

The University of Toronto

# **INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THEORY THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

German 411H / Fall 2013

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**Class meets on Wednesdays from 3:10 to 5:00**

## **DESCRIPTION**

In this advanced undergraduate seminar we will read one of the most famous books of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "Dialectic of Enlightenment." Written in Los Angeles in 1944 and published in 1947, it is intended as a sustained argument against the destructive power of reason in the service of technology and capital. Its anger and its acute analysis are directed in equal measure against the inhumanity of Nazi Germany and of capitalist America. We will begin by reviewing the critiques of Enlightenment that informed Adorno and Horkheimer, from Kant through to Nietzsche and Freud. On this basis, we will read their book carefully with an aim to understanding what the concept of Enlightenment does for them. Chapter by chapter, we will investigate their understanding of myth, sexuality, popular culture, anti-Semitism, the ego, and other themes. This will lead us to a discussion of their philosophical positions, where we will address topics such as the dialectic of subject and object, the instrumentalization of reason, the disenchantment of the world, the alienation of language, the technological domination of nature, and so on. By way of contextualization, we will also familiarize ourselves with the texts and music that prompted the authors to take their own specific positions on these topics. Our reading will attempt to combine philosophical and literary strategies, and will ask whether this kind of critique of Enlightenment is still valid today.

## **REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION**

Attendance and Participation	10%
Review of a critical commentary on the text	20%
Short assignments	30%
Term paper	40%

## **MATERIALS**

Students are required to purchase from the U of T Bookstore:

- Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer. *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: University of Stanford Press 2007.

A course reader will be made available to students on Blackboard.