

# L13&L14: The Meaning of War & The Birth of Uncertainty

## Agenda

### Objective:

To understand...

1. How the war effected intellectual thought in the 1920s through a critical examination of the works of Freud, Quantum Physics, Nietzsche, and Cubism.

### Schedule:

1. War and Historical Memory
2. Freud
3. Quantum Physics
4. Nietzsche
5. Art
6. Closing Discussion using "The Hollow Men"

## Homework

1. Rough Draft Due:  
Fri 2/7
2. Unit Test  
Mon 2/10

# Questions We Will Grapple With...

- What effect did World War One have on the intellectual world in the 1920s?
- How do the particular psychological, philosophical, scientific, and artistic theories to emerge out of war reflect the nature and experience of the war?
- How do they represent changes in how people thought about reality and the world around them as well as themselves?

# War and Historical Memory

- To answer these questions, we have to begin with an understanding of how people in the 1920s remembered the war...
- How do we remember the past?
  - As they actually happened, like a photograph?
  - Or in the image of how we wished things had happened?
  - Do we tell a new story of the past, that meets the needs of our present?
  - Do we ignore the past?



# Collective Memory

- The representation of the past shared by a group of people.
- Foster and define group identities, telling a group of people where they come from, who they are, and how they should act in the present and the future.





BENEATH THIS STONE RESTS THE BODY  
OF A BRITISH WARRIOR  
UNKNOWN BY NAME OR RANK  
BROUGHT FROM FRANCE TO LIE AMONG  
THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THE LAND  
AND BURIED HERE ON ARMISTICE DAY  
11 NOV: 1920, IN THE PRESENCE OF  
HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V  
HIS MINISTERS OF STATE  
THE CHIEFS OF HIS FORCES  
AND A VAST CONCOURSE OF THE NATION  
THUS ARE COMMEMORATED THE MANY  
MULTITUDES WHO DURING THE GREAT  
WAR OF 1914 - 1918 GAVE THE MOST THAT  
MAN CAN GIVE LIFE ITSELF  
FOR GOD  
FOR KING AND COUNTRY  
FOR LOVED ONES HOME AND EMPIRE  
FOR THE SACRED CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND  
THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD  
THEY BURIED HIM AMONG THE KINGS BECAUSE HE  
HAD DONE GOOD TOWARD GOD AND TOWARD  
HIS HOUSE



# WWI and Historical Memory

- What was the collective memory of World War One in the immediate years after the war?



# World War One and Repressed Collective Memories

- Faced with the fact that the war might not have a clear purpose, people simply buried the thought of war.
  - For example: Veterans' organizations had been founded, but relatively few veterans wanted to join.
- People were clearly trying to repress the war, even though the scars of war were everywhere.





# World War One and Collective Repressed Memory

- Europe post war, was ‘catastrophe... presented as a well-ordered existence...the artificial limbs of war-cripples did not creek, empty sleeves were pinned up with safety-pins. Men whose faces had been scorched by flame-throwers wore large black spectacles. The lost war took care to camouflage itself as it roamed the streets.”
  - Ilya Ehrenburg, quoted in Eksteins, Modris. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Modern Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1989.



# World War One and Collective Repressed Memory

- The mismatch between the experience of war and the subsequent response to it meant that the war, was relegated to the realm of the unconscious.
- “But among all these injured things is the mind. The mind has indeed been cruelly wounded...it doubts itself profoundly.”
  - From: Paul Valery quoted in Eksteins, Modris. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Modern Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1989.

# WWI, Repressed Collective Memories, and Freud

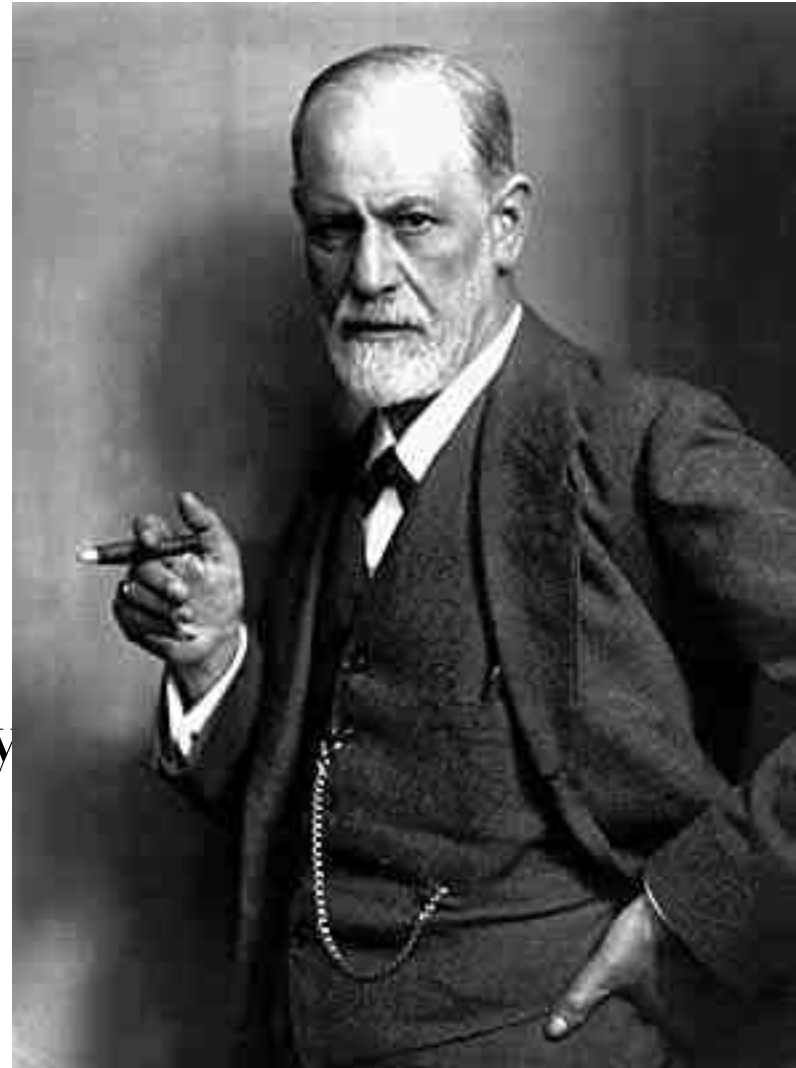
- The experience of repression and a “wounded mind” that was occurring at a societal level, was at the same time being for the first time at the individual level, by the founding father of a new school of science: psychology





# Sigmund Freud

- 1856-1939
- Austrian neurologist & psychologist
- Founder of psychoanalysis
  - Clinical treatment where patients talk through his or psychological problems.
  - “The Talking Cure”
- Father of modern psychology
- Develops the notion of unconsciousness and repression...



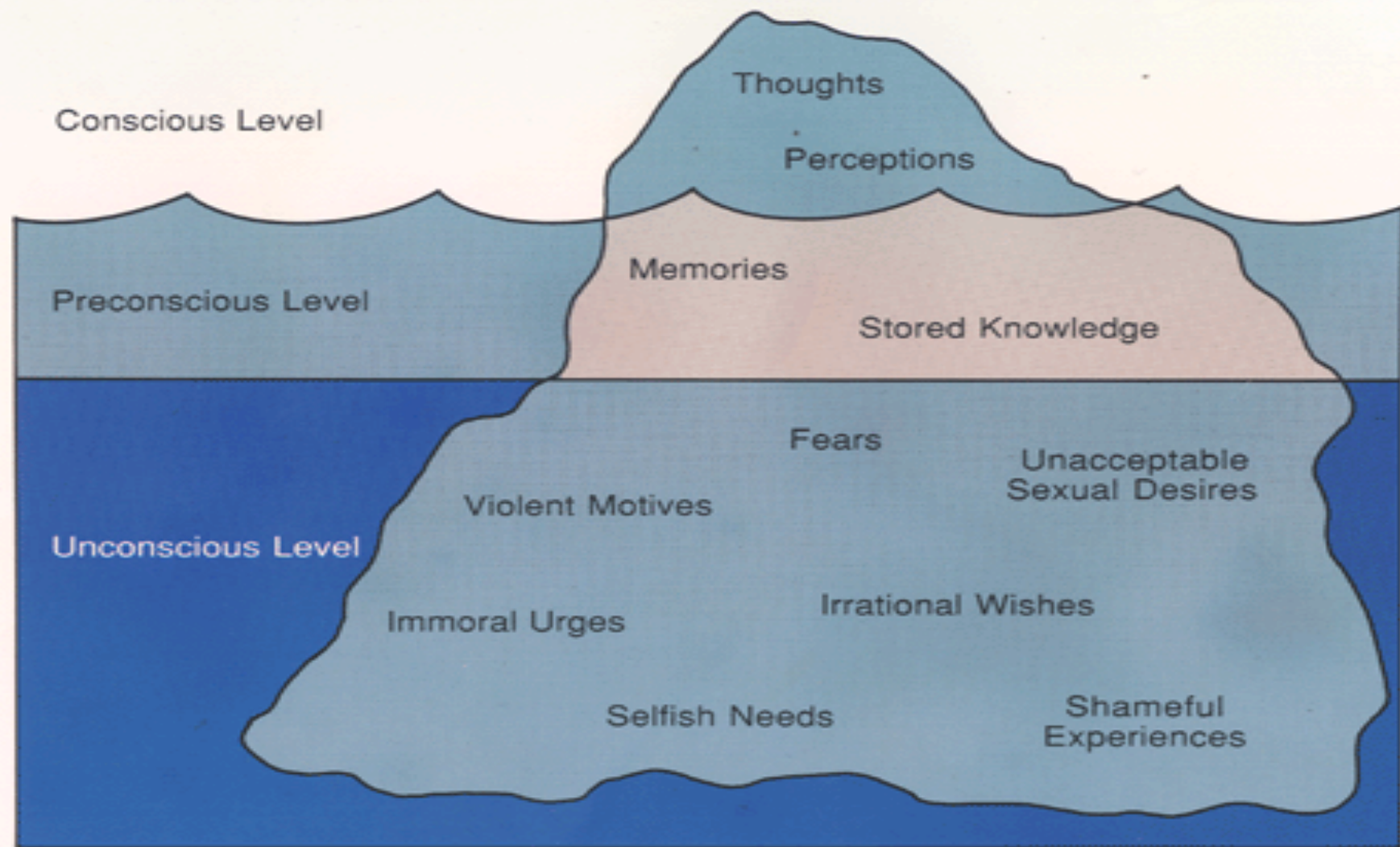
# Overview of Freud's Theory

- Freud concentrated on the power and influence of non-rational drives and impulses in human thought and behavior.
- Psychic Determinism:
  - Behavior is determined by:
    - Irrational Forces
    - Unconscious Motivations
    - Biological and instinctual drives.

# Freud's Theory of the Mind

- Human mind is divided into three components:
  - Conscious
    - Everything we are aware of at a given moment.
  - Preconscious
    - Thoughts, feelings, memories, and wishes that lay below, but can easily be brought to the conscious level.
  - Unconscious
    - Thoughts, feelings, and wishes that are extremely difficult to bring to awareness.
    - Portion of the mind inaccessible to conscious thought.
    - Often “speaks” to us in disguised forms in dreams.

## PERS 5 Freud's View of the Human Mind: The Mental Iceberg



# Freud's Structure of Personality

- Freud said the human psyche could be divided into three parts:
  - The Id
    - Primitive desires (Food, Water, Sex)
    - Ruled by the pleasure principle; Amoral and selfish
    - “The Demanding Child”
  - The Superego
    - Internalized social norms and moral forces
    - Conscience
    - Acts in contradiction to the id
      - Id wants instant gratification while the superego wants to do what society says is “right”
    - “The Traffic Cop”
  - The Ego
    - Tries to balance the id and the superego; tries to balance our primitive desires and social expectations of behavior.
    - “The Judge”

