

Course title:	German Philosophy: From Kant to Habermas
Instructor:	Dr. Bernardo Bianchi
Email address:	bianchi@cmb.hu-berlin.de
Track:	B-Track
Language of instruction:	English
Contact hours:	48 (6 per day)
ECTS credits:	6
Prerequisites:	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher. Prior experience with reading philosophical texts will be helpful.

Course description

Philosophy has constituted a central element in the emergence of modern German culture. In the late 18th century, German philosophy participated in the broader European Enlightenment culture, which was in turn connected to the development of modern empirical science. Under the impression of the historical changes brought about by the French Revolution and by the 'Industrial Revolution' in Great Britain, a special constellation of German philosophy emerged at the end of the 18th century, which has deeply left its mark on subsequent philosophical thinking far beyond Germany.

This philosophy course addresses the historical reality of this 'German moment of philosophy' in two subsequent phases: In the first part, we follow the emergence and full deployment of German philosophy from its Kantian beginnings to Hegel's grand but fragile synthesis, trying to understand its richness as well as its fragility. In a second part, we explore the later renewal of German philosophy in the late 19th century and its historical tragedy in the 20th century. This includes a discussion of the new beginnings of philosophy since the mid-19th century, from Marx to Nietzsche. Rosa Luxemburg, with her revolutionary critique of capitalism and commitment to democratic socialism, is then studied alongside Martin Heidegger, an established pro-Nazi philosopher. We also examine Max Horkheimer, the leading philosopher of the Frankfurt School who was driven into exile, and Hannah Arendt, as key thinkers navigating the Night of the 20th century.

Finally, post-World War II developments in philosophy (as exemplified by Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas) will be looked at as pathways out of the self-destructive turn the 'German moment of philosophy' in Germany had taken in the first decades of the 20th century, and as passages into an emerging world philosophy. In this context, we will also explore the works of two contemporary philosophers, Elisabeth List and Rahel Jäggi.

The course will be based upon contemporary attempts at rethinking a global philosophical perspective. The focus is on the tension between the Enlightenment heritage of a universalizing human philosophy and a national culture project, as well as on the tension between classicist rationalism and romantic emotionalism in its construction as a series of philosophical projects. From the perspective of a German version of the dialectics of the Enlightenment, the German philosophers of the 19th and 20th centuries will be studied in

context - combining the reading of key texts with a reconstruction of their historical contexts and their interaction.

Student profile

This course is open for students from all disciplines having a deep interest in Philosophy. Prior exposure to the field of philosophy will be helpful.

Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced Intermediate level (Mittelstufe II) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>

Course requirements

Active participation, course presentation, midterm exam, essay paper

Grading

Active participation	20%
Course presentation	25%
Midterm exam	25%
Essay paper	30%

Reading

A course reader will be provided online as PDF file.

Course schedule

Date	Program*	
Tuesday, July 29, 2025	Session 1	Orientation meeting: Introduction of instructor and participants/ Reading philosophy philosophically Class discussion with inputs from the instructor
	Session 2	Reading the double “moment of German philosophy” through Germaine de Staël Lecture, with debate
	Session 3	Kant’s Transcendental Turn: Reading: Immanuel Kant: “Prefaces,” from: <i>The Critique of Pure Reason (both editions, 1781 and 1787)</i> Class reading, with introduction
Friday, August 1, 2025	Session 1	Fichte’s Radicalization of Kant Reading: Johann Gottlieb Fichte: <i>The Science of Knowing (1804) (Selections)</i> Class reading, with introduction
	Session 2	Hegel’s Dialectic: Reading: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: “Preface,” in: Id., <i>The Philosophy of Right (1820)</i> Class reading, with introduction

	Session 3	Philosophy after Hegel: The ‘Young Hegelians’ and the Historical Break of 1848 Lecture, with debate
Tuesday, August 5, 2025	Session 1	New Beginnings, 1: A New Materialism and the Proletariat Reading: Karl Marx, <i>[Notes on] Feuerbach</i> (1845) and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 2	New Beginnings, 2: An Existentialist Perspective Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Prejudices of the Philosophers</i> (Ch. 1 of <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , 1885) Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 3	Excursion to the DHM (German Historical Museum)
Friday, August 8, 2025	Session 1	German Philosophy on the Edge, 1: The Dialectics of Transformation Readings: Luxemburg, Rosa, <i>Reform or Revolution</i> (1900). Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 2	German Philosophy on the Edge, 2: The Conservative Revolution Reading: Martin Heidegger, <i>What is Metaphysics?</i> (1929) Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 3	Mid-term exam
Tuesday, August 12, 2025	Session 1	German Philosophy in the Night of the 20th century, 1: The Frankfurt School Reading: Max Horkheimer, <i>The End of Reason</i> (1941) Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 2	German Philosophy in the Night of the 20th century, 2: Renewing Humanism: Hannah Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i> (1958) Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 3	Excursion to the Topography of Terror
Friday, August 15, 2025	Session 1	Renewing ‘critical theory’, 1: New Forms of Control Reading: Herbert Marcuse, <i>The New Forms of Control</i> (Ch. 1 of <i>The One-Dimensional Man</i> (1964) Class reading, with introduction by students

	Session 2	Renewing ‘critical theory’, 2: Critical Social Knowledge Reading: Jürgen Habermas, <i>The Idea of the Theory of Knowledge as Social Theory</i> (1968) Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 3	The German Philosophy and May 1968 Lecture with debate
Tuesday, August 19, 2025	Session 1	A Feminist Retrospective on German Philosophy Reading: Elisabeth List, <i>Reason, Gender, and the Paradox of Rationalization</i> (2000) Class reading, with introduction by students
	Session 2	Critical Transformations: A Theory of Forms of Life Reading: Rahel Jäggi, <i>What is a Form of Life?</i> (section 1 of Ch. 1 of <i>Critique of Forms of Life</i>)
	Session 3	Excursion to Humboldt Universität at Unter den Linden
Friday, August 22, 2025	Session 1	Concluding debate: What did I learn here? Class discussion, with introduction by students
	Session 2	“My own take” - looking back on the course: exchange of personal impressions Class discussion, with round of impressions from everyone
	Session 3	FUBiS Farewell Ceremony

*Field trips may be subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days adaptation of class times is possible.