

Content:

In this interdisciplinary seminar, the following fundamental questions will guide our discussions: What is utility? What is the common good? When do we talk about a tension between individual utility and the common good?

We will also address the following related questions: What contributes to utility? Can we observe or even measure utility? Do individuals succeed to maximize utility? What contributes to the common good? Can we measure the common good? How to maximize the common good?

Texts in different formats (ranging from tragedies to scientific articles) and from different epochs (ranging from the 7th century BCE to 2017) will guide us in approaching the questions.

'Utility' has played an important role in ideas and concepts since the earliest texts of Western Culture, long before modern economists reflected on this topic. We can find concepts of utility not only in economic and philosophical texts, but also in poetic and fictional texts, which explicitly or implicitly use them. So the early poetic text of the Greek author Hesiod (7th century BCE), which treats rules of behavior in an agricultural world, uses 'utility' as a category and reflects on the relation between individual utility and common good. But also the thoughts and argumentation of figures in Greek tragedies like Antigone (5th century BCE) reveal ideas of utility. The Greek philosopher Plato (4th century BCE) thinks more explicitly about utility as an incentive of human behavior and about the relation of the categories 'useful' and 'good'. In modern times, the scholars Adam Smith (18th century CE) and Jeremy Bentham (18th to 19th century CE), who themselves had an education in the Classics, developed the theory that human beings in general pursue their own benefit. They also asked what the relation of individual good and common good is. Starting from their ideas, 'utility' has become the central concept of economics and now plays an important role in the mathematical models of economics which measure 'utility.' Therefore, it is a central topic in economic studies. At the same time, we can find that modern political, but also fictional texts like novels and short stories integrate 'utility' as an important motivation of people. We discover this by carefully reading the texts. We will see how important it is to be able to analyze texts by approaching them in a methodical way.

By reading the texts we will learn about the different ways 'utility' has been and still is understood and which concepts of the relation between individual good and common good exist. This leads us to a deeper understanding of these concepts and of their importance for economics.

Participants' responsibilities:

The seminar participants are expected to read all the required texts (see bibliography) and to actively participate in the discussions. Each student is supposed to address the questions above in a presentation, based on the text assigned for the particular session and complemented with his or her own literature research. Presentations can be prepared in interdisciplinary teams of students. Based on their presentation, on the discussions during the seminar, and on their own research, students write a seminar paper (10-12 pages) in which they address the questions posed above.

Seminar plan:

16.04.2019 Introduction and organization of the seminar

23.04.2019 Texts: Tirole, Föllinger, Zeh; Birkle, Norris

Presenters: Prof. Dr. Carmen Birkle, Prof. Dr. Sabine Föllinger & Prof. Dr. Elisabeth Schulte

30.04.2019 Text: Hesiod, "Works and Days", especially V. 212-357

Presenters: Students (TBA)

07.05.2019 Text: Smith

Presenters: Students (TBA)

14.05.2019 Text: Jefferson

Presenters: