European Enlightenment has often been presented as a rational revolution, as the “Age of Reason”. The sentimental movement against an excessively materialistic and rationalistic view of humanity was then seen as a reaction (romanticism following rationalism). A look at the history of the key concept “sensibilité” in French and the corresponding concepts in other European languages shows instead that a certain idea of sentimentalism is a decisive element of the Enlightenment thought, and not a reaction against it.

The course will show how “sensibilité” is related to moral values such as humanity or benevolence. An interesting question concerns the gender aspects of this 17th and 18th century debate about morality and feeling. Can we say that “sensibilité” was seen as a “female idea”? 

**September 10**

**Seminars:**
Part 1 (10-12):
- Definitions, overview of different forms of the concept of sensibility and its connexions, 17th to 18th Century
- The philosophical, political and aesthetic aspects of the concept
- Overview over seminal texts related to the concept

Part 2 (13-15):
- Case studies: sensibility and moral sense; medical theory of (female) sensibility; sensibilité as a fashion in French society; sensibilité in erotic writings

**September 11**

**Lecture:** Sensibilité – Sensibility – Empfindsamkeit: A Key Concept of European Enlightenment – a Gendered Concept?

**Literature:**
Baasner, F: The Changing Meaning of ‘Sensibilité’ (available in PDF)

**Examination:** paper 6-8 pages