INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THEORY
THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT
German 411H / Fall 2013

Instructor: JOHN NOYES
Office: Odette Hall #304
Hours: Mondays & Thursdays 12-1pm
Or by appointment

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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:


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