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Princeton-HU Strategic Partnership Grant Application

Normativity: its nature, history, and varieties

Overview

A number of cooperative links have developed between the philosophy departments at Princeton University and Humboldt-Universität over the last few years. The ground has thus been prepared for the establishment of focused graduate seminars and workshops that bring faculty and graduate students together to work on topics of common research interest. The overarching theme of these graduate seminars and workshops will be *Normativity: its nature, history, and varieties*, a theme that draws on the research expertise of a particularly strong group of faculty at both institutions. The first step in the establishment of these graduate seminars and workshops will be taken in 2016 when a graduate seminar for graduate students from both departments, *Ethical rationalism vs. sentimentalism*, will be co-taught by Smith (Princeton) and Schmidt (HU) partly at Humboldt and partly at Princeton. In addition to this graduate seminar there will be two Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshops in 2016. One will take place at Humboldt and the other at Princeton. At these workshops graduate students will present and discuss their current research with each other and with faculty from both departments.

Background

The Philosophy Department at Princeton University has long been ranked one of the top three or four philosophy departments worldwide (for the latest rankings see *Philosophical Gourmet Report 2014-15*: <http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/overall.asp>). At the same time, the Institut für Philosophie at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin has emerged as one of the leading analytic philosophy departments in Continental Europe, with graduate students from Humboldt enjoying notable success in having their PhD dissertations accepted for publication by major university presses.

It is therefore no accident that philosophers at Princeton and Humboldt have developed especially strong ties over the last few years. These ties include:

- the appointment of Professor Michael Smith (Princeton), sponsored by Professor Thomas Schmidt (Humboldt), at Humboldt on a *Forschungspreis* from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in AY 2010-2011;
- a colloquium for graduate students in philosophy at Humboldt on topics in ethics/practical philosophy convened, inter alia, by Smith in AY 2010-2011;
- a workshop on topics in ethics/practical philosophy in Summer 2011 featuring talks by junior faculty members throughout Germany, and with comments by senior faculty members, convened, inter alia, by Schmidt and Smith, and sponsored by the philosophy departments at Humboldt and Princeton;
- Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshop, with graduate students from each department presenting their research, which has been held annually in Berlin since Summer 2011;
- the appointment of Andreas Müller, when he was still a PhD student of Schmidt, as Visiting Student Research Collaborator at Princeton to work with Smith in Spring 2012;
- the appointment of Smith as external examiner of Müller's PhD dissertation in Spring 2014;
- the appointment of Professor Dominik Perler (Humboldt) as Global Scholar at Princeton for a three-year term teaching graduate seminars each Spring Semester;
- *Plato in Berlin*, an undergraduate course for Princeton students, taught by Professor Benjamin Morison (Princeton) at Humboldt in Summer 2014 with the participation of Professor Jonathan Beere (Humboldt) and Professor Stephen Menn (Humboldt).

A number of these initiatives are already scheduled to continue well in to the future. For example, another Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshop is already planned for 2015, and others for future years; a philosophy graduate student from Humboldt has already applied to be a VSRC at Princeton during AY2015-16; *Plato in Berlin* is scheduled to be taught again by Morison at Humboldt in Summer 2015, and other undergraduate philosophy courses for Princeton students taught at Humboldt over the summer by Princeton faculty members are in the planning stages; Smith will return to Humboldt for an extended period during Summer 2015 to give a talk at a conference and colloquium being run by Schmidt; and faculty in ancient philosophy at both Princeton and Humboldt are part of the Ancient Philosophy & Science Network (<https://ancient-philosophy.hu-berlin.de/en/ancient-philosophy/apsn>) which has plans to coordinate workshops, summer schools, and graduate conferences in ancient philosophy and science in the years to come.

Proposal

We propose a series of regular meetings between faculty and graduate students at Princeton and Humboldt to harness the momentum that already exists and catalyze future research collaborations. These meetings will address the overarching theme *Normativity: its nature, history, and varieties*, a theme that draws on the research expertise of a particularly strong group of faculty at both institutions. In the first instance, the proposal is to fund a one-off graduate seminar co-taught by Schmidt and Smith on a specific topic within the general area of normativity, *Ethical rationalism vs sentimentalism*, plus two graduate workshops that address a variety of related topics in the area of normativity.

In addition to taking up and structuring the momentum in research collaborations that has already developed, we note that this proposal fits in well with the recently signed agreement between the Excellence Cluster Topoi at Humboldt and the Philosophy Department at Princeton to facilitate teaching and research collaborations between the two institutions where appropriate. The proposal would also provide an institutional framework in which both new activities, as well

as those we are already committed to, are embedded in a common structure that gives both partners an equal role.

So far, because students at Princeton have had more access to funding for international travel over the summer, the traffic in graduate students has by and large been from Princeton to Humboldt, rather than from Humboldt to Princeton. The proposal would guarantee Humboldt graduate students the opportunity to spend time at Princeton working with Princeton faculty members, and Princeton graduate students the opportunity to spend time at Humboldt working with Humboldt faculty members.

Details of the initial proposal for 2016

Rationalism has been a major approach to ethics throughout the history of philosophy, with proponents including Plato, the British rationalists, and of course Kant. Rationalism is still a very popular model of ethics with contemporary proponents including Michael Smith (1994), Christine Korsgaard (1996), Thomas M. Scanlon (1998), and Derek Parfit (2013).