## LEVEL OF AWARENESS

### CONSCIOUS

Everything we are aware of at a given moment

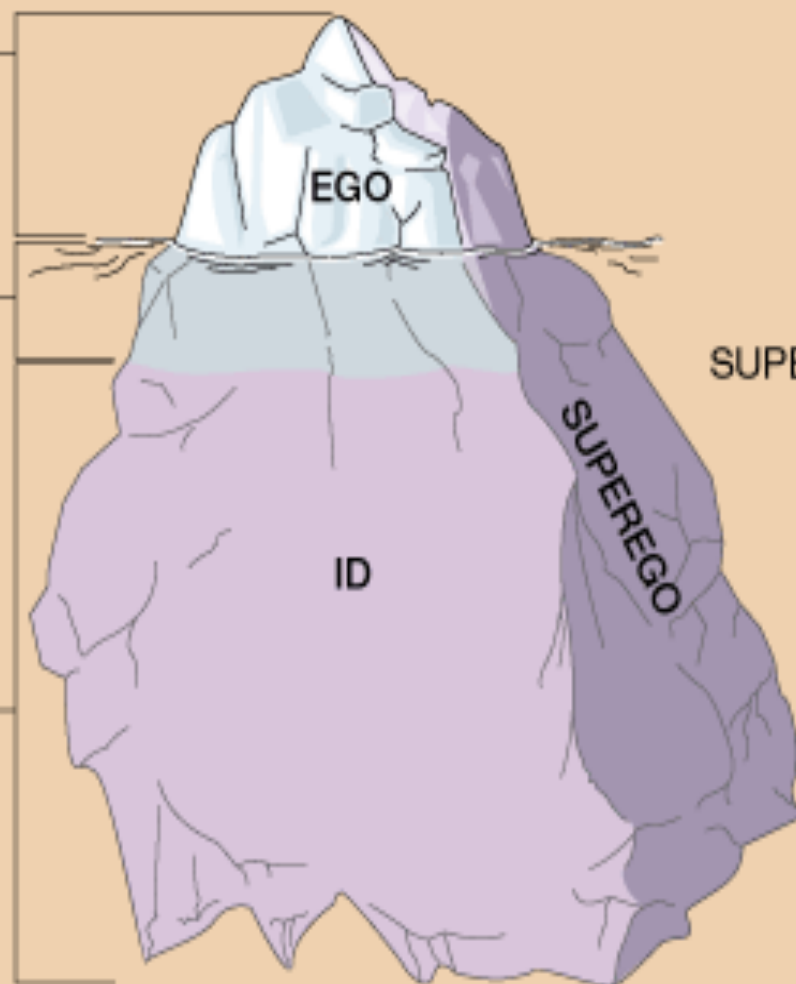
### PRECONSCIOUS

Thoughts, feelings, memories, and wishes that can easily be brought to the conscious level

### UNCONSCIOUS

Thoughts, feelings, memories, and wishes that are extremely difficult to bring awareness; may appear in disguised form in dreams

