

Elvira Basevich, Ph.D.
W.E.B. Du Bois and Late Modern German Philosophy:
Advanced Philosophy/ Africana Studies Course

PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

Du Bois scholars have marked the influence of German social philosophy on Du Bois's thought, but contest its scope and depth. Studying under Max Weber in Berlin in the 1890s, Du Bois drew on German social philosophy to advance freedom for African Americans in his homeland, the United States. Upon return to the U.S., Du Bois's scholarship reflects and engages Kant, Herder, Hegel, Marx, Weber, and Dilthey. In this course, we will survey some central concepts driving Du Bois's thought in relation to complementary German concepts. We will assess Du Bois's refashioning of the concept of 'the people' (*das Volk*) and of the modern state, conceived as an 'ethical' state embedded within a national civic community (*die Rechtsstadt*). We will also consider his philosophy of social science as it pertains to his founding of the discipline of modern American sociology, his critique of Marxian ethics, and his account of the imbrication of racial and civic in 19th and 20th c. American democracy.

SAMPLE READINGS

I. Du Bois in Berlin

Week 1:

- (1) Axel R. Schäfer, "W.E.B. Du Bois, German Social Thought, and the Racial Divide in American Progressivism, 1892-1909"; (2) Manning Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*, chps. 1 & 2; (3) Kenneth Barkin, "'Berlin Days,' 1892–1894: W.E.B. Du Bois and German Political Economy"; (4) W.E.B. Du Bois, "Bismark"; (5) Du Bois, "The Present Condition of German Politics, 1893"; (6) Du Bois, "Das Neue Vaterland"¹

Weeks 2-4:

I. Du Bois's Racialism and the *Volk*

Part I. The Concept in German Social Philosophy

- (1) Frederick C. Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (excerpt); (2) Herder: *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Desmond M. Clarke and Michael N. Forster; (3) Kant, "Review of Herder's

¹ No English translation exists of this early short essay penned by Du Bois during his student days. I will translate the essay for my students over the summer '17.

Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind,” (4) G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Philosophy of History*, Lectures 3 & 4; (5) Frank Kirkland, “Kant on ‘Race’ and ‘Transition’ (*Ubergang*) & Hegel on ‘Race’ and ‘Development’ (*Entwicklung*)”

Part II. Du Bois's Appropriation of the Concept

- (1) W.E.B. Du Bois, “On the Conservation of Races”; (2) Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chp. 1; (3) Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk”; (4) Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race” & “The Concept of the Negro”; (5) Paul C. Taylor, “Appiah’s Uncompleted Argument: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Reality of Race”; (6) Chike Jeffers, “The Cultural Theory of Race: Yet Another Look at Du Bois’s ‘The Conservation of Races’”

Weeks 5-6:

II. The Theoretical Roots of American Sociology

- (1) Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (excerpt); (2) Wilhem Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* (excerpt); (3) Robert Gooding Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, chp. 2; (4) Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, chps. 1, 4, 16-18; (5) Aldon D. Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (excerpt)

Week 6-7

III. Du Bois and Marxian Ethics

- (1) Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”; (2) Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*; (3) George C. Brenkert. *Marx's Ethics of Freedom*, chp. 4; (4) Rahel Jaeggi, “‘Like the Structure of Cotton Candy’: Being Oneself as Self-Appropriation” (chp. 9 from *Alienation*); (5) Adolph Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color*

Line, chp. 9; (6) Marable, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*, chp 5; (7) Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, chps. 1-4 (8) Du Bois, “The Socialism of German Socialists”; (9) Du Bois, “The Salvation of American Negroes Lies in Socialism”; (10) Du Bois, “Karl Marx and the Negro”

Weeks 8-10:

IV. Du Bois’s Political Critique: Endorsing Cosmopolitanism, Pan-Africanism, or American Civic Nationalism?

Part I. Cosmopolitanism

- (1) Immanuel Kant, “First Definitive Article” (from *Perpetual Peace*), (2) Kant, “Idea for Universal History as Having a Cosmopolitan Purpose”; (3) Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, chp. 2; (4) Chike Jeffers, “Appiah’s Cosmopolitanism” (5) Du Bois, “On the Conservation of Races,” cont’d

Part II. Pan-Africanism

- (1) Du Bois, “The Pan-African congresses: the story of a growing movement”; (2) Du Bois, “To the world: Manifesto of the Second Pan-African Congress (3) Adolph Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*, chp. 6

Part III. American Civic Nationalism

- (1) Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, “Sittlichkeit,” §§142-157, 182-208, 230-256, and §§257-271; (2) Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, chp. 2; (3) Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy’s Reconstruction: Thinking Politically with W.E.B. Du Bois*, chps. 1 & 6