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Jeremy Bentham: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*

Proseminar (undergraduate seminar), Konstanz, Summer semester 2011/12

Monday, 13.30-15.00, Room G305

FÜR BACHELOR-STUDIARENDE (For BA students)

FÜR LEHRAMTS-STUDIARENDE BIS ZUR ZWISCHENPRÜFUNG (For Teacher Training students)

FÜR EPG1-STUDIARENDE (For EPG1 students)

4 ECTS-Credits

Introduction. Jeremy Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* is probably the founding work of the moral theory known as utilitarianism today. It is certainly the first systematic treatment of the theory and already as such it deserves special attention. But Bentham's work has more than historical relevance; its substantial statements and arguments are also relevant and interesting today. In the book Bentham famously puts forward the principle of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" and makes important contributions to the theory of crime and punishment. In the course we will read Bentham's work and discuss its content.

Course material. Since we will read one book, it is important that we have the same edition. The one we will use - this is one of the standard ones, available in bookshops and on the internet - is Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Dover, 2007. It is strongly recommended to purchase the book; there is nevertheless a copy in the so-called semester apparat (books on reserve for running university courses) of the course in the Library. The book costs ca. 10 EUR online (Amazon and AbeBooks). Further secondary material is also available in the same semester apparat.

Background and overview reading. I am not aware of the existence of any lengthier encyclopedia entry on Bentham's philosophy that would be freely available online. If anyone knows or finds such an entry, please let me know. A decently written and informative enough entry can, however, be found in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The semester apparat of the course contains several volumes on Bentham's philosophy, these can also be consulted as background.

Course requirements. As a rule, the course will be completed by a 10-20 page long paper (Times New Roman, 12, 1.5) written by the student on topics that are related to the course (length depending on whether the student completes a 'Hausarbeit' or an 'Essay'). Topics must be discussed with the course instructor and must have his permission. However, it is also possible, with the course leader's permission, to take the course only for a 'pass' without a grade, or to only audit the course.

During the course, student presentations will also be possible (they will be compulsory if the number of students will not be higher than the number of occasions). The idea for these presentations, however, is not that the student gives a lecture to the other participants of the course, but that he/she guides us through the text, by summarizing the author's position and making critical remarks and commentaries (the latter are particularly welcome!).

Grading. The final grade will be composed of three parts: seminar participation and attendance (15%), seminar presentation (15%), final paper (70%). My grading policy for student papers is the following: for a grade between 1 and 2, the student must present an original idea in some (convincing) detail, in addition to giving a good and correct summary of Bentham's relevant discussion; for a grade between 2 and 3, the student must prove to have a competent grasp of Bentham's relevant arguments by giving a good summary, pointing out the weak points, perhaps making suggestions how to overcome such weaknesses; for a grade between 3 and 4, the student must show that he/she understands Bentham's text. Use of secondary material is permitted, but not required (this means: just because a paper shows that the student read a lot, will not guarantee a better grade...)

Course schedule. We will read only the book, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*; no secondary material, or other work by Bentham, is included as a mandatory reading. This does not mean, however, that such material cannot be consulted for discussion in the seminars or for the papers written at the end of the course. As for the organization of the seminar, each session will begin with a student presentation (unless there are outstanding problems left over from the previous session), which will be followed by open discussion.

Below follows a schedule of the seminars. (*Note:* Chapter numbers come first, then are page numbers listed, in brackets.)

All references are to the following edition of Bentham's work: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Dover Philosophical Classics, London: Dover Publishers, 2007.

Seminar 2. Chapters I and II (1-23)

Seminar 3. Chapters III, IV, and V (24-42)

Seminar 4. Chapter VI (43-69)

Seminar 5. Chapter VII, VIII, IX (70-96)

Seminar 7. Chapter X (97-130)

Seminar 8. Chapter XI (131-152)

Seminar 9. Chapter XII and XIII (153-177)

Seminar 10. Chapter XIV (178-188)

Seminar 11. Chapters XV (189-204)

Seminar 12. Chapter XVII (309-329)

(*Note.* There are altogether 14 occasions to meet in the semester (by my counting, correct me if I am wrong). However, one falls out due to national holiday (05.28), and another because it was this week's introductory seminar (04.16). This leaves us with 12 occasions to meet. The course schedule above is designed accordingly. I have left out Chapter XVI, which is a very long and technical chapter, interesting not so much for philosophers but for legal scholars (in my view). By popular demand, we can of course include (parts of) the chapter in the discussion. The rest of the schedule is also flexible: depending how discussion in the given seminar shapes up, we can discuss certain chapters more, and other chapters less, than as they appear in the schedule above.)