Philosophy in Berlin II: Philosophy and the University

Semester: Winter semester 2019/20

Course instructor: Benjamin Wilck / benjamin.wilck3@gmail.com

Subject area: History and Literature

Credits: 5 ECTS

Time: Thursday, 12 – 14 c.t. (12.15-13.45)

Room: 0302-26 3rd floor, Hauvogteiplatz 5–7 (HVP)

Course description:

(Reading materials will be made available electronically in both the original German as well as in English translation. Seminar discussion will be in English, but German contributions are welcome.)

Learning objectives:

The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an overview of the philosophical activity in Berlin in the 19th century and, in particular, with an in-depth understanding of the philosophical circumstances which led to the establishment of Humboldt University. The course will enable its participants to read and understand central philosophical texts about the idea of the university, as well as to critically reflect on the question as to how philosophy can have an actual impact on institutions such as universities.
By the end of the course, students will be able to:

**Knowledge**

- Understand, describe and identify the core theories about the university by German philosophers (Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, but also Kant and Heidegger)
- Direct independent research on topics discussed in the course

**Academic/Transferable Skills**

- Analyze and critically reflect on philosophical texts in general
- Select relevant sources and methods for analyzing course-related questions
- Communicate and discuss key concepts in philosophy

**Competencies**

- Read primary philosophical texts
- Apply relevant theories and concepts in independent work in order to analyze new problems

**Assessment:**

- Regular attendance, active participation
- Presentation (about 10–15 minutes with questions for the audience + handout)
- Final research essay (Deadline: 8 February 2019; format: about 2000 words, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12)

Participants will receive their grades for this course on 15 February 2020 at 12 noon. The grade will be composed of the partial grade for the presentation (1/3 of the entire grade) and the partial grade for the research essay (2/3 of the entire grade).

**Language requirements:**

At least English B2 (and at least German B1) will be required to participate in this class. Since most (but not all) of the course readings are available in English translation, a rather high level of German is required for some of the readings in this course. Depending on the participants,
discussion will take place in German or English. Presentations and written essays may be in German or English.

**Timetable:**

**Session 1:** 17 October 2019  Opening session

In the first session, we will informally discuss the question as to what a university is, and get an overview of the topics to be covered in the course of this class.

**Session 2:** 24 October 2019  Kant’s idea of the university

In the second session, we will ascertain Kant’s view about the role of philosophy in a university, and thereby get an insight into the institutional status of academic philosophy in the 18th century. The philosopher Immanuel Kant was not based in Berlin, yet his little book *Der Streit der Fakultäten* from 1798 can be regarded as the origin of the calls for university reform by Berlin-based philosophers such as Fichte, von Humboldt, Hegel, and Schleiermacher.

**Readings:**

- I. Kant: *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798)

**Session 3:** 31 October 2019  First excursion

In our first excursion, we will visit the main building of Humboldt University (which accommodates the Philosophical Faculty, as well as Hegel’s original desk), the Law Faculty and the Theological Faculty.

**Session 4:** 7 November 2019  Von Humboldt’s idea of the university

The philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt was actively engaged in the institutional founding of Humboldt University Berlin. We will carry out a close reading of Humboldt’s two programmatic texts regarding the establishment of a new university in Berlin.

**Readings:**

- W.v. Humboldt: “Antrag auf Errichtung der Universität Berlin” (1809)
- W.v. Humboldt: “Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin” (1809/10)

**Session 5:** 14 November 2019  Fichte’s idea of the university
The philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte was the founder of German Idealism and the first rector of Humboldt University Berlin. We will read selected passages from Fichte’s programmatic treatise “Deduzierter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höhern Lehranstalt”.

Readings:
- J.G. Fichte: “Deduzierter Plan einer zu Berlin zu errichtenden höhern Lehranstalt” (1807)

Session 6: 21 November 2019  Schleiermacher’s idea of the university

The theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher also actively contributed to the establishment of Humboldt University Berlin. We will study his essay “Gelegentliche Gedanken über Universitäten in deutschem Sinn. Nebst einem Anhang über eine neu zu errichtende”, and compare it to von Humboldt’s and Fichte’s conceptions.

Readings:

Session 7: 28 November 2019  Hegel’s idea of the university

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is the most prominent philosopher involved in the establishing of Humboldt University Berlin, where he taught from 1816 until his death in 1831. We will read Hegel’s essay “Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten” on academic philosophy, as well as his inaugural lecture at Humboldt University.

Readings:
- G.W.F. Hegel: “Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten” (1810)
- G.W.F. Hegel: “Berliner Antrittsrede” (1818)

Session 8: 5 December 2019  Second excursion

In our second excursion, we will visit the Medical Faculty of Humboldt University, as well as the Dorotheenstädtischen Friedhof, where Hegel and Fichte are buried.

Zweite Exkursion: Besichtigung der Humboldt-Universität (Medizinische Fakultät) und des Dorotheenstädtischen Friedhofs (Hegels und Fichtes Grabstätten).
Session 9: 12 December 2019 Hegel’s view of philosophy

We will read Hegel’s preface to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, in which he determines the relationship between philosophy and reality.

Readings:

– G.W.F. Hegel: Preface (“Vorrede”) of *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1820)

Session 10: 19 December 2019 Marx’s criticism of Hegel

After our assessment of Hegel’s view of philosophy in his *Philosophy of Right*, we will read an essay by the young Karl Marx’s essay, which is supposed to be a criticism of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, and in which he expresses his own view of philosophy.

Readings:

– Karl Marx: "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie" (1843)

Session 11: 9 January 2020 Heinrich Heine on German philosophy

After our readings of programmatic philosophical writings by German philosophers of the 19th century, we will read passages from Heine’s amusing intellectual history of Prussian Germany *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* from 1834, in which the Berlin-based poet draws an amusing picture of Prussian philosophy from Luther to Hegel.

Readings:

– H. Heine: *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1834)

Session 12: 16 January 2020 Schopenhauer’s criticism of Hegel

We will read Schopenhauer’s late essay "On Philosophy at the Universities", which he wrote after he dropped out of his teaching position in Berlin, and in which he complains about academic philosophy.

Readings:

– Schopenhauer, Arthur: "On Philosophy at the Universities" (1851)
Session 13: 23 January 2020  Discussion of student essays
The participants will present their prospective research essays and give each other feedback.

Session 14: 30 January 2020  Heidegger’s idea of the university

In order to conclude our readings of programmatic writings on philosophy and the university we will gain a critical perspective on that philosophy’s subsequent history. In particular, we will discuss Martin Heidegger’s inaugural address as rector of Freiburg, the “Rektoratsrede”, which was entitled “The Self-Assertion of the German University”.

Readings:
– M. Heidegger: „Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität“ (1933)

Session 15: 6 February 2020  Reflexion

In this session, we will reflect on our previous readings and discussion results, as well as prepare the last session, in which we will interview a contemporary Berlin-based philosopher about her/his own views on philosophy and the university.

Session 16: 13 February 2020  Final session (with a guest from Humboldt University)
In our final session, we will have the opportunity to talk with a contemporary Berlin-based philosopher and interview her/him about her/his own views on philosophy and the university.
Preliminary bibliography:

Primary texts (in German):

Primary texts in English translation:

– Schleiermacher, Friedrich: Occasional thoughts on universities in the German sense with an appendix regarding a university soon to be established (1808); translated and annotated by Terrence N. Tice, with Edwina Lawler, San Francisco: EM TEXT, 1991.

Remarks:

• Attendance policy (Humboldt University rules: 80% attendance needed in order to pass; absences need to be excused and certified)