In this seminar, we will read some of the central, inaugurating texts in modern European philosophy concerning the nature and meaning of human history, including works by Rousseau, Kant, and Herder. We will discuss various questions, such as: does history have an aim or purposes, and if so, which, and how could we know of it/them? Is there historical progress, and if so, of what sort? What kind of description, knowledge, understanding is appropriate to history as an object (are there laws of history, for example)? We will also be concerned to discuss two central issues that occupy these early thinkers in the philosophy of history, namely the relationship between history and nature, freedom, and rationality. Thus, we will ask: is human history to be understood as part of, continuous with, natural history (of all organisms, or of human beings in particular)? Is historical investigation therefore strongly akin to biological explanation, or based upon biological premises? Are human beings “historical” beings by nature? Or does human freedom or human rationality disrupt, contradict the claims of biology and nature, and thus history is a “history of human freedom”?