

# HU | P S A

Humboldt Perspectives  
Study Abroad



**Fall term 2021: 6 September – 11 December 2021**

## **Philosophy in Berlin: Education & Political Theory**

### **Instructor**

Benjamin WILCK

### **Schedule**

weekly

### **Time**

Thursday, 16:00-18:30

### **Room**

tba

### **Course Level & Target Group**

Humboldt Perspectives Study Abroad courses are designed for undergraduate students.

Since the course does not presuppose any previous knowledge of the topic, students from all disciplines are all able and welcome to participate. The course will be of interest to anybody who wants to learn about the theory and history of the university, especially in the German tradition. Also, this course does not presuppose any genuinely philosophical skills. Rather, it prepares students to critically assess philosophical texts in their historical and cultural context.

### **Language requirements**

This course is taught in English, including readings in English. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, a language level B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required. (While we read texts written mostly by German philosophers, English translations of all course materials are available.)

### **Credits**

6 ECTS

### **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 Prussian Berlin of 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. 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. Consequently, the University of Berlin became the paradigm of a new era of teaching and research. By reading key texts by Kant, Schelling, Fichte, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Hegel, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, and Rosa Luxemburg, we will trace how ideas relating to university reform, and to reform more generally, 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. Moreover, the course puts particular emphasis on the impact of philosophical ideas on politics, religion, and education, as well as on literature, visual arts, and architecture in Berlin past and present.

### **Course Objective & Learning Outcomes**

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an overview of the German philosophical activities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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, and reform in general, by German philosophers such as Kant, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, and Rosa Luxemburg
- 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 the theory of education 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

### **Course Schedule**

(14 weeks, 3 hours à 45 min. per week)

#### **Week 1: Opening session.**

Content/topic: In the first session of the seminar, 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 as to what a university is, as well as the extent to which the notion of *academic freedom* is part of the definition of *university*.

Recommended Readings: Elizabeth Harman (Princeton University): "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 of what a university is; 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.

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 1, 5, and 7.

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.

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

### **Week 5: 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. We shall discuss two of his programmatic texts with respect to (i) Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), (ii) the prospective actual establishment of a new university in Berlin (1809/10), and (iii) the Bologna Process (1999).

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).

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

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.

### **Week 6: 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

### **Week 7: Schleiermacher's idea of the university.**

Content/topic: The theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) also actively contributed to the establishment of the University of Berlin. We will study his treatise *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense*, and compare it to von Humboldt's views of the university.

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.**

Content/topic: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) taught at the University of Berlin from 1816 until his death, and he is probably the most prominent and influential philosopher who ever lived and worked in Berlin. We will take a look at the preface to Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820), which emerged from his lectures in Berlin, and in which Hegel determines the relationship between reason and reality, as well as the scope and limits of political philosophy. In addition, we will look at Hegel's inaugural lecture at the University of Berlin from 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1818, and a letter that Hegel wrote to the University of Berlin before he was appointed there, in which he expresses his views on teaching philosophy at a university.

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

Additional 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. Additional readings are to be jointly prepared by small groups of students.

### **Week 9: 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. We will read a famous essay by the young 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 politically revolutionary potential. In addition, we will watch Episode 1 of the Chinese TV show *The Leader* (2019), in which Marx is depicted as a young, 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. Additional readings are to be jointly prepared by small groups of students.

### **Week 10: 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 revolution through philosophy, which are expressed in this book, to those of Marx.

Required Readings: Heinrich Heine: *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834). (Note: This text should be presented by at least two 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 11: 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. Schopenhauer's text can be read as a 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 suggests that philosophy becomes itself a State-controlled instrument when taught at universities.

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 12: Heidegger's idea of the university.**

Content/topic: We will discuss the philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) inaugural address as the Rector of Freiburg University, which is entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University". While Heidegger here expressly addresses the definition of the university and critically challenges the idea of academic freedom, this speech also paradigmatically documents Heidegger's entanglement with Nazism.

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. Additional readings are to be jointly prepared by small groups of students.

### **Week 13: Rosa Luxemburg on reform and revolution.**

Content/topic: We conclude our readings of programmatic writings on university reform by studying the pamphlet "Reform or Revolution?", published in 1898/99 by the Marxist economist and Berlin-based philosopher Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919). While this essay is not about education and university, but about politics and social democracy, it still takes up motives from texts we studied earlier in the semester (especially from Marx's "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie"), and it gives us an insight into the writing and thinking of this famous female Berlin-based writer. Moreover, we will watch parts of Margarete von Trotta's feature film *Rosa Luxemburg* (West Germany, 1986).

Required Readings: Rosa Luxemburg's "Sozialreform oder Revolution?" (1898/99).

Additional 'Readings': *Rosa Luxemburg* (Film by von Trotta, West Germany, 1986).

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.

### **Week 14: 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

## **Assignments**

In order to be granted 6 ECTS, participants will be asked to

- actively attend the classes (a minimum of 80% class attendance is required),
- hand in written assignments on a weekly basis (answer at least 7 sets of questions about the course readings),
- give a presentation on one of the course readings (plus handout with questions),
- submit a final research essay ('Hausarbeit': c. 2000 words, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12).

Alternative final assessments, such as a film project, are also feasible and encouraged.

### **Assessment Components**

The final grade will be composed of

- the partial grade for the individual presentation (25 % of the entire grade), and
- the partial grade for the final research essay (75 % of the entire grade).

(Written assignments do not contribute to the grade, but are required for course credit.)

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

### **Expectations & Policies**

Preparation for lively discussions in the classroom: 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 schedule including handing over to the lecturer.

Commitment in class: Pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers, locals engaged with on the visits).

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Attendance policy: 80% class attendance are required. Students must contact their class teachers to catch up on missed work.

Field trips: If classes involve a field trip or other external visits, these require attendance as well as appearance in time.

### **Your Instructor**

Benjamin Wilck is a Doctoral Researcher and Adjunct Lecturer in Philosophy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His research specializes in Ancient Philosophy (especially Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus), Philosophy and History of Science (especially Mathematics), as well as in Philosophy of Medicine (especially Psychiatry and Medical Education). His teaching comprises Ethics and Political Theory. He holds an M.A. in Philosophy and Cultural Studies / Aesthetics from Humboldt-Universität, and was also a research fellow at the Philosophy Department at Princeton University in 2017.

Please note that the course and its syllabus are subject to change.  
Last update: 20. November 2020