

Wilhelm von Humboldt
(* 1767, Potsdam - †1835, Tegel)

With "The Limits of State Action" Humboldt set one of the first intellectual highlights of liberal thinking in Germany. His thinking about the self-development of man and the role of the state inspired many philosophers and politicians, among them John Stuart Mill. Humboldt argues in his famous essay that a state seeking to provide for more than the physical safety of the citizens will inevitably destroy the freedom and the creativity of the individuals. The only source of progress in a liberal society is the free interaction of free people. In Humboldt's thought human beings must strive for self-cultivation within society and require society for their full development.

Wilhelm v. Humboldt is best remembered in today's Germany for his contribution to the educational reforms of the 19th century. As a member of the Prussian reform government he created the humanistic Gymnasium and founded the Berlin University. The German education system is strongly influenced by his ideas.

Literature:

Wilhelm von Humboldt: Ideen zu einem Versuch die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staates zu bestimmen (verschiedene Ausgaben).

Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Limits of state Action (various editions).



J. S. Burrow (ed.): Introduction to The Limits of State Action by Wilhelm von Humboldt, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

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<http://www.libertyhaven.com/theoreticalorphilosophicalissues/philosophy/wilhelmvon.html>