

# Enlightenment and Its Critics (HI514/PH412/PH612/PO592)

Mugar 424  
Wednesdays 2:30-5:15 PM

James Schmidt

Room 618A, 745 Commonwealth Ave.  
jschmidt@bu.edu /617-358-1781

Office Hours: Mondays 2:00-3:30  
Wednesdays 12:45-2:15

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 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 intend) 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.

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## Schedule of Readings

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

- 9/4 J. K. W. Möhsen, "What is to be Done Toward the Enlightenment of the Citizenry?" in James Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?* pp. 49-52.  
 Moses Mendelssohn, "On the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in James Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?* 53-57  
 Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?," in Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment?* 58-64  
 "Appendix: Public and Private Use of Reason," in J. Colin McQuillan, "Oaths, Promises, and Compulsory Duties: Kant's Response to Mendelssohn's Jerusalem," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 75:4 (2014) 602-604
- 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, "Human, All too Human," in *Ecce Homo* 115-116.  
 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.  
 Ernst Jünger, "Total Mobilization," in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, pp.119-139.  
 Martin Heidegger, "On Nietzsche," "On Ernst Jünger," and "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Nietzsche Reader*
- 10/2 American and Émigré Responses
- Mortimer J. Adler, "God and the Professors," in *Science, Philosophy, and Religion*, ed. Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life (New York, 1941), 120-38  
 Leo Strauss, "German Nihilism," ed. David Janssens and Daniel Tanguay, *Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 353-78.  
 John H. Hallowell, "The Decline of Liberalism," *Ethics* 52, no. 3 (April 1942): 323-49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2988828>.  
 Aron Gurwitsch, "On Contemporary Nihilism," trans. Anna G. Hatcher, *The Review of Politics* 7, no. 2 (April 1945): 170-98.
- 10/2 First Short Summary Due**

**III. Horkheimer and Adorno**

- 10/9 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* xiv-xix, 1-34, 180-2, 184-187, 192-196, 203-12
- 10/16 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 35-62  
 Horkheimer, "Reason Against Itself," in Schmidt, *What is Enlightenment?*  
 Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment," [New German Critique, no. 26 \(1982\): 13-30.](#)

**IV. Gadamer vs Habermas**

- 10/23 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxi-xxv, 3-42, 265-285, 369-405, 474-491
- 10/30 Jürgen Habermas, "A Review of Truth and Method" in *Understanding and Social Inquiry* edited by Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy pp. 335-363  
 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* pp. 18-43.  
 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**

- 11/6 "Maurice Florence" [pseudonym], "Foucault," *Essential Works of Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 459-463  
 Foucault, Selections from *The History of Madness* in *The Foucault Reader* 123-140  
 Foucault, *Discourse on Language*  
 Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History" in *Essential Works of Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 369-392  
 Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," in *Essential Works of Foucault: Power* 90-105  
 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* pp. 195-230
- 11/13 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* pp. 238-293  
 James Schmidt, "Habermas and Foucault," in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 147-71.

**11/13 Third Short Summary Due****VI. Arguments About Enlightenment 1983-2001**

- 12/4 Foucault, "What is Critique?" in Schmidt, ed. *What is Enlightenment?*, pp. 382-398  
 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
- 12/11 Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present: On Foucault's Lecture 'What is Enlightenment?'" in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate* 173-180

- Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory* 12:2 (1984) 152-83
- Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, "What Is Maturity? Habermas and Foucault on 'What Is Enlightenment?,'" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 109-23.
- Ehrhard Bahr, "In Defense of Enlightenment: Foucault and Habermas," *German Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (February 1988): 97-109.
- Richard Rorty, "The Continuity Between the Enlightenment and 'Postmodernism,'" in *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, ed. Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2001), 19-36.

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