After 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.

Course 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 that are unclear or unconvincing.

For undergraduate members of the colloquium, the main written requirement will be a final paper, due on Monday, December 16 at 1 PM, 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. A proposal for the paper (including a sketch of the argument, a discussion of its significance, and a bibliography of possible sources) is due on or before November 13. 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, a research proposal, or other mutually agreed upon project) that they propose to complete during the seminar.

Finally, on October 2, October 30, and November 13 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 paper or project will count for 50%, the three short summaries will count for 25%, and participation in class discussions 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/

Course Policies

Should any problems arise (e.g., absences, issues with the course site, scheduling of meetings), I can best be reached via email. Messages can also be left on my office phone (617-358-1781), but it will take longer for me to respond.

Students with learning disabilities that may require adjustments in course arrangements should contact me by the second week of class.

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/

Revised: September 10, 2019
Schedule of Readings

I.  What is Enlightenment? German Arguments, 1783-1830


9/11 Hegel, Selections from Phenomenology of Spirit

9/18 Hegel, Sections from Lectures on the Philosophy of History

II.  Enlightenment and Nihilism

9/25  German Nihilism

Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human §§ 26, 55, 110, 150, 221, 463, 475
Nietzsche, Daybreak § 3, 197, 298, 535,
Nietzsche, The Gay Science § 122, 125
Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil §46
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, 116-123, 146-152, 179-180, 217-219
Nietzsche, The Will to Power pp. 55-56, 61-64.

10/2  American and Émigré Responses


10/2  First Short Summary Due
III. Horkheimer and Adorno


10/16 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 35-62

IV. Gadamer vs Habermas


Jürgen Habermas, “The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality” in *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Method, Philosophy and Critique*, ed. Josef Bleicher

10/30 Second Short Summary Due

V. Foucault vs Habermas

Foucault, Selections from *The History of Madness* in *The Foucault Reader* 123-140
Foucault, *Discourse on Language*
Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* pp. 195-230

11/13 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* pp. 238-293

11/13 Third Short Summary Due

VI. Arguments About Enlightenment 1983-2001

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


**Monday, December 16 at 1 PM Final Papers or Projects Due**