A
fter two centuries, the Enlightenment remains a source of controversy. While regarded by some as the origin of the central ideals of modern liberal democracies, others see it as responsible for many of the maladies that plague the modern world. This seminar explores some of the disputes about the nature, promise, and limits of the Enlightenment and examines the peculiar intertwining of philosophy, politics, and history at the heart of these discussions.

We begin by examining the eighteenth-century German attempt to answer the question “what is enlightenment?” and subsequent discussions of its alleged influence on the French Revolution. We then consider twentieth-century attempts to draw connections between the Enlightenment and totalitarian forms of rule. We close with a consideration the contrasting accounts of the Enlightenment offered by Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault.

Requirements

The seminar is intended for advanced undergraduates and graduate students. It will be quite demanding, both in the amount of reading and, in some cases, in its difficulty. Participants are expected to come to meetings prepared to discuss the readings and, most importantly, to call attention to those aspects of the readings are unclear or unconvicing.

For undergraduate members of the colloquium, the main written requirement will be a final paper, due at the start of class on December 12, of fifteen to twenty-five pages (i.e., no more than 9,000 words) exploring some of the issues we have been examining in the course in greater detail. As preparation for this paper, undergraduates of the colloquium will be required to post regularly to the course blog on WordPress (http://sites.bu.edu/critics) discussing the assigned readings, exploring possible themes for the final paper, and suggesting points that should be pursued during meetings of the seminar. A proposal for the paper (including a sketch of the argument, a discussion of its significance, and a bibliography of possible sources intend) is due on or before November 16. On or before the same date, graduate students participating in the colloquium should submit a preliminary sketch for a project (e.g., a seminar paper, an annotated bibliography of readings, a review essay, or a research proposal) that they propose to complete during the seminar.

Finally, on September 19, October 19, and November 14 all members of the colloquium will be asked to submit short summaries (900 words or less) of what they view as the most significant issues that are emerging from the readings and the course discussions.

Please submit all papers as email file attachments in either .doc or .pdf format.

In determining final grades for the colloquium, the final project will count for 50%, the three short summaries will count for 25%, and participation in class discussions and the online forum will count for the remaining 25%. For the policy regarding plagiarism and other academic conduct matters, please consult the University Academic Conduct code, which is available at: http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/.

Readings

The following book has been ordered from the Boston University Bookstore:

Condorcet, Political Writings (Cambridge)

Students should also order (either from the publisher or from an online bookseller) the J. G. A. Pocock’s edition of Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (Hackett Publishing). The remaining readings for the course will be available for download from the course site.

Revised: September 8, 2017
Schedule of Readings

I. **What is Enlightenment? German Arguments, 1784-1790**


II. **Enlightenment and Revolution**

9/21  Nicolas de Condorcet, “The Sketch” in *Political Writings* 1-88
9/26  Condorcet, “The Sketch” in *Political Writings* 88-147


10/10  No class (Monday schedule)

10/12 & 17  Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* 456-477

III. **Enlightenment, Nihilism, and Totalitarianism**

10/19  Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* §§ 26, 55, 110, 150, 221, 463, 475
       Nietzsche, *Daybreak* § 3, 197, 535.
       Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* § 122, 125
       Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* §46
       Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* §283.
       Nietzsche, “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable,” in *Twilight of the Idols* p. 171
       Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks* pp. 83-87, 116-121, 146-151, 180, 217-219
       Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* pp. 55-56, 61, 129, 247-8, 447-8, 496-498


10/26  Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* 3-77

10/31  Cassirer, *Myth of the State* 189-298
Enlightenment and Its Critics 3

11/2 & 7 Max Horkheimer, “Reason Against Itself,” in Schmidt, What is Enlightenment?
Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment xiv-xix, 1-34, 180-2, 184-187, 192-196, 203-12

11/9 & 14 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment 35-62
Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment 63-93

IV. Habermas, Foucault, and the Question of Enlightenment


11/21 Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity 1-44, 51-74, 83-105

Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx,” in Essential Works of Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, 269-278

11/30 Foucault, Selections from The History of Madness in The Foucault Reader 123-140
Foucault, Selections from Discipline and Punish in The Foucault Reader 206-213,

12/5 Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?”, in Essential Works of Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth 303-321
Foucault, “The Art of Telling the Truth,” in Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture 86-95