



Philosophy in Berlin: Origin and Future of the University

Winter Semester 2021/22: 18 October 2021 - 19 February 2022

CATEGORY

Philosophy and Politics

COURSE STRUCTURE

2 contact hours à 45 min per week (winter semester: 16 weeks)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Time

Monday 14-16 c.t. (2.15 pm -3:45 pm)

Place

Hausvogteiplatz 5-7, 10117 Berlin
Room 0323-26

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in English, including the readings. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, language-level B is required. Some basic German (A-level) is recommended for some of the additional readings in class.

Language requirements (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)

English B2
German A2

TARGET GROUP

International exchange students of all subjects with a strong interest in the course topic. Berlin Perspectives courses are designed for undergraduate students. Master students may participate if their home university agrees. Regular degree-seeking students can select the course within the elective part of their study program (überfachlicher Wahlpflichtbereich üWP).

The course is of interest to anybody who wants to learn about the theory and history of the European university, especially in the German tradition. Students from across all disciplines are welcome to participate, as the course does not presuppose any previous knowledge of the topic.

The course does not presuppose any philosophical skills either. Rather, it prepares students to critically assess philosophical texts in their historical, political, and cultural context.

CREDITS = 5 ECTS

The Berlin Perspectives courses are offered by the Career Center as part of the elective program üWP. Registration takes place via Agnes.

All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Registration on Moodle (HU's e-learning platform)

in case of online classes

- Fully functional device (laptop, tablet, PC)
- Stable internet connection
- Software: Zoom (video/audio)
- *Recommended* hardware: external headset for better sound quality

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions: be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment: pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers).

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical) especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct.

Attendance policy: Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the lecturer.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores philosophical reflections on the structure and purpose of the university and the role of philosophy within that institution as put forward by German philosophers in the 19th century, while also providing a critical perspective on the subsequent history of the university through the 20th century until today. The University of Berlin was founded in 1809/10 following a series of philosophical university reform writings: it was the first research university in history. Wilhelm von Humboldt in particular had the idea to create a new kind of university in which teaching and research would form a unity, in which science would be independent of political interests, and in which students would receive a universal education. By reading key texts by philosophers such as Kant, Schelling, Fichte, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, we trace how ideas relating to university reform changed and were implemented in the course of the last two centuries, also in light of the most recent European university reform: the Bologna Process in 1999.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an overview of the German philosophical activities in the 19th and early 20th centuries and, in particular, with an in-depth understanding of the philosophical circumstances which led to the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1809/10. The course will enable its participants to analyze and interpret central philosophical texts about the idea and purpose of the university, as well as to critically reflect from a historical and philosophical perspective upon the institution of the university in which they study.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

[Knowledge]

- Understand, describe and identify the central positions and arguments concerning university reform by German philosophers such as Kant, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, and Heidegger
- Direct independent research on topics discussed in the course

[Academic/Transferable Skills]

- Select relevant sources and methods for analyzing course-related questions
- Analyze and interpret texts about university reform and reform in general
- Communicate and discuss key concepts of university reform in the German tradition and the history of European universities

[Competencies]

- Assess primary philosophical texts in the context of history and literature
- Critically reflect about the structure and purpose of higher education institutions
- Apply relevant theories and concepts in independent work to analyze new problems

READINGS

All required readings will be made available electronically in both the original German and English translation. A bibliography on the course topic will be distributed in the first session.

ASSIGNMENT INFO

Workload and assignments

In order to be granted 5 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend all seminar sessions (a minimum of 75% attendance is required for classroom or online sessions)
- prepare and revise the weekly classroom / online sessions
- hand in the following **assignments**:
 - weekly written assignments about the course readings
 - 1 set of minutes documenting a seminar session
 - 1 presentation about the course readings, plus short handout
 - 1 final essay (approx. 2.000 words)

Failure to fulfil one of the mentioned components results in failure of the class.

Assessment Components

The final grade will be composed of the above-mentioned assignments.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR



Benjamin Wilck is a Doctoral Researcher and Adjunct Lecturer in Philosophy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His research specializes in History of Philosophy, History and Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Mathematics, and Philosophy of Medicine. He is also conducting collaborative medical research on language and cognition in schizophrenia and related disorders at Charité – Medical University Berlin. His teaching interests comprise Ethics, Moral Psychology, and Education Theory. He holds an M.A. in Philosophy and Cultural Studies / Aesthetics from Humboldt-Universität. In 2017, he was a Visiting Research Fellow at Princeton University.

Contact: benjamin.wilck@hu-berlin.de

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Opening session

Content/topic: In the first session, we will get an overview of the topics to be covered and the texts to be read in the course of this class. Also, we will discuss the definitional question: What is a university?, and explore related notions such as *teaching*, *research*, and *academic freedom*.

Recommended Readings: Elizabeth Harman, "Racist research must be named, but often allowed", *The Daily Princetonian*, July 27, 2020.

Group activity / assignment: Prospective participants are asked to prepare a mind map on the question: What is a university?; informal class discussion.

