Course Syllabus

Critic or Prophet? The Intellectual in Modern Germany

Dr. Todd H. Weir

email: weirt@washington.edu  
University of Washington  
CHID 498 F  
Spring 2006

Course meeting times and place: T-Th 10:30-12:20, Mary Gates Hall 288  
Office Hours: after class or by appointment. Please use my email

Course Description & Aims:

In the nineteenth century a new and quintessentially modern figure emerged in the German social landscape: the intellectual. Straddling the roles of prophet, critic, political activist and scientist, intellectuals defied clear categorization; they portrayed themselves as “free-floating” and independent from universities, political parties and state power. Yet, in the course of the twentieth century, it became clear that Germany’s intellectuals could not live up to this autonomous self-image and faced a number of dilemmas. Could they fulfill their obligation to criticism if they served utopian political movements on the right or left? Could writers remain both politically committed and produce valuable literature? How should socialist artists and writers respond to the often dictatorial means used by the East German communist regime? Finally, have intellectuals become irrelevant after the end of the Cold War?

In this seminar students will read and discuss original sources in English from authors, such as Gerhart Hauptmann, Ernst Jünger, Walter Benjamin and Heiner Müller, to see how successive generations of German intellectuals framed and faced these dilemmas. Each week we will also read classic and contemporary investigations of the function of the intellectual from sociologists such as Karl Mannheim, Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu.

In addition to a basic knowledge of modern German intellectual and political history, the course will provide students with a basic training in text analysis, conceptual thinking and argumentative writing.

Course Requirements:

Student participation is essential to the success of this course. This means that you must do the readings and come to class prepared. Attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the start of each class. Please let the instructor know in advance by email if you cannot attend that day’s session.

Textbooks and Readings: Most course readings will be found in a reader that you are to purchase from Ave Copy on the Ave. In addition you are asked to purchase the following textbooks, which have been ordered by the University Bookstore:

Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crises: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis*
If you do not have a basic knowledge of events in 20th-century German history, I would recommend you purchase and read:


**Class Journals and Participation (Discussion)--30 %:** In order to help you prepare for the in-class discussions, you will be asked to type up your own critical response to the texts we will be discussing that week. Some weeks you will be given questions in advance to help guide your responses. In addition to answering these questions, you should also include notes on what puzzles, irritates or fascinates you. Try to ask questions and formulate tentative hypotheses. You should print out a copy (1-2 pages single spaced) and hand it to the instructor at the start of the class. The participation grade will be based on effort and quality of thought not on final polish. Consistent journal work will greatly improve your understanding of the readings, help alert the instructor to any difficulties you are having, and prepare you for the papers and exams.

**Essay writing:** You will be asked to write two short essays of 5-7 typed pages, which will be due at mid-term and at term end. The point of these essays is to help you synthesize your reading and your journal entries and to give you the opportunity to demonstrate that you can make a strong, logically sound argument for a historical interpretation. No outside reading will be required. A list of possible topics will be provided by the instructor.

**Midterm essay and short exam: 35% (25% essay, 10% exam).**

**Final essay and short exam: 35% (25% essay, 10% exam).** The final essay will be due in two parts. The first will be a thesis, outline and bibliography and the second the final paper. The final essay is due at the beginning of the short final exam.

**Late Penalties:** Please make every effort to submit your work on time. A late penalty of ca. 5% per day will be imposed unless you make arrangements with the instructor in advance.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Please familiarize yourself with the University’s policy on "Academic Honesty." For historians, plagiarism is the worst offense. If you take any information from a book or off the web you must put it in quotation marks and cite the source in a footnote. If you take ideas and reformulate them in your own words, you must still cite your source.
Weekly schedule

Week One: Introduction

Tues., March 28, Introduction

Sources: Goethe, “Prometheus,” Heiner Müller. “Prometheus” from Cement

Thur., March 30, Overview of the century of intellectuals 1889 to 1989

Theory: Edward Shils, “The Intellectuals and the Powers”

Week Two: Criticism and Crisis

Tues., April 4, The Critic and the Public Sphere

Sources: Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?”
Theory: Koselleck, Critique and Crisis. Introduction, Chapters 1, 3, 8.

Thur., April 6, The Critic and Crisis

Source: “Carl Schurz’s Recollections of 1848”
Theor: Koselleck, Critique and Crisis, Chapters 9 and 11.

Week Three: The Artistic Avantgarde

Tues., April 11, Naturalism

Sources: Gerhardt Hauptmann, Before Sunrise; John Mackay poem, “In der Gesellschaft”
History: Kevin Repp, Antipolitics, Chapter 1.

Thur., April 13, The Avantgarde Boheme of 1900

Sources: Schoenbener, Confessions of a European Intellectual, Chs. 1-6; Elsa Lasker-Schuler, poems Weltende, Weltflucht; Nietzsche, Selections from Zarathustra, and Ecce Homo: “Why I am a Destiny”; Vassily Kandinsky, selection from Concerning the Spiritual in Art.
History: Todd Weir, “The Freigeist as an Intellectual Type: A Group Biography” (optional)
Week Four: Modern Prophets: Toward a sociology of intellectuals

Tues., April 18, Max Weber’s Sociology of Intellectuals
Theory: Selections from Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building*

Thurs., April 20, Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology of Intellectuals

Week Five: Weimar Culture: New Post-War Intellectual Consciousness

Tues., April 25, New Post-War Intellectual Consciousness
Sources: Schoenberner, Confessions of a European Intellectual (chs. 9-10); All Selections in *Weimar Sourcebook* section “Redefining the Role of the Intellectuals” (pp. 285-308)
History: Peter Fritzsche, “Landscape of Danger, Landscape of Design: Crisis and Modernism in Weimar Germany.”

Thur., April 27, Dada and Surrealism
Theory: Benjamin, “Surrealism”
Renato Poggioli, *Theory of the Avantgarde*, Chapter One

Week Six: Intellectual Politics in the Weimar Republic I

Tues., May 2, Left-wing intellectuals and Communism
Sources: Brecht, “Intellectuals and Class Struggle” (1926); Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” (1934) and “Notes from Svendborg” (1934), Arthur Koestler, selection from *Darkness at Noon*.
History: Geoff Eley, “Intellectuals and the German Labor Movement”

Thur., May 4, Short Mid-term exam
Film clips from: *Metropolis* (1927)
Week Seven: Intellectual Politics in the Weimar Republic II

Tues., May 9, The embattled Middle,


Thur., May 11, Right-wing intellectuals and fascism

Theory: Herf, Reactionary Modernism, Chapters 1-4

Week Eight: Intellectual Responses to the Third Reich

Tues., May 16, Intellectuals in the Third Reich

History: Herf, Reactionary Modernism, Chapters 8 and 9; Claudia Koontz, “Allies in the Academy,” from: The Nazi Conscience.

Thur., May 18, Jewish Intellectuals respond to the Third Reich


Week Nine: Postwar intellectuals: The West

Tues., May 23, Jewish Intellectuals II
Theory/History: Read “Introduction” and “Swann’s Nose” from Yuri Slezkine, The Jewish Century.

Thur., May 25, “Grand Hotel Despair”? West German intellectuals after 1945
History: Jan-Werner Müller, “Nation, State and Intellectuals in West Germany since 1945,” in Another Country.
Week Ten: Postwar intellectuals: The East

Tues., May 30, Socialist Intellectuals and the East German State

  Sources: Brecht, Heiner Müller.

Thur., June 2, Final Discussion