## STRUCTURE OF THE MIND



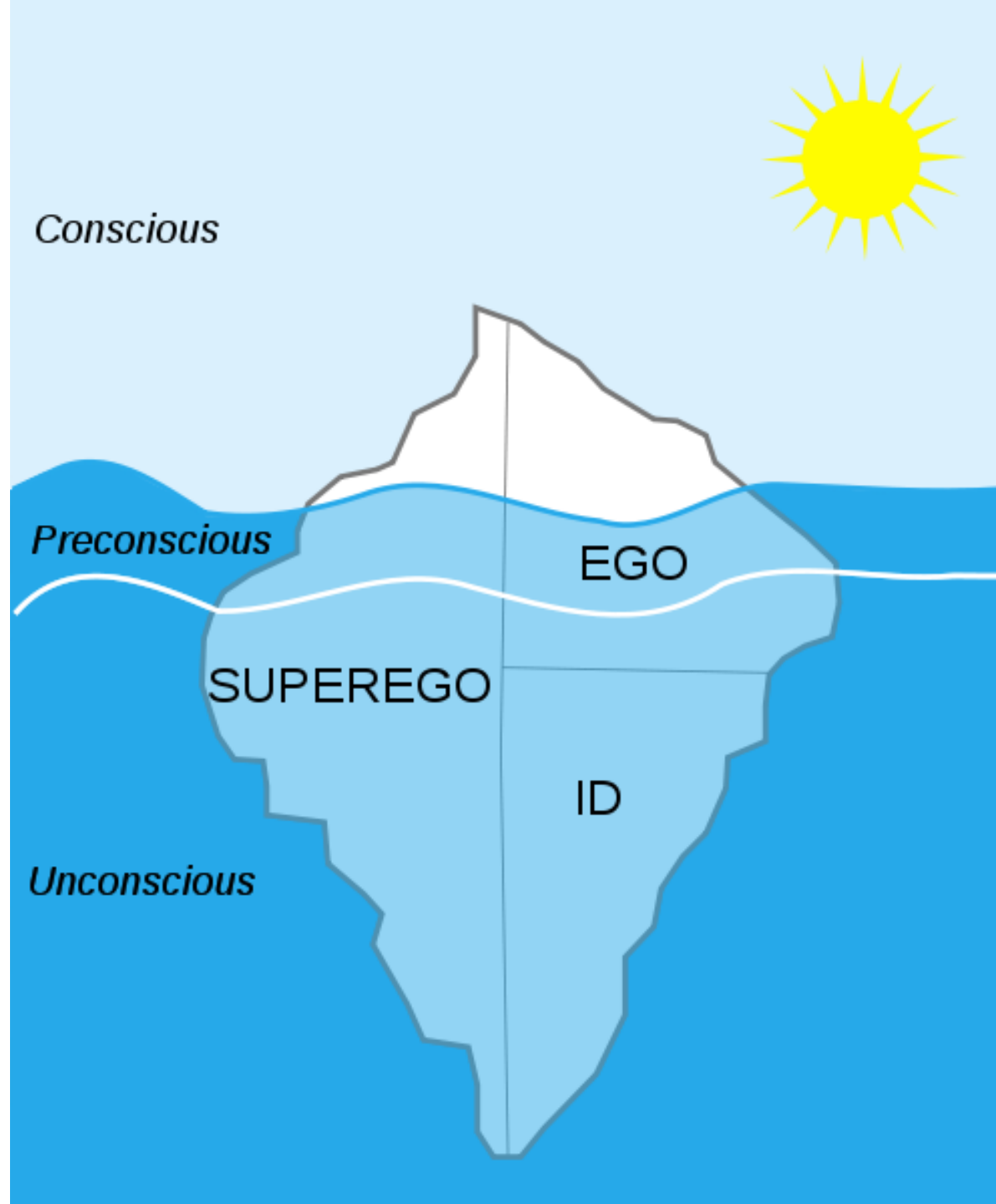
## DESCRIPTION OF FUNCTION

EGO The executive arm of personality that seeks to resolve the continuing

SUPEREGO The moralistic and idealistic structure, consisting of the conscience, which punishes behavior that violates

ID The source of the energy of *eros* and *thanatos*, which





# Freud's Theory: The Id's Conflict with Civilization

- There is a conflict between our id and the requirements of civilization.
- While man derives the highest pleasure from sexual fulfillment, unconstrained sexuality drains the individual of psychic energy needed for a creative and intellectual life.
- Hence, society imposes rules on us that restrict our more animalist desires.
- Having our sexual urges suppressed causes anxiety, but violating the rules of civilization also gives us guilt.
- Therefore civilized life is psychologically painful. Civilization is a burden people must bear, but the alternative is worst.

# Freud's Theory: Implications for Human Behavior

- Human behavior is governed primarily by powerful inner forces which are hidden from consciousness.
- Primitive drives, strivings, and thoughts influence our behavior, often without our awareness, so that we may not know the real reasons for our actions.
- Human behavior is not rational!



# Quantum Physics

- Freud's notion of the unconscious in the psychic world, was finding its parallel in the physical world with the introduction of quantum physics.
- Film: *The Fabric of the Cosmos*



# Revisiting our Guiding Questions Thus Far...

- How were the ideas of Freud and quantum physics shaped by the experience of war?
- How do they represent changes in how people thought about reality and the world around them as well as themselves?
- What are their implications?

