, memories, thoughts, etc., presents us with an abundance of material that we cannot process as such. If the external world is chaotic, the inner-mental world is even more chaotic. There are no laws or unitary principles in the inner world, except for the random principle of will to power. If we imagine that the inner world of memories and thoughts is like the action happening on a theater stage, there is no little puppet-master sitting behind the curtain pulling the strings for what happens on the stage. Whatever happens on this stage, happens according to random will-to-power-struggles.

4) NO RATIONAL 'I'

• Philosophers have belied this situation when they have invented a rational unifying principle according to which we think. They assume that in the 'I think,' the 'I' is such a unifying principle. However, to Nietzsche, there is no 'I' in the mind. The 'I' preceding 'thinking' in the sentence 'I think' is merely a linguistic construction, it does not mean that there is actually something in the mind corresponding to this 'I'. (BGE 16 & 17).

• In the mind, there is also no cause-effect relationship. So, the 'I' does not *cause* 'thinking'; there is also no 'will' *causing* action. Such singular unitary principles cannot be located in the mind. There is only a crisscross of processes and power-struggles without any clear and obvious origin. (BGE 19).

5) MORALITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-DESCIPLINE

• Since the human being is inherently chaotic, society has invented rules by which to discipline and regulate human behavior. These rules come as moral laws. They are never timeless, universal, and abstract — as Kant would have it. In Nietzsche, morality always serves the interest of a group or a people. Moral laws are consequently relative to the history, the culture, and the social group they are meant to serve. (BGE 186).

• Moral laws are always designed to restrain the human being; and when they have been exercised over several centuries, the originally anarchistic human being eventually develops something Nietzsche calls a 'formal conscience' (equivalent to Freud's 'super-ego') as an internalized self-criticizing, self-controlling agency in the psyche. The human being has imprisoned itself thanks to this 'formal conscience.' (BGE 188 & 199).

6) AGAINST 'HERD' MORALITY

Especially Christianity has cultivated this obedient and self-restraining human that Nietzsche labels the 'slave' or the 'herd.' Against this 'herd-morality,' he advocates the idea of a master or noble morality, where the human being has cast off the fetters of Christianity. He believes that it is possible to cultivate this alternative human type; a kind of super-personality, he labels the super-human [*Übermensch*].

• Such a human type would create values, not obey them. He would be tough, severe, and unsentimental in his treatment of both himself and fellow human beings. He would completely lack negative sentiments like envy and resentment, because he would be affirming his own existence, without envying greener pastures. Ideally, he would be self- and life-affirming to such an extent that he would chose, if given the choice, to re-live his life, without any changes, eternally as the same life — the *Eternal Recurrence of the Same* being his only 'law.'

7) SOME ATTRIBUTES CHARACTERIZING THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *NOBLE* AND *HERD*

NOBLE/MASTER	HERD/SLAVE
Beyond Good and Evil	Believes in Good and Evil
Active	Reactive
Self-sufficiency	Group-mentality
Independency	Dependency
Transgressive	Submissive
Self-confidence	Insecurity
Anti-authoritarian	Authoritarian
Generosity	Resentment/Envy
Creative	Non-creative
Affirms this life, denies afterlife	Denies this life, affirms afterlife
Affirms Eternal Recurrences of the Same	Rejects Eternal Recurrence of the Same