Week 2: Immanuel Kant's idea of the university

Content/topic: We will ascertain Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) view about the role of philosophy in a university, and thereby get an insight into the institutional status of academic philosophy in the late 18th century in Prussia. Kant's book *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (*The Conflict of the Faculties*) from 1798 can be regarded as the origin of the revolutionist calls for university reform by Berlin-based philosophers such as Fichte, von Humboldt, and Schleiermacher, which then led to the actual establishing of the University of Berlin.

Required Readings: Immanuel Kant: *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), Part I, Sections 1–4.

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentation about the readings; class discussion.

Week 3: Schelling's idea of the university

Content/topic: We will discuss selected passages from Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's (1775–1854) *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study* (1803), which were written shortly after, and in reaction to, Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*.

Required Readings: F.W.J. Schelling, *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* (1803), Lectures 2, 5, 7.

Additional Readings: F.W.J. Schelling, "Antrittsvorlesung in Berlin 15.11.1841" (This is the late Schelling's inaugural address as a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin.)

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentation about the readings; class discussion.

Week 4: Fichte's idea of the university

Content/topic: The philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) was the founder of German Idealism, as well as the first Rector of the University of Berlin. We will read Fichte's programmatic treatise *Deduced Scheme for a University to be established in Berlin*, in which Fichte proclaims to derive a theory of the university from one single philosophical principle.

Required Readings: J.G. Fichte, *Deduzierter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höhern Lehranstalt* (1807), §§ 1–26.

Additional Readings: J.G. Fichte, "Über die einzig mögliche Störung der akademischen Freiheit" (1811) (This is Fichte's inaugural lecture as the Rector of the University of Berlin. The English translation of Fichte's inaugural lecture covers only pp. 231–234 of the German edition; it is sufficient for you to read those three pages, besides §§ 1–26 of Fichte's book *Deduced Plan*.)

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentation about the readings; class discussion.

Week 5: First excursion

Content/topic: We will visit the main building of Humboldt University (which accommodates the Rector's office, the Philosophy Department, and Hegel's original desk), as well as the Law Faculty and the Theological Faculty. In particular, we will discuss Ceal Floyer's art installation "Vorsicht Stufe" ("Mind the step") from 2009 in the entrance hall of the main building of Humboldt-Universität (Unter den Linden 6). We will further explore and critically discuss artworks and memorials regarding Fichte's, Hegel's, Marx's, and Heine's lives and works.

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about Ceal Floyer's art installation in the main building of Humboldt-Universität) for every participant; individual or group presentation about that art installation or other aspects of the excursion; class discussion.

Guest lecture: Ceal Floyer (to be requested)

Week 6: Wilhelm von Humboldt's idea of the university

Content/topic: The philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) was actively engaged in the institutional founding of the University of Berlin. In this session, we discuss two of his texts with respect to (i) Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), and (ii) the subsequent actual establishing of a new university in Berlin (1809/10). Von Humboldt argues for the establishing of a new (kind of) university in which teaching and research would form a unity, in which science would be independent of political and economic interests, and in which students would receive a universal education.

Required Readings: Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Antrag auf Errichtung der Universität Berlin" (1809); "Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin" (1809/10, fragment).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion.

Week 7: Schleiermacher's idea of the university

Content/topic: The theologian, philologist, and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) also actively and decisively contributed to the establishing of the University of Berlin. In this session, we discuss selected passages from his treatise *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense*, and compare Schleiermacher's view of the university to von Humboldt's. Schleiermacher argues for the necessity of a new, third kind of institution of higher education mediating between mere teaching institutions (schools) and research institutions (academies), namely, the university. Moreover, Schleiermacher argues for the primacy of the philosophical faculty, and for the State's support of universities across national, but within mono-linguistic boundaries.

Required Readings: F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschem Sinn. Nebst einem Anhang über eine neu zu errichtende* (1808), Sections 1–2.

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentation about the readings; class discussion.

Week 8: Hegel's view of philosophy (I)

Content/topic: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) taught at the University of Berlin from 1818 until his death, and he is probably the most prominent and influential philosopher who ever lived and worked in Berlin. In this first of our two Hegel sessions, we look at two documents in which Hegel expresses his views on teaching philosophy at a university: a letter from 1816 that Hegel wrote to the University of Berlin before he was appointed there, and finally Hegel's inaugural lecture at the University of Berlin, delivered on 22nd October 1818.

Required Readings: G.W.F. Hegel, "Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten" (letter to Raumer, 1816); "Berliner Antrittsrede" (1818).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion.

Week 9: Hegel's view of philosophy (II)

Content/topic: Our second Hegel session is dedicated to Hegel's infamous preface (German: Vorrede) to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). In this book, which emerged from lectures he gave during his first years as a professor in Berlin, Hegel determines the relationship between reason and reality, as well as the scope and limits of (political) philosophy.

Required Readings: G.W.F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1820), Preface ("Vorrede").

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion.

Week 10: Marx's view of philosophy

Content/topic: Karl Marx (1818–1883) studied Law at the University of Berlin from 1836 till 1841, shortly after Hegel's death. In this session, we read a famous essay by the very young Karl Marx, which presents itself as a criticism of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and in which Marx expresses his own view of philosophy, especially with respect to its revolutionary potential: Marx characterizes philosophy as a political weapon that can be used to bring about a political revolution in Germany.

