

# The Promise of German Philosophy: Between Kant and Hegel

Dr. Detlef von Daniels

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| Email Address:           | info@fubest.fu-berlin.de |
| Time Slot:               | Thursdays, 4:30 p.m.     |
| Language of Instruction: | English                  |
| Contact Hours:           | 45                       |
| ECTS Credits:            | 6                        |

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## Course Description

German idealism, a movement in philosophy that began in the 1780s and lasted until the 1840s, played a central role in the development of modern German culture and has shaped philosophical thinking far beyond Germany. It expressed the Enlightenment's promise to advance the common good through science and the humanities, but it also contained seeds of anti-Enlightenment thought that unfolded later.

In this course, we trace the rise of German idealist philosophy from Kant's critical turn to Fichte's radicalization of the self and his political response to Napoleon, and finally to Hegel's grand but fragile synthesis. Alongside these developments, we will consider Hölderlin's poetic philosophy and the challenges posed by the so-called Young Hegelians, such as Feuerbach and Stirner. Goethe's work will accompany us as a cultural counterpoint to the philosophical debates.

Beyond historical exposition, the seminar pursues two systematic lines of inquiry. First, we will ask how philosophy interacts with its wider cultural environment and how it can be extended to contemporary discussions (feminist, postcolonial, and black perspectives). Second, we will address the problem of radical transformation – from evil to good, and from dogmatic to critical philosophy. In times of culture wars and deep political divisions, this problem has a persistent relevance.

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to give accurate and relevant answers, complete with supporting details, to specific questions about philosophical ideas covered during the semester. They can explain difficult text passages clearly, accurately, and thoroughly. They will learn to speculate, in a well-informed, well-supported, and plausible fashion, about what a given philosopher would say about a novel issue or problem. Students will also gain competency in using and evaluating AI tools.

## Technology Policy

Out of respect for your fellow students, your instructor, and the educational process, all technology devices (cell/smart phones, I-pods, laptops) must be turned off and put away during class.

## Student Profile

They should be in their fourth semester of college/university education or beyond.

## Assignments and Grading

Attendance & Participation: 300 Points (including weekly reading responses and short presentation)

Independent Project Report: 100 Points

Midterm Exam: 300 Points

Final Exam: 300 Points

### **Weekly reading responses**

1-2 pages, due at noon on the day of class.

### **Short Presentation**

Each student has to give one mini-presentation on a specific topic.

### **Independent Project Report**

Write a 4-5 page report about your time travel to the past (the time we covered in class). Your task is to change history a little bit by convincing a philosopher to change or clarify their view on a specific topic. The report is a combination of personal fiction and a philosophy paper. Please include one fun historical fact (what you wear, where you eat, etc.) and concentrate on one specific text.

Completion of the Midterm Exam as well as the Final Exam is needed for a grade.

| FUB Grade | Points of 1,000 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1.0       | 980-1,000       |
| 1.3       | 950-979         |
| 1.7       | 900-949         |
| 2.0       | 850-899         |
| 2.3       | 800-849         |
| 2.7       | 750-799         |
| 3.0       | 700-749         |
| 3.3       | 650-699         |
| 3.7       | 600-649         |
| 4.0       | 500-599         |
| 5.0       | < 500           |

### **Attendance**

Attendance in class is **mandatory**. We also expect you to be **punctual** out of respect to both your instructor and your fellow students. An absence for more than half of a particular day's session will be considered an absence for that day.

If you cannot attend class because you are ill, please **notify your instructor** by e-mail (not via messenger service or through another student) before class. Any absence **without a notification** of your instructor before class will automatically be considered **unexcused**.

Absences because of **illness** are **excused**; however, for the **third** sick day and every other sick day after that (per course), you will need to turn in a **doctor's notice** ("Attest" in German) in order for them to count as excused, too. It is **your** responsibility to keep track of your absences and to know when a doctor's note is required. No doctor's notice issued more than three days after the day of illness will be accepted.

If you miss an **exam** due to an excused absence, your instructor and the FU-BEST team will arrange a make-up exam for you; you may also be entitled to a term paper **deadline extension**. If you, however, do not fulfill all course requirements needed for a grade by the (later) date determined by the program, passing the course is no longer possible.

Please also note that if you miss **more than half** of a course's sessions (even if due to excused absence), passing the course is no longer possible.

Personal travel and visits by relatives or friends are **not** accepted as reasons for absence (i.e., absences for these reasons always count as **unexcused**).

Regarding **unexcused** absences, please note the following:

- Any unexcused absence has consequences for at least the participation portion of the grade.
- Two unexcused absences lead to a lowering of the course grade by a fraction.
- Three unexcused absences will result in a 5.0 (equivalent to an “F”) on the transcript.

### Literature

Digitalized readings are posted on the online learning platform Blackboard.

