211.265 – Fall 2023
Panorama of German Thought
Peter Jelavich

This course examines three themes in German thought between the 1770s and the 1940s, as reflected in theoretical texts and dramas. The first section concerns the enlightenment and its emphasis on reason, with a focus on two classical works: the appeal for toleration (and the critique of religious fanaticism) in Lessing’s *Nathan the Wise*, and the dramatization of the limits of reason in Goethe’s *Faust*. The second part covers competing theories of history that arose in the nineteenth century: Hegel’s theologically-based concept of historical progress; Marx’s materialist critique and inversion of Hegel; and Nietzsche’s radically unsystematic and elitist counter-vision. The third and last part concerns aggression and war in the 20th century: Freud’s theory of the innate aggressive impulses in human beings; and expressionist responses to the two world wars in the works of Kaiser, Toller, and Lasker-Schüler.

This course will give students an opportunity to study a variety of theoretical and theatrical texts. Skills to be gained include: How to analyze theoretical texts dealing with philosophical, aesthetic, social, economic, and political issues; how to interpret dramas in terms of both content and aesthetic style; how to orally discuss and debate these ideas; and how to present such topics in writing.

Your final grade for the course will be determined by three 8-page essays on assigned topics (25% each) and participation in class discussion (25%). No extensions or incompletes will be granted, except for medical reasons. All three essays must be submitted in order to pass the course.

The four books labeled “purchase” are available at the campus bookstore; they have also been placed on reserve at the Library. You must use these editions/translations of those four works.

My office hours are Wednesdays from 2:00 to 3:00, and by appointment, in Gilman 370.
PART I: ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS LIMITS

Aug 30

Sept 6

Sept 11

Sept 13
Lessing, Nathan the Wise, 62-115.

Sept 18

Sept 20

Sept 25

Sept 27

Oct 2 – FIRST ESSAY DUE
PART II: PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY

Oct 4

Oct 9

Oct 11
Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 57-98.

Oct 16

Oct 18

Oct 23

Oct 25

Oct 30 – SECOND ESSAY DUE
PART III: WAR

Nov. 1

Nov 6

Nov 8

Nov 13

Nov 15

Nov 27

Nov 29

Dec 4 – final discussion

Dec 6 – THIRD ESSAY DUE