

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 been a central element in the emergence of modern German culture. In the late eighteenth century, German philosophy was an integral part of the broader European Enlightenment, itself closely linked to the rise of modern empirical science. Under the impact of the profound historical transformations brought about by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, a distinctive constellation of German philosophical thought emerged at the end of the eighteenth century - one that left a lasting imprint on subsequent philosophy far beyond Germany.

This philosophy course addresses the historical reality of this 'German moment of philosophy' in two successive phases. In the first part, we trace the emergence and full deployment of German philosophy from its Kantian beginnings to Hegel's grand yet fragile synthesis, seeking to grasp both its richness and its internal tensions. In the second part, we explore the later renewal of German philosophy in the late nineteenth century and its historical tragedy in the twentieth. This includes a discussion of the new beginnings of philosophy since the mid-nineteenth century onward, from Marx to Nietzsche. Rosa Luxemburg, with her revolutionary critique of capitalism and commitment to democratic socialism, is studied alongside Martin Heidegger, an established pro-Nazi philosopher. We also examine Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the leading thinkers of the Frankfurt School who were driven into exile, and Hannah Arendt, as key thinkers navigating the crises of the twentieth century.

Finally, post-World War II developments in philosophy, exemplified by Herbert Marcuse and Jürgen Habermas, will be examined as pathways out of the self-destructive turn that the "German moment of philosophy" had taken in the first decades of the twentieth century, and as transitions toward an emerging world philosophy. In this context, we will also engage with the works of two contemporary philosophers, Elisabeth List and Rahel Jaeggi.

The course is grounded in contemporary efforts to rethink philosophy from a global perspective. It focuses on the tension between the Enlightenment legacy of a universalizing human philosophy and the project of a national culture, as well as on the tension between classicist rationalism and romantic emotionalism in the construction of German philosophical traditions. From the perspective of a distinctly German version of the dialectic of Enlightenment, nineteenth- and twentieth-century German philosophers will be studied in

context - combining close readings of key texts with a reconstruction of their historical backgrounds and mutual interactions.

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.

Course requirements

Class participation, course presentation, final exam

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>

Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 6 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 14 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

Grading

Class participation	30%
Course presentation	35%
Final exam	35%

Reading

A course reader will be provided online as PDF file.

Course schedule

Date	Program*	
Tuesday, July 21, 2026	Session 1	Orientation meeting and overview of the course: Introduction of instructor and participants Class discussion with inputs from the instructor
	Session 2	The Nationalization of Philosophy and the German Case I: From Leibniz to Wolff Lecture, with debate
	Session 3	The Nationalization of Philosophy and the German Case II: Between France and Germany Lecture, with debate
Friday, July 24, 2026	Session 1	German Idealism and Its Afterlives, 1: Kant Reading: Kant, <i>An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?</i> (1784) Class reading, with seminar by students

	Session 2	German Idealism and Its Afterlives, 2: Hegel Reading: Hegel: 'Preface' (in <i>The Philosophy of Right</i> , 1820) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 3	German Idealism and Its Afterlives, 3: The Young Hegelians Reading: David McLellan <i>The Young Hegelians and K. Marx</i> (Introduction, pp. 1-33). Class reading, with debate
Tuesday, July 28, 2026	Session 1	Socialism and Revolution, 1: Marx Reading: Marx, <i>[Notes on] Feuerbach</i> (1845) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 2	Socialism and Revolution, 2: Engels Reading: Friedrich Engels, <i>Socialism: Utopian and Scientific</i> Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 3	Socialism and Revolution, 3: Luxemburg Reading: Luxemburg, <i>Reform or Revolution</i> (1900) Class reading, with seminar by students
Friday, July 31, 2026	Session 1	German Detours: Nietzsche and Heidegger Reading: Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Prejudices of the Philosophers</i> (Ch. 1 of <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i> , 1885) Complementary reading: Martin Heidegger, <i>What is Metaphysics?</i> (1929) Class reading, with debate
	Session 2	Critical Theory and the 20th Century, 1: Lukács Reading: Lukács, 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' (in <i>History and Class Consciousness</i> , 1923) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 3	Short visit to the Humboldt University building on Unter den Linden and excursion to the German Historical Museum (DHM)
Tuesday, August 4, 2026	Session 1	Critical Theory and the 20th Century, 2: Adorno and Horkheimer Reading: Adorno and Horkheimer, 'The Concept of Enlightenment' (in <i>Dialect of Enlightenment</i> , 1947) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 2	Critical Theory and the 20th Century, 3: Arendt

		Reading: Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i> (1958) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 3	Critical Theory and the 20th Century, 4: Marcuse Reading: Marcuse, <i>The New Forms of Control</i> (in <i>The One-Dimensional Man</i> , 1964) Class reading, with seminar by students
Friday, August 7, 2026	Session 1	Critical Theory and the 20th Century, 5: Habermas Reading: Habermas, <i>The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article</i> (1964) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 2	Critical Theory and the 20th Century, 6: Heller Reading: Heller, Ch. 1 and 2 of <i>The Everyday Life Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article</i> (1970) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 3	Critical Theory and May 1968 Lecture, with debate
Tuesday, August 11, 2026	Session 1	Critical Theory and Feminism: List Reading: List, <i>Reason, Gender, and the Paradox of Rationalization</i> (2000) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 2	Renewing Critical Theory: Jaeggi Reading: Jaeggi, <i>What is a Form of Life?</i> (section 1 of Ch. 1 of <i>Critique of Forms of Life</i>) Class reading, with seminar by students
	Session 3	Excursion to Staatsbibliothek – Potsdamer Platz
Friday, August 14, 2026	Session 1	Concluding debate: What did I learn here? Class discussion
	Session 2	Final Exam
	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.