In addition, we will watch Episode 1 of the Chinese TV show *The Leader* (2019), in which Marx is depicted as an enthusiastic student of Hegel's philosophy at the University of Berlin.

Required Readings: Karl Marx, "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, Einleitung" (1843/44);

Additional 'Readings': Episode 1 of the Chinese TV show *The Leader* (2019, available on YouTube).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion.

Week 11: Heine's review of German philosophy

Content/topic: We will read the entire (but relatively short) book *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* by Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), in which the Berlin-based poet and philosopher draws an amusing and polemic, but insightful picture of German philosophy from Luther to Hegel. Also, we will compare Heine's views on philosophical revolution, which are expressed in this book, to those of Marx.

Required Readings: Heinrich Heine: *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834). (This text should be presented by at least 2 students.)

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentation about the assigned readings; class discussion.

(Note: Presentations about the women in the background of Heine's book – namely, Madame de Stael, Madame du Devant, and Rahel Varnhagen, are very welcome, too.)

Week 12: Second excursion

Content/topic: Our second sightseeing tour through Berlin will feature a visit to the Medical Campus of Humboldt-Universität, as well as to the Dorotheenstadt Cemetery, where Berlin-based philosophers such as J.G. Fichte, G.W.F. Hegel, Herbert Marcuse, and Friedrich A. Kittler, and various Berlin-based artists in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, such as Bertolt Brecht, Helene Weigel-Brecht, Hanns Eisler, Heiner Mueller, and Gisela May, are buried.

Group activity / assignment: All participants are asked to prepare a (very brief) presentation about one person of their own choice buried on Dorotheenstadt Cemetery.

The course concludes with a class discussion in which participants reflect about the texts and topics discussed in this course, with reference to their respective home university.

Week 13: Schopenhauer's criticism of university philosophy

Content/topic: We will read Schopenhauer's (1788–1860) late essay "On Philosophy at the Universities", which he wrote after he had dropped out of his teaching position at the University of Berlin. This essay can be read as a sarcastic reversal of Kant's view of the university: while Kant had argued that Philosophy is an independent, autonomous faculty to examine the state-controlled faculties of Law, Theology, and Medicine, Schopenhauer now argues that philosophy is itself a state-controlled instrument when taught at universities. Although Schopenhauer here argues that Philosophy cannot be taught at a university, he nonetheless makes some interesting concessions pertaining to the inclusion of Philosophy in university studies.

Required Readings: Arthur Schopenhauer, "Über Universitäts-Philosophie" (1851).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentation about the readings; class discussion.

Week 14: Nietzsche's criticism of the German educational system

Content/topic: We will discuss Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) "On the Future of our Educational Institutions", which is a series of lectures given at the University of Basels in 1872. Following Schopenhauer, Nietzsche here reproaches the German educational system as being a mere instrument of the state, requires the independence of Philosophy from the state, and proposes that universities should be reformed according to the classical Greek model of an intellectual aristocracy.

Required Readings: Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungs-Anstalten" (1872).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion.

Week 15: Heidegger's criticism of academic freedom

Content/topic: We will critically discuss Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) inaugural address as the Rector of Freiburg University, which is entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University", and which documents Heidegger's entanglement with Nazism. While Heidegger here appeals to the traditional definition of the university as a community of teachers and students (*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*), he also argues for a rejection of Kant's idea of academic freedom.

Required Readings: Martin Heidegger, "Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität" (1933).

Additional Readings: Spiegel interview with Martin Heidegger (1976).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion.

Week 16: The Bologna Process

Content/topic: In the final session, we examine the motives behind, and consequences of, the most recent European university reform: the Bologna Process in 1999. While the Bologna reform aimed to harmonize European universities by providing mobility and comparability across countries, it is subject to criticism.

- Is the Bologna Process chiefly motivated by economic interests?
- Is fast employability becoming more relevant than thorough research?
- Does the Bologna Process require the separation of teaching from research?
- Does modularization of study programs do justice to the educational objectives?
- Do program entry restrictions violate freedom of occupational choice?
- How are your studies and professional prospects afflicted by the Bologna Process?

Besides, we will critically compare the Bologna reform with views on teaching and research held by philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Wilhelm von Humboldt.

The course concludes with a class discussion in which all participants reflect upon the texts and topics discussed in this course, especially with respect to the participants' respective home universities and their own experiences with studying at different universities and abroad.

Required Readings: Bologna Declaration (1999); Sorbonne declaration (1998); Magna Charta Universitatum (1988).

Additional Readings: P. Zgaga, "Reconsidering the EHEA Principles: Is There a 'Bologna Philosophy'?" (In: A. Curaj & al., eds., *European Higher Education at the Crossroads: Between the Bologna Process and National Reforms. Part 1*, Springer 2012, pp. 17–38).

Group activity / assignment: Written assignment (questions about the readings) for every participant; individual or group presentations about the readings; class discussion. Additional readings are to be jointly prepared by small groups of students.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: 31 August 2021