Ethical rationalists take reason and rationality to be the key elements in an explanation of the nature of ethics, ethical judgment and ethical knowledge. Their main tasks, as they see it, are thus to explain the relations between reason and rationality, and to show how an understanding of these provides us with a substantial account of ethical facts and knowledge. *Sentimentalists*, by contrast, emphasize the role that emotions and feelings play in an account of ethics, and of our cognitive access to ethical facts. The issue that divides ethical rationalists and sentimentalists is thus whether intellectual and reflective capacities of the mind, or emotions and feelings, hold the key to an understanding of ethical facts and ethical knowledge.

Despite its continued popularity, ethical rationalism faces serious challenges. Many philosophers endorse a broadly naturalistic approach to philosophy which seems to be in tension with the core assumptions of ethical rationalism, and more amenable to sentimentalism. Naturalists claim that we must be able to locate all human phenomena in the world investigated by natural sciences such as physics and biology. They also insist that a plausible account of human cognitive and motivational capacities must show how these capacities have emerged from the less sophisticated capacities of our animal ancestors. They therefore argue that there must be an important continuity between the proto-ethical patterns of behavior we witness in primates and even in lower mammals, on the one hand, and the ethical facts to which we take ourselves to respond and our own capacity to make judgments about such phenomena, on the other (Harman (1977), Gibbard (1990), Blackburn (1993), and Joyce (2006)).

The issue to be addressed in the initial graduate seminar, *Ethical rationalism vs sentimentalism*, co-taught by Schmidt and Smith, is the challenge sentimentalists provide to ethical rationalism. Do ethical rationalists have the resources to meet this challenge, and are they able to deliver the needed accounts of the nature of reasons and rationality from which they can derive a substantial account of ethical facts and knowledge? The syllabus for the graduate seminar will be worked out by Smith and Schmidt when Smith visits Humboldt in Summer 2015, however the current plan is to focus exclusively on contemporary literature.

As regards the format of the graduate seminar itself, the proposal is to teach the seminar in two parts. In view of the lead time required to arrange travel and accommodation, we have scheduled all events for Summer and Fall of 2016. The first part of the graduate seminar will be co-taught at Humboldt in six three-hour seminars held on six consecutive teaching days during June 2016, the last part of Humboldt's academic year. At the end of the graduate seminar, the annual Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshop will take place on the theme *Normativity: its nature, history, and varieties*. The idea is to make the workshop not just a place

where students who attended the graduate seminar can share their work on the topic of the seminar itself, but also a place where others who work on related themes can share their work as well.

The graduate seminar and workshop will take place over eleven days: there will be an initial arrival day, six days for the graduate seminar with a weekend in the middle, and two days for the graduate student workshop at the end. In addition to Smith, we are requesting funding for *six* Princeton graduate students to attend the graduate seminar at Humboldt. All philosophy graduate students at Princeton will be invited to submit written applications to be a part of the graduate seminar. The graduate seminar will also be open to as many graduate students from Humboldt as wish to attend. Faculty from Humboldt will also be invited to attend as their schedules permit, as will faculty from neighboring institutions.

The second part of the graduate seminar will be co-taught at Princeton in September 2016 in six three-hour seminars held on six consecutive teaching days prior to the beginning of Princeton's Fall Semester 2016. It will be followed by a second Humboldt-Princeton Graduate Student Workshop on the same theme. In addition to Schmidt, we are requesting sufficient funding for *six* Humboldt graduate students to attend the graduate seminar and workshop in Princeton. All philosophy graduate students at Humboldt will be invited to submit written applications to be a part of the graduate seminar. The graduate seminar will also be open to as many graduate students from Princeton as wish to attend. Faculty from Princeton will also be invited to attend as their schedules permit, as will faculty from neighboring institutions.

There will be a considerable interest in both the graduate seminar and the workshop at both institutions. Meta-ethical issues related to the discussion of rationalism and sentimentalism in ethics have occupied center stage in the research of members of both departments. Apart from Schmidt and Smith, Jan Gertken, Benjamin Kiesewetter (both at Humboldt) and Professors Gilbert Harman, Mark Johnston, Sarah McGrath, and Gideon Rosen (all at Princeton) have been, and still are, working on reasons and the relation of reasons to rationality. The proposed graduate seminar and workshops will have significant catalytic effects in getting Humboldt and Princeton people to work together on related topics.

If, as we expect, there is significant student demand for the graduate seminar, and if, as we expect, the seminar itself is an intellectual success, then we will apply for three years of funding for a series of graduate seminars on the more general topic *Normativity: its nature, history, and varieties*. This future application would be made in conjunction with colleagues who work on other aspects of the more general topic: Professors Johann Frick (Princeton) and Gabriel Wollner (Humboldt), who we expect would offer a graduate seminar on topics in applied normative ethics, and Professors Daniel Garber (Princeton), Des Hogan (Princeton), Dominik Perler (Humboldt), and Tobias Rosefeldt (Humboldt), who we expect would offer a graduate seminar on the history of normativity.

Facilities and administrative support in 2016

We do not anticipate that there will be costs associated with procuring the seminar rooms required for the graduate seminars and workshops. The departments will arrange for seminar rooms for the activities that take place in their department. The departments will also provide the administrative support required for the dispersion of funds to faculty and graduate students in each department.