# In a world that is uncertain, how do we live?

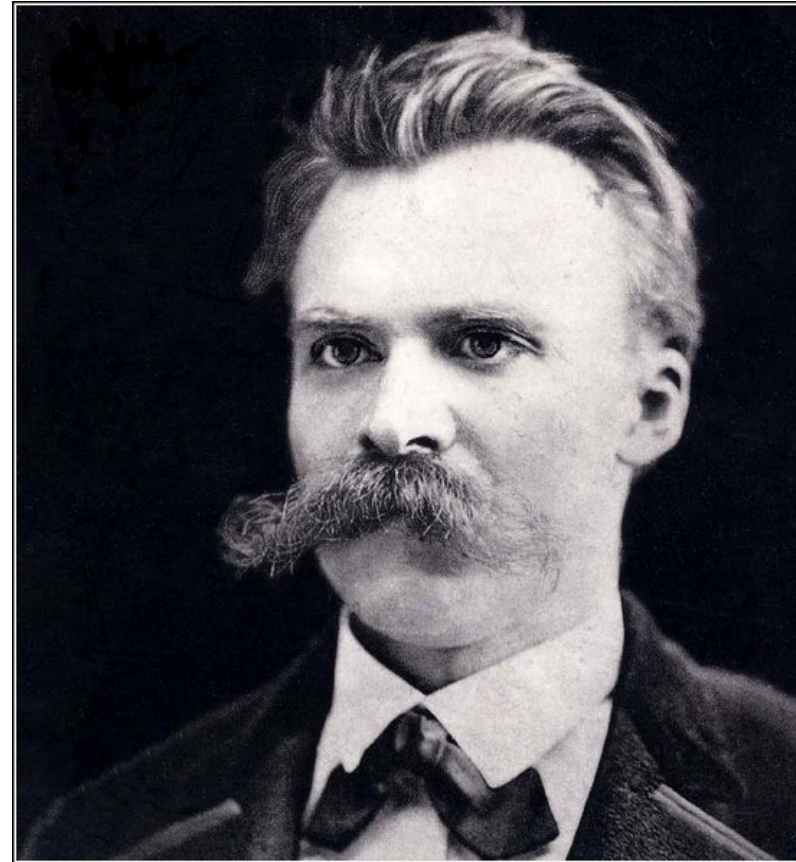
- Freud and Quantum physicists say reality is uncertain and unknown.
- As people became less able to answer the fundamental question of the meaning of life, they insisted that the meaning lay in life itself, in the act of living, in the vitality of the moment.
- Plays out in...
  - Philosophy with Nietzsche
  - Art with Cubism





# Friedrich Nietzsche: Biography

- 1844-1900
- German philosopher
- Had serious mental illness and suffered a severe mental breakdown in 1889. This left him an invalid for the rest of his life.
- In 1890 moved in with his mother and sister who cared for him until the end of his life.
- Most famous works: *The Birth of Tragedy*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *The Anti-Christ*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*.



# Nietzsche's Philosophical Approach

- Nietzsche does not have a unified philosophical theory.
- Instead, Nietzsche's writings are a series of provocative aphorisms (short, often witty, instructive statements).
- Nietzsche's thought is asystematic, aphoristic, and highly personal.

In many ways this springs from the fact that Nietzsche had an agonized, tortured mind.

- Nietzsche found himself wrestling with the most profound enigmas of modern life. "Nietzsche philosophized with a hammer -- and what else does one do when everything looks like a nail?"
- However, Nietzsche's writings do cohere to create a larger philosophical statement. We will explore some of these.



# Nietzsche's Philosophy: The World Is An Irrational Place

- Life is not governed by rational principals.
- Life is full of cruelty, injustice, uncertainty, and absurdity.
- Modern industrial middle class society made man decadent, feeble, and the victim of excessive development of the rational faculties at the expense of human will and instinct.
- On Morality & Truth..
  - “Insofar as we believe in morality we pass sentence on existence”
  - “Morality is herd instinct in the individual.”



