Course Description:
The course examines the literary explorations of the place where two sets of ideas meet, psychoanalysis and existentialism.

Civilisation is based on order and so on laws that seek the common good in a stable, secure setting. Accordingly, civilisation requires that we defer gratification. Our instincts, however, are indifferent to order because they are imperious and impatient and so seek immediate satisfaction. Thus, the civilised human being is conflicted and often frustrated, caught between a rational longing for the benefits of civilisation and the chaotic raptures of instinctual gratification.

Civilisation also confers freedom: the sort of freedom that is a ‘freedom from’ such things as mob rule, random violence and tyranny. In so doing, however, civilisation gives the individual responsibility for her or his identity, the ‘freedom to’ be the self that one chooses. In many cases, such responsibility is frightening, even terrifying, and so the individual flees from it into some version of authoritarian rules, behaviours, ways of thinking, and belief systems that are imposed on her or him, not chosen.

The course focuses on texts that explore humankind’s conflicted condition in the freedoms created by civilisation.