### Background Reading

A. Recommended Web Resources (referring to further web resources):

- [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_idealism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_idealism)
- <http://www.iep.utm.edu/g/germidea.htm>
- <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/idealism/>
- <https://sites.northwestern.edu/germanphil/resources/>

B. Selected Secondary Texts:

- Andrew Bowie, *Introduction to German Philosophy. From Kant to Habermas*, Cambridge: Polity, 2003.
- Heinrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany. A Fragment*, transl. John Snodgrass, Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.
- Dieter Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel. Lectures on German Idealism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860. The Legacy of Idealism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

### Course Schedule

| Calendar  | Topics, Readings, etc.  |
|-----------|---|
| Session 1 | <p><b>Topic: The Origins of German Philosophy in the Lutheran Reformation</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martin Luther, Selected Writings (1517-1520)</li> </ul> <p><b>Music</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giacomo Meyerbeer, Les Huguenots (1836)<br/><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDfpOu-VWGw&amp;t=311s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDfpOu-VWGw&amp;t=311s</a></li> <li>• Chorale, Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott<br/><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Snj9yR5Ae_k">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Snj9yR5Ae_k</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Katharina von Bora Luther: The invention of the Protestant pastor's family</p> |
| Session 2 | <p><b>Topic: German Enlightenment and its Other</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immanuel Kant: An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? (1784)</li> </ul> <p><b>Music</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• German folk song, Die Gedanken sind frei<br/><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVc0wBLri1A">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVc0wBLri1A</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Caroline von Keyserling: regent of the court of the muses</p>  |

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| <p><b>Session 3</b></p>     | <p><b>Topic: Kant's Transcendental Turn: Radicalizing the Enlightenment?</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immanuel Kant: Critique of Pure Reason. Preface to the Second Edition (1787)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Session 4</b></p>     | <p><b>Topic: A new Foundation for Morality</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immanuel Kant: Critique of Practical Reason (1788)</li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Did Kant suppress his debt to Anton Wilhelm Amo, the first black philosopher?</p>  |
| <p><b>Session 5</b></p>     | <p><b>Topic: Radicalisation of the Self and the Invention of German National Politics</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johann Gottlieb Fichte: <i>Foundation of the Entire Science of Knowledge</i> (1794), Introduction and §§ 1–2</li> <li>Johann Gottlieb Fichte: <i>Addresses to the German Nation</i> (1807/08), First and Eighth Address</li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Napoleon's meeting with Goethe in Erfurt (1808)</p>  |
| <p><b>Session 6</b></p>     | <p><b>MIDTERM EXAM</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Session 7</b></p>     | <p><b>Topic: German Idealism as the Elaboration of the New Philosophy</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Friedrich Hölderlin: Judgment and Being (1795); Poems; Letters to Hegel and Schelling; Hyperion (1797/1799)</li> <li>Schelling/Hegel/Hölderlin: The Oldest System Program of German Idealism (1797)</li> </ul> <p><b>Music</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Franz Schubert, Trio no. 2 op. 100<br/><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kuFzjkUcLw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kuFzjkUcLw</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> What was the Tübinger Stift?</p>  |
| <p><b>Session 8 + 9</b></p> | <p><b>Topic 8: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a Freemason. Recasting Cosmopolitanism?</b></p> <p><b>Mini-presentations:</b> The history of Freemasonry; Goethe's service to Karl August</p> <p><b>Music</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Franz Schubert / Goethe, Der Erlkönig<br/><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTxiagvCThg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTxiagvCThg</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Topic 9: Faust. The drama of the Germans</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust, Parts I and II (1808, 1832)</li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Xi Jinping's fascination with Faust</p> |

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| <p><b>Session 10</b></p> | <p><b>Topic: Reclaiming Theory – Hegel’s Transitional Synthesis: The Phenomenology of Spirit</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: <i>The Phenomenology of Spirit. Introduction</i> (1806)</li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Why did Hegel’s sister go mad?</p>   |
| <p><b>Session 11</b></p> | <p><b>Topic: Hegel on Recognition: The Master-Slave Dialectic</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: <i>The Phenomenology of Spirit. Mastery and Servitude</i> (1806)</li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Hegel and black thought. The legacy of Martin Luther King</p>  |
| <p><b>Session 12</b></p> | <p><b>Topic: The Unravelling of Hegel’s Synthesis: The Young Hegelians</b></p> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Max Stirner: <i>The False Principles of Our Education – Or, Humanism and Realism</i> (1842)</li> </ul> <p><b>Music</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Einstürzende Neubauten, Kollaps (live)<br/><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkrv0Q11tWM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkrv0Q11tWM</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Mini-presentation:</b> Ayn Rand: taming the self?</p> |
| <p><b>Session 13</b></p> | <p><b>FINAL EXAM</b></p>   |