# Nietzsche's Philosophy: God Is Dead

- “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us?”
- “God” (religion and other such spirituality) is no longer a viable source of any received wisdom.
  - There is no morality.
  - There is no objective truth.
  - There is no meaning.



# Nietzsche's Philosophy: Nihilism

- At best, the death of God means that all that remains is our only our own multiple, diverse, and fluid perspectives (perspectivism).
- At worst, the death of God may lead to the belief that nothing has any importance and that life lacks purpose (nihilism).
- But this nihilism can be overcome.
- To Overcome Nihilism:  
Recognize that nihilism is produced by everyday life.  
Create new values. Man can become his own master and be true to himself rather than another.





# Nietzsche's Philosophy: Instinct & Will

- Man needs to recognize and embrace the dark and mysterious world of instinct--the true life force.
  - “Du Sollst werden, der du bist.” (You must become who you are.)
- For man to realize his potential he must let go of
  - Reason and intellect and instead develop his instincts, drive, and will.
  - Christianity, which with all its restrictions and demands to conform, crushes the human impulse to life. Christianity gives man a sick soul. It blocks the free and spontaneous exercise of human instinct and will.





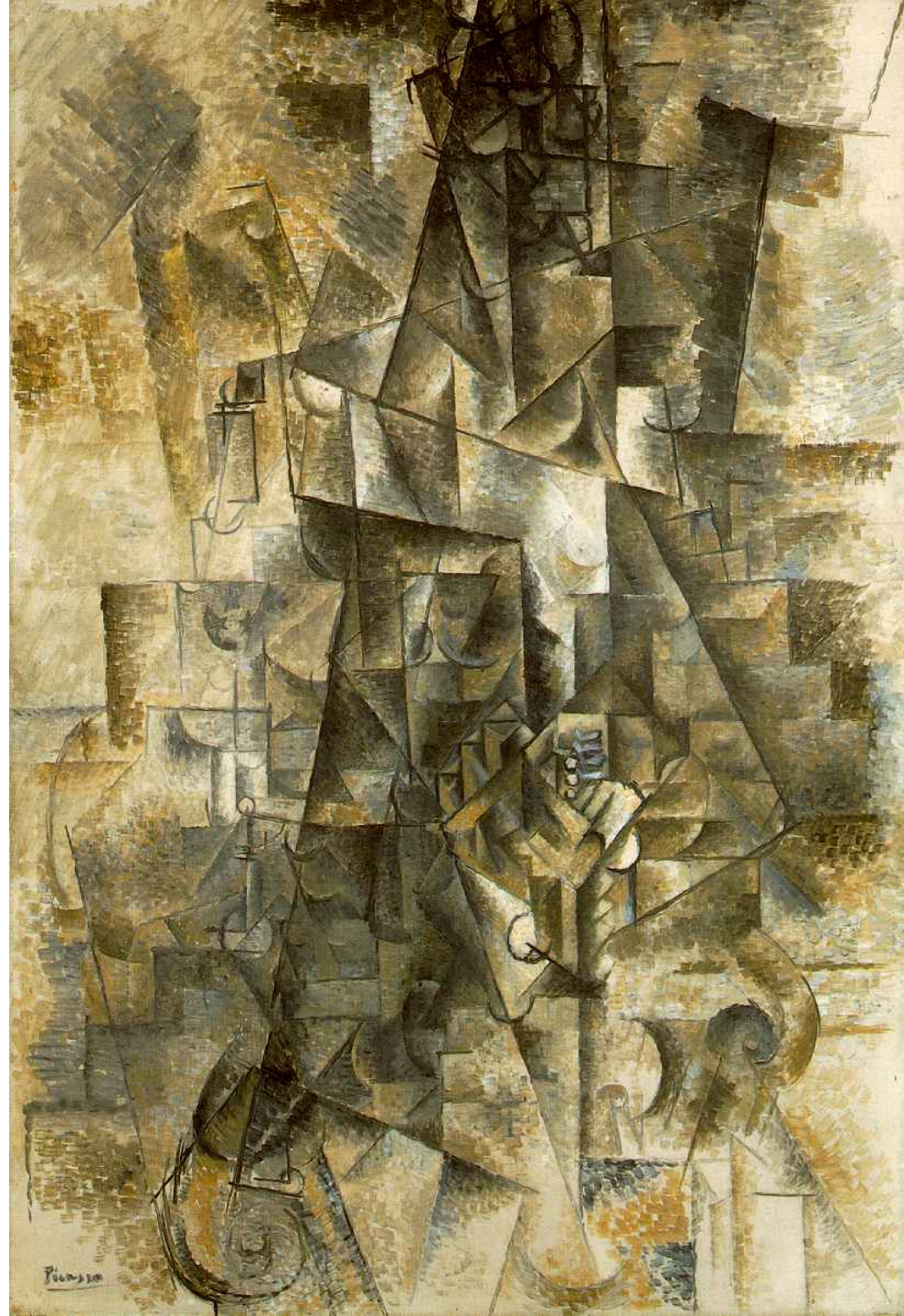
# Nietzsche's Philosophy: The Übermensch

