Cultures of Economics
A series of events coordinated by the Federal Cultural Foundation in cooperation with the University of Munich

June 25th 2010, 10 am - 8 pm
New Vistas: Desire to win!
Location: Radialsystem V, Holzmarktstr. 33, Berlin

Chair: Prof. Dr. Armin Nassehi

Abstracts of the presentations

Prof. Dr. Elena Esposito

*Expectation of surprise in risk markets*

Modern financial markets are more and more turning into markets of risk and uncertainty: what is being bought and sold are primarily risks and projections of the future, due to ever more refined techniques of risk calculation and protection. The crisis has shown, however, that the attempt to protect oneself from risk in itself produces further, uncontrolled risk. Could it be, that the fundamental error lies precisely in the effort to prepare and control the future (or its various possible trends)? One might think of another position, which holds that the future is continously being produced by our current actions and decisions (including attempts of control), which is precisely what makes it completely uncontrollable. The future is open, because it reacts to the ties the present tries to implement. What we would need, then, are techniques which structure the future, not to control or anticipate it, but to learn from what is happening; structures, therefore, that prepare us to expect surprises.

Prof. Dr. Julian Nida-Rümelin

*Economic rationality and practical reason*

Is the economy a closed system with its own rationality? One could easily get this impression. The global financial market seems to be a striking example of just that. This paper, however, claims the opposite: economical rationality is a part of human *praxis*, guided by reasons and rules, values and norms. The particular effectiveness of economical optimization can only unfold if it leaves the cultural and ethical context intact. The goal of this paper is to clarify, with the means of game theory, the resulting complex relation between economical rationality and practical reason.
Prof. Stephan Klasen PhD

The new utopias of economic sciences?
Fairness, sustainability, gender equality and happiness

While, in the eyes of the public and in the political sphere, economics is mostly (and, to some degree, by their own fault) seen as an advocate of free market, liberalization and deregulation, a whole new discussion is now being held within the economic sciences and is beginning to reach the public to an ever greater extent. Experimental economics demonstrate the importance of fairness for successful economic action, developmental economics show the negative effect inequality and discrimination of women have on growth and development. The study of happiness has become its own discipline within economic science, and more and more economists turn to questions of justice, how it can be measured and what it implies. These debates are increasingly being taken outside of the universities, as otherwise rather conservative institutions such as World Bank, IMF and OECD further refine them and then translate them into political measures. The OECD now uses the slogan: For a stronger, fairer, cleaner world economy. The World Bank dreams of a world free of poverty, and the Stiglitz-Sen Commission recently demanded that whole new criteria for the measurement of wealth be applied. The paper retraces these more recent trends and tries to make the connection to current discussions on ways out of the crisis.

Prof. Dr. Rahel Jaeggi

Capitalism as form of life – Three ways of criticizing capitalism

Critique of capitalism is booming. But what exactly is the problem with capitalism? Is it wrong, unjust, irrational or bad? Is it evil or stupid? Or does it just not work the way it is supposed to? To put it another way: on what grounds can capitalism be criticized? Leaving aside trivial reproaches to the greed of individuals, one can distinguish three strategies of critique. First, there is a functional argument: capitalism cannot work as a social and economic system; it is intrinsically dysfunctional and necessarily crisis-prone. Second, a moral or justice-oriented argument: capitalism is based on exploitation and therefore based on or producing an unjust social structure. Third, the ethical critique: Life shaped by capitalism is a bad (e.g. destitute, alienated) life. Each of those strategies of critique has its problems as well as its potentials. I will argue that only a critique of capitalism as form of life capable of uniting all three kinds of critique will be able to critically scrutinize capitalism as a social and economic system, including its economic, social and cultural dimensions.