

Call for papers: “Revisiting the Idea of the University”

Danish Yearbook of Philosophy

Guest Editors:

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Short call

The university is one of those few institutions that, allegedly, can be encountered all over the globe. Philosophical questions about the university have in particular been raised in times of change and crisis, be that in science and education or society at large. Contemporary social acceleration, however, has made acute and almost constant these transitory states, and today the classical university is in a precarious situation.

Hence, we see an increasing number of texts on these issues from emerging fields of studies, just as we see new scholarly disciplines with their own conferences, journals and celebrities. On the one hand, after centuries of existence, one may say that universities are finally on the way towards self-consciousness and self-reflexivity. On the other hand, one may fear that this only happens as they are on the verge of losing their traditional identity and *raison d'être* as the seats of science and education, hosting critique, truth and academic freedom.

The *Danish Yearbook of Philosophy* invites the global intellectual community to join hands with the participants of the Aarhus University conference “The Purpose of the Future University” and submit papers to be considered for review and publication. All philosophical disciplines, schools and traditions are welcome, as are systematic and historical studies.

The editors of the special issue are Søren S.E. Bengtsen and Asger Sørensen, both part of the Centre for Higher Education Futures, Aarhus University.

Deadline June 1st 2018.

Full call: <http://filosofiskselskab.dk/cms/index.php?page=2018-cfp-the-idea-of-the-university>

Guidelines for submissions at the journal's home page: www.brill.com/products/journal/danish-yearbook-philosophy

Extended call

Born in medieval Europe, i.e. in Bologna and Paris, as a place dedicated to the education of the future societal elites, the university has consistently been engaged in the refinement of thinking and learning, pursuing critically the truth of the matter: at first primarily in theology, law and medicine, and the liberal arts, but later on also in a wider range of scientific and scholarly disciplines.

The expansion of the universities, especially during the last century, and more increasingly in recent decades, provokes all kinds of questions about the meaning and purpose of the university, regarding both descriptive and normative perspectives, encompassing argumentative and conceptual as well as phenomenological approaches, and from ethical, political and historical viewpoints.

A key problem today for the classical university is the global tendency towards reduced government funding of universities, in particular with respect to basic research, which forces universities to rely on private funding. Such funding always comes with powerful strings attached, which endangers freedom of research and gradually creates a popular conception of university research as always tied to special interests: All research results are partisan, being essentially commissioned inputs to ongoing power struggles in the world of business or of politics. This conception of science is ever more widespread and has allowed politicians worldwide to dismiss scientific results that did not conform to their agenda. The most striking example is that of the Trump administration which roundly dismisses as “fake science” the near total consensus among climate scientists about the reality of global warming. The scientific stance on the issue is presented as mere ideology. The fact that this allegation is accepted, at least tacitly, by a large part of the US population, and similarly in other countries, is a clear warning signal that the perception of universities as sources of unbiased truth is threatened.

Hence, a classical discussion concerns the relation between science and the university. Debated is whether or not science and scholarship, or research more broadly, are constitutive of the idea of the university, or if the university can do without research and focus only on education. And what kind of education this would have to be? To be discussed is thus the relations between the disciplines and elements of the university, as well as the culture of the university, and if a certain moral or aesthetic dimension should be inherent in the pursuit of knowledge and the formation of scholars and students. Furthermore, an issue is how the university relates to wider public domains, to culture, civil society and the state. Indeed it includes the very question, if universities must be public institutions, or if they may be run as private businesses. What is the university’s allegiance to humanity and the state, and does this allegiance include a spiritual or religious dimension as well, or should the university exist only as a secular institution dedicated to knowledge, enlightening citizens and human beings?

Universities today demonstrate great differences in the ways they are managed and run, thus occasioning further discussions concerning the constitution of the university and academic authority. It may be discussed if universities, as a particular form of institution, should also have its own form of leadership, and whether such leadership should be democratic or republican. Furthermore, should an authoritative academic institution connect to the history and tradition of the university, or must the university constantly renew, reinvent and transcend itself – in other words, how deeply related should modern and historical versions of the university be? Not only history, but also class and culture, and in particular campus culture, play into the idea of the university. Hence, can the university persist as a universal idea at all, i.e. does the term ‘university’ mean the same across national, social and cultural contexts across the world?

Questions concerning the idea of the university, its ethos, mission, and nature, or concerning the ideology of the university, have primarily been discussed by philosophers on the occasion of institutional celebrations or similar special events, using such opportunities to look backwards or forwards, to be introspective or broadening out the view in relation to this very old institution. Among such occasions could be the anniversary of an old university (Ortega y Gasset, Habermas), the opening of a new university (Huxley) or the accession to some university office (Newman, Helmholtz, Heidegger). Other classical texts discuss the theme occasioned by prospects of reforms or changes, e.g. reorganizing the university (Condorcet, Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Durkheim) or adapting it to recent societal developments (Jaspers, Parsons, Lyotard, Derrida), or some university crisis (Kant, Nietzsche, Bloch, Aranguren, Minoque, Bourdieu). Thus, among the classical texts are a number of speeches, but some of the texts, especially the most recent ones, transcend the format of speeches and articles and become book length reports or monograph, thus expanding and elaborating the discussions, constituting the idea of the university as a subject for genuine philosophical investigation.

The call invites for reflections and discussions concerning the role and responsibility of the university today. Apart from aspects already mentioned, it can also consider questions regarding the university as an elitist or popular institution, as a traditional or experimental venture, with idealistic or pragmatic concerns. This even calls for a discussion of the university’s ontological underpinnings, the experiences it generates and the sense of belonging or alienation, as well as the activities that constitutes it, e.g. investigations, questioning, critique or love for wisdom.