Course Description and Objectives:

Freud, Marx and Nietzsche are three of the greatest critics of religion in general, and Christianity specifically. While all three of them hold religion to be false, their critique of it is not that of classic skepticism. They do not seek to show the weakness or uncertainly of classical theistic positions by presenting arguments for God’s non-existence. Rather, they are engaged in what Paul Ricoeur has characterized as the “hermeneutics of suspicion.” Each of these thinkers attempts to uncover religious belief as serving a certain social, political, moral or psychological function, while simultaneously masking this function. The work of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche requires, then, more than a mere refutation of their views, but an appreciation of their critique of religion as uncovering the ideological uses to which faith and religious practice are frequently put. In this course, we will examine the insights of these great “masters of suspicion” through a close reading of representative works. A careful analysis of their writings in their historical context will enable students to assess their evaluation of religion (particularly Christianity), and discern the key features and limitations of their hermeneutic approach. Although this course, an advanced seminar for M.A. and Ph.D. students, presumes a certain familiarity with the history of philosophy on the part of the student, no prior coursework on Freud, Marx, or Nietzsche is presumed.

By the end of the semester, students will have gained an appreciation of the basic concepts of the philosophies of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, including illusion, psychoanalytic method, egoic and libidinal drives, and the unconscious (Freud); alienation, ideology, capital,
emancipation, and the materialist and dialectical conception of history (Marx); 
ressentiment, “the
death of God,” perspectivism, the will to power, the eternal return, and the Übermensch
(Nietzsche). Students should also be able to articulate the common traits of the
hermeneutic
approach of these thinkers (the “hermeneutics of suspicion”), as well as the essence of the
critique of religion of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, seeking to critically evaluate for themselves
the value and limits of each of these thinkers’ contribution to understanding the truth of
religion and its place in the life of individual persons and communities.

Course Requirements:

As an advanced seminar course, this class will focus primarily on the discussion of assigned
texts, although the instructor will provide background material in lecture form from time to
time. Students will be expected to carefully prepare assigned readings in order to actively
participate in the conversation and raise thoughtful questions in class. Each week several
students will be asked to begin the class discussion by introducing a particular text and raising
several substantive questions for discussion. Because this class is structured as a seminar,
attendance and participation in the discussion is essential. Absences will significantly affect a
student’s final grade. Students with disabilities or whose first language is not English are
couraged to speak with the instructor about any special needs they might have.

Students will be evaluated according to the quality of their class participation and leadership of
class discussions, and a final research paper of 15-20 pages. These assignments are designed to
help students develop their own critical thinking on the fundamental concepts, hermeneutic
strategies, and critique of religion present in the thought of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, and
articulate their understanding of these topics both orally and in writing. They also offer
students the opportunity to show their growth in the DSPT’s institutional goals of integrative
thinking, self-direction, collaborative learning, and leadership. All sources in the final research
paper should be cited using proper “Turabian” format (see Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for
Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Eighth Edition. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 2013). Students should conscientiously avoid plagiarism, and are asked to
consult the DSPT Student Handbook for the DSPT’s policies regarding academic honesty. A
paper proposal consisting of a short paragraph describing a student’s chosen topic, along with a
preliminary bibliography of a minimum of 10 sources, should be submitted by April 22. The final research paper is due no later than May 20, 2014. Late papers will be accepted, but will be penalized for each day past the date due.

Grading: Weekly Class Participation: 25%
Class Presentations and Discussion Leadership: 25%
Final Research Paper: 50%

Assigned Texts:


Weekly reading assignments will be taken from these assigned texts (all of which are available at online book retailers substantially cheaper than their list prices, reflected above), as well as from readings posted on Moodle (http://moodle.gtu.edu).

Course Schedule:

2/2: Introduction to the Course
   The Hermeneutics of Suspicion and the Uses of Atheism
   Introduction to “the Masters”

2/9: Freud on Drives, Desires, and the Interpretation of Dreams
   Sigmund Freud, selections from On Dreams, “On Narcissism,” and The Ego and the Id
   (in The Freud Reader)

2/16: Freud on Religious Practices
   Sigmund Freud, selections from Totem and Taboo and The Future of an Illusion
   (in The Freud Reader)

2/23: Freud’s Psychoanalytic Contribution to the Philosophy of Culture
   Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents

3/1: Freud on Judaism and Christianity
   Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism

3/8: Marx on Hegel, Religion, and Revolution
   G.W.F. Hegel, Preface, Introduction and Part I of Elements of the Philosophy of Right
   Karl Marx, “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: An Introduction,”
   “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” and “On the Jewish Question”
   (in The Marx-Engels Reader)
3/15: Marx on Feuerbach, Alienation, and the Materialist Conception of History
Ludwig Feuerbach, Introduction to *The Essence of Christianity*
Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” and “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” and *The Holy Family* (in *The Marx-Engels Reader*)
Georg Lukács, “What is Orthodox Marxism?”

3/22: No Class (Reading Week)

3/29: Marx on Economics and Ideology
Karl Marx, selections from *The German Ideology* and *Grundrisse*  
(in *The Marx-Engels Reader*)
Louis Althusser, “Contradiction and Overdetermination”

4/5: Marx and the Communist Ideal
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (and its prefaces) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (in *The Marx-Engels Reader*)
Denys Turner, “Religion: Illusions and Liberation”

4/12: Nietzsche on Truth, Lies, and the Death of God
“In Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense” and *The Gay Science*, Books 1-3  
Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead’”

4/19: Nietzsche on Ressentiment
Deleuze, “Active and Reactive” from *Nietzsche and Philosophy*

4/26: Nietzsche on Asceticism
Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Second and Third Essays
Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”
5/3: Nietzsche on Christianity
Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* and selections from *The Late Notebooks*
René Girard, “Nietzsche versus the Crucified”

5/10: The Uses and Abuses of Suspicion
selections from Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*
Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, Part One, Chapter One

5/20: Final Research Paper Due by 5 PM

N.B.: The instructor reserves the right to revise the course syllabus as the need arises.

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**Additional Resources**

The following is a list of supplemental and suggested readings. They are by no means required reading for the course, but may be a useful place to start for your final research paper, or of interest to those wishing to do additional research centered on the hermeneutics of suspicion or the thought of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, or Friedrich Nietzsche.

**Primary Sources**


Translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud. 24 volumes. New York: W.W. Norton, 1952–64.


*Secondary Sources*

I. *Freud*


II. Marx


III. Nietzsche


