Philosophy in Berlin: *Programmatic Writings by Berlin-based Philosophers in the 19th and 20th Century*

*Berliner Philosophie: Programmatische Schriften von Berliner Philosophen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*

**Semester:** Winter semester 2018/19  
**Course instructor:** Benjamin Wilck, benjamin.wilck3@gmail.com  
**Subject area:** Philosophy / Cultural Studies / Literature and Language Studies  
**Credits:** 5 ECTS  
**Time:** Monday 10 – 12 c.t.  
**Room:** 0323-26

**Course description:**
What is a university, and what is the relation between philosophy and the university? This course explores the origins and objectives of philosophical theories of the university in 19th-century Prussian Berlin, while simultaneously providing a critical perspective on that philosophy’s history from the 20th century until today. The Humboldt University Berlin was founded in 1809/10 under the name ‘Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität’ as a result of calls for university reform by Berlin-based philosophers such as Fichte, Hegel, von Humboldt, and Schleiermacher. Of particular significance was Wilhelm von Humboldt’s plan to create a new kind of university, in which teaching and research would form a unity, in which science would be pursued independently of political and economic interests, and in which students would receive a universal education. Subsequently, Humboldt University Berlin became the paradigm of a new era of university and science. In reading texts written by philosophers before, during, and after the establishment of the Humboldt University, we will trace how ideas relating to the structure and purpose of the university and academic teaching and scientific research changed and were implemented in the course of the last two centuries.

**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 and 20th 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 different ways in which philosophers such as Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, von Humboldt, and Schleiermacher put forward their claims and arguments
- Provide an overview of programmatic writings by Berlin-based philosophers of the 19th and 20th century about their respective ideas of what a university is
- Direct independent research on topics discussed in the course

**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)
- 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 2019 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 German B2 and English B2 will be required to participate in this class. Since many but not all of the course readings are available in English translation, a high level of academic spoken and written 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: 22 October 2018  Introduction

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.

Recommended readings:

Session 2: 29 October 2018  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 polemic 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: 5 November 2018  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 4: 12 November 2018  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 5: 19 November 2018  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 6: 26 November 2018  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, his inaugural lecture, as well as related official documents by and about Hegel.

Readings:
- G.W.F. Hegel: “Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten” (1810)
- G.W.F. Hegel: “Schreiben an den Königlich Preußischen Regierungsrat und Professor Friedrich v. Raumer” (1816)
- G.W.F. Hegel: “Berliner Antrittsrede” (1818)

Session 7: 3 December 2018  Fichte on the vocation of the scholar

We will read selected passages from Fichte’s early *Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* (*Lectures on the Vocation of the Scholar*), in which he sets out a philosophical ideal of scholarly life.

Readings:

Session 8: 10 December 2018  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: *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (1820), preface (“Vorrede”)

**Session 9:** 17 December 2018    Schelling’s view of philosophy

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling was, alongside Fichte and Hegel, one of the leading figures of German Idealism. After Hegel’s death, Schelling took over the chair of philosophy in Berlin in order to teach his anti-Hegelian program of philosophy. We will read selected passages from Schelling’s late *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation) from 1841/42.

Readings:
- F.W.J. Schelling: *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung* (1841/42), lectures 1–6 of the first term

**Session 10:** 7 January 2019    Heinrich Heine on German philosophy

After our readings of programmatic philosophical writings surrounding the establishing of Humboldt University Berlin, 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.

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

**Session 11:** 14 January 2019    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 12:** 21 January 2019    Discussion of student essays I
The participants will present their prospective research essays and give each other feedback.

**Session 13:** 28 January 2019  
**Sightseeing**

We will visit the main building of Humboldt University Berlin and other of its various faculty buildings, as well as the Dorotheenstädtischer Friedhof where Fichte and Hegel were buried.

**Session 14:** 4 February 2019  
**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 15:** 11 February 2019  
**Philosophy in Berlin now**

In the final session, we will invite a contemporary Berlin-based philosopher and interview her/him about her/his own views on philosophy and the university.

**Literature:**

(The relevant literature will be made available via Moodle or Dropbox.)

**Introductory readings:**


**Primary texts:**


Primary texts in English translation:
(Note that many of the primary texts are also available via Wikisource.)