- Man can be saved by the Übermensch (The Superman/Overman)
- The Übermensch
  - Recognizes nihilism.
  - Creates his own morality based on instincts, drive, and will. This new man dares to become who he is. He is the creator of new values.
- The Übermensch knows that life has no meaning but he lives it instinctively, fully, and dangerously.



# Cubism

- The reality articulated by Freud and the Quantum physicists, and the “solution” posed to it by Nietzsche, found expression in the works of Cubist artists such as Pablo Picasso...



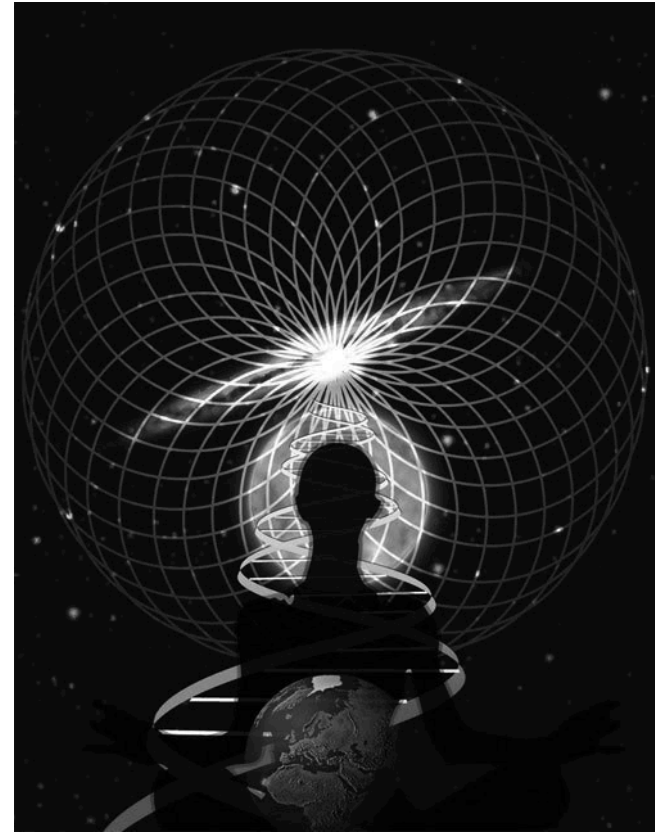




Pablo Picasso,  
*Les Femmes d'Alger*  
*(O Version O)*.  
Paris (June-  
July 1907). Oil  
on canvas  
8' x 7' 8"

# Collective Consciousness

- Our task for the past two lessons has been to examine
  - What effect did World War One have on the intellectual world in the 1920s?
  - How do the particular psychological, philosophical, scientific, and artistic theories to emerge out of war reflect the nature and experience of the war?
  - How do they represent changes in how people thought about reality and the world around them as well as themselves?
- Given what we have learned, how would you answer these questions..



# “The Hollow Men”

## T.S. Elliot

### 1925

- 1888-1965
- American, but lived most of his life in England
- “The Hollow Men” deals with themes of post-war Europe

