

PC 699 Special Topics: Psychoanalytic Interpretation of War
Richard Koenigsberg and Stephen Soldz **Spring 2008**

Course Description

Psychoanalysis extends its scope and impact by using its concepts to interrogate—not only the internal world—but the external world. This course presents methods and theories for studying the interaction between psychological motives and culture forms. We will study how unconscious fantasies—projected into social reality—shape and meaning to ideologies and institutions.

Focusing on the psychic sources of collective forms of violence—manifest as war, genocide and terrorism—we begin by examining the idea of “the enemy.” Warfare is generated based on the assumption that another group or class of people constitutes a mortal threat to one’s own nation, God or ideology. Why do enemies evoke profound anxiety and rage?

We will examine the psychological meaning of “the nation” as a sacred object with which human beings become deeply identified. In the name of protecting, preserving and rescuing this object, violence is conceived as good and just. Why do people bind their own identities in such a radical way with their nation?

Collective forms of violence seek to assert the power of one’s own belief-system in the face of competing belief-systems. What are the psychological sources of fanatic forms of belief that generate terrorism, genocide and war? People die and kill in order to demonstrate that their faith in the object is real.

Psychiatry claims that individuals are disordered. Two-hundred million people died in the last one-hundred years as a result of violence generated by nation-states. Yet nowhere do we read of a “war disorder” or a “genocidal disorder.” Isn’t this astonishing? This course explores the concept of collective forms of psychopathology: disorders that may be inherent within the very structures of society or civilization.

Objectives

Students will learn:

- Methods for analyzing political texts and the rhetoric of political leaders (as manifest content) that allow one to perceive how unconscious fantasies (latent content) are contained within and articulated by ideologies.
- How to use psychoanalytic concepts to understand how our psychic lives shape and are shaped by cultural beliefs and ideologies.

Teaching Method

There will be guided discussions based on classroom presentations, assigned readings and writing assignments.

Syllabus

Class 1: Culture and Unconscious Fantasy

Fornari, Franco (1975). *The Psychoanalysis of War*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Excerpt at: <http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/docs/fornari1.htm>

Koenigsberg, Richard (2005). *The Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Reality: Theory and Method*, from <http://www.psych-culture.com/docs/rk-pir.html>

Koenigsberg, Richard (2005). ‘I Am, Therefore I Think’: Separating From the Symbolic Order, from <http://www.psych-culture.com/docs/rk-think.html>

Koenigsberg, Richard (2005). Why Do Ideologies Exist: The Psychological Function of Culture, from <http://www.psych-culture.com/docs/rk-whydo.html>

Class 2: The Symbolic Meaning of the Enemy

Koenigsberg, Richard (2005). Ideology, Perception, and Genocide: How Fantasy Generates History, from http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/docs/rk_ipg.htm

Koenigsberg, Richard (2004). The Logic of the Holocaust: Why the Nazis Killed the Jews, from <http://home.earthlink.net/~libraryofsocalscience/logic.htm>

Koenigsberg, Richard A. (2007). *Hitler's Ideology: Embodied Metaphor, Fantasy and History*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing (Book available from Dr. Koenigsberg).

Class 3: What are “Nations” and why are we so attached to them?

Koenigsberg, Richard (2006). Nations are Bodies, from <http://www.psych-culture.com/docs/rk-nations.html>

Koenigsberg, Richard (2006). The Human Body Becomes a Body Politic, from <http://www.psych-culture.com/docs/rk-humanbody.html>

Class 4: Fanatic Belief

Koenigsberg, Richard (2004). Hitler and Bin Laden: The Psychology of Terror, from http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/docs/hitler_binladen.htm

Koenigsberg, Richard. ‘Death To The Non-Believers’: The Meaning of Terroristic Violence, from http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/docs/rk_dnb.htm

Class 5: Warfare and Self-destruction

Koenigsberg, Richard (2004). Dying for One's Country: The Logic of War & Genocide, from http://home.earthlink.net/~libraryofsocalscience/dying_for.htm

Class 6: Societal Violence as Collective Psychopathology

Herf, Jeffrey (2006). *The Jewish Enemy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Excerpt online at:

http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/docs/herf_jewish.html

Koenigsberg, Richard (2005). Awakening from the Nightmare of History: Psychological Interpretation of War and Genocide, from

<http://www.psych-culture.com/docs/rk-aw.html>