



Spring term 2022: 9 February – 20 May 2022

Philosophy in Berlin: Educational Theory in the German Tradition

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 is 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, political, 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

What is the purpose of studying? Are teachers needed in higher education, or is it sufficient for students to have the teaching materials? Why are there universities besides secondary schools and research academies? Precisely what is the relationship between teaching and research? This course addresses these and related questions by exploring philosophical reflections on education ("Bildung") and student life in the German tradition. The focus is on theories of higher education, especially on the structure and purpose of the university, as put forward by German, mostly Berlin-based philosophers of the 19th century, while also providing a critical perspective on the subsequent history of educational theories, and educational policies, through the 20th century until today. By reading and discussing key texts by philosophers such as Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, we trace how ideas relating to education changed and were implemented during the last two centuries, also in light of the most recent European university reform: the Bologna Process in 1999. Besides looking at the actual impact of philosophical ideas on education policies, this course also appeals to the traces of these ideas in literature and the arts in Berlin past and present.

While the authors considered in this class are exclusively male, this course addresses issues pertaining to gender equality insofar as they arise from their respective theories, as well as the reception of these theories by female authors and artists.

Course objective & learning outcomes

The objective of this B.A.-level course is to equip students with an overview of German philosophical activities and, in particular, with an in-depth understanding of central theories of higher education and university reform, in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The course enables its participants to analyze and interpret key philosophical texts about educational theory, and to critically reflect upon the history, structure, and purpose of the institution in which they study themselves: the university.

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

Knowledge

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

Academic skills

- Select relevant sources and methods for analyzing course-related questions
- Analyze and interpret historical philosophical texts about educational theory and university reform
- Communicate and discuss some of the key concepts of educational theory in the German tradition, and in the history of European universities and education policies
- Conduct independent research on course topics

Transferable competencies

- Assess primary philosophical texts in the context of history, politics, 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 get an overview of the topics to be covered and the texts to be read in the course of this class. Also, we discuss the meaning(s) of "Bildung", as well as the definitional question as to what a university is.

Group activity / assignment: Prospective participants are asked to prepare a mind map on the question of what a university is (and what it is not); informal class discussion.

Week 2: Kant's idea of the university

Content/topic: We 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 higher education in the late 18th century in Prussia. In his book *The Conflict of the Faculties* from 1798, Kant argues that Law, Theology, and Medicine (the three so-called Higher Faculties) are nothing but instruments of the State, whereas Philosophy (the so-called Lower Faculty) serves the function of examining and controlling the Higher Faculties. This polemic treatise triggered the revolutionist calls for university reform advanced by Berlin-based philosophers such as Fichte, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Schleiermacher, which then led to the actual establishing of the University of Berlin in 1809, and hence of the modern research university.

Required readings: Kant's *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), Part I, Section 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 discuss selected passages from the *Lectures on the Method of Academic Study* (1803) by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854), which were written shortly after (and in reaction to) Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*. Schelling argues that philosophy is in fact not simply a faculty among others, but rather a principle and foundation of the university as a whole, and that all higher education is to be grounded in philosophy.

Required readings: Schelling's *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* (1803), Lectures 2, 5, 7.

Additional readings: Schelling's inaugural lecture (Antrittsvorlesung) at the University of Berlin (1841).

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 principal (that is rector, or president) of the University of Berlin. In this session, we read selected passages from 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. Fichte claims that, just as all knowledge is ultimately grounded in one single philosophical principle, so all faculties of the university too are to be grounded in the faculty of Philosophy. Moreover, Fichte argues that all teachings at the university should ideally be performed by one single philosophy professor (namely, by himself).

Required readings: Fichte's *Deduzierter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höhern Lehranstalt* (1807), §§ 1–26.

Additional readings: Fichte's inaugural lecture (Antrittsvorlesung) at the University of Berlin (1811).

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 explore some of the artworks and memorials found in central Berlin regarding the lives and works of other famous Berlin-based philosophers and famous intellectuals of the 19th century: most notably, Hegel, Fichte, Wilhelm & Alexander von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Marx, Heine, Kierkegaard, and Rahel Varnhagen. This includes a visit to the main building of Humboldt-Universität (which accommodates the Rector's office, the Philosophy Department, and Hegel's original desk), which gives us the opportunity to discuss the Berlin-based British artist Ceal Floyer's installation "Vorsicht Stufe" ("Mind the step") from 2009 in the entrance hall of the main building of Humboldt-Universität.

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 by the Berlin-based British artist Ceal Floyer (planned)

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

Content/topic: The philosopher, linguist, and statesman Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) was actively engaged in the institutional founding of the University of Berlin. We discuss two documents by Wilhelm von Humboldt on higher education, in which he 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: "Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin" (1809/10, fragment).

Additional readings: W. von Humboldt's "Antrag auf Errichtung der Universität Berlin" (1809, letter).

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 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 his view of the university to Wilhelm von Humboldt's (given that Schleiermacher's and von Humboldt's ideas were the ones actually adopted in establishing the University of Berlin). 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: Schleiermacher's: *Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschem Sinn* (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 look at Hegel's inaugural lecture at the University of Berlin from 22nd 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. In addition, we take a look at the famous 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.

Required readings: Hegel's "Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten" (letter to Raumer, 1816); Hegel's inaugural lecture at the University of Berlin ("Berliner Antrittsrede", 1818).

Additional readings: Hegel's *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. 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. 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 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: Marx's "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 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 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). (This text should be presented by at least two students together.)

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: Second excursion

Content/topic: Our second sightseeing tour through Berlin features a visit to the Medical Campus of Humboldt-Universität, as well as to the adjacent 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 entombed.

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

Week 12: Schopenhauer's criticism of university philosophy

Content/topic: We 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 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 argues that Philosophy becomes itself a State-controlled instrument when taught at universities.

Required readings: Schopenhauer's "Über Universitäts-Philosophie" (1851).

Additional readings (optional): Nietzsche's "Über die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten" (1872).

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

Week 13: Heidegger's idea of the university

Content/topic: We critically discuss the philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) infamous inaugural address as the Rector of Freiburg University, which is entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University" (a.k.a. "Rektoratsrede"). While Heidegger here

expressly addresses the definition of the university and challenges the Kantian idea of academic freedom, this speech also documents Heidegger's entanglement with Nazism.

Required readings: Heidegger's "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 14: The Bologna Process (1999)

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 important 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?
- Precisely how are your studies and professional prospects afflicted by the Bologna Process?

In addition, we critically compare the Bologna Process 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 we reflect upon the texts and topics discussed in this course with reference 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: Selected secondary literature on the Bologna Process (TBA).

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.

Assignments

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

- actively attend the classes (a minimum of 80% class attendance is required),
- hand in written assignments on a weekly basis (write 1 set of minutes documenting a seminar session, and answer at least 7 sets of questions about the course readings),
- give a short oral or multimedial presentation on one of the course readings (plus handout with questions to spur class discussion),
- submit a final research essay ('Hausarbeit': c. 2000 words, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12). (The essay topic is to be agreed upon with the instructor.)

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

Assessment components

The final grade is 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 Greek Philosophy, Philosophy and History of Science (especially Mathematics), and Philosophy of Medicine (especially Psychiatry and Medical Education). His teaching also comprises Ethics, Moral Psychology, and Educational Theory. He holds an M.A. in Philosophy and Cultural Studies / Aesthetics from Humboldt-Universität, and he has been a Visiting Fellow at the Philosophy Department at Princeton University in 2017.

Please note that the course and its syllabus are subject to change.

Last update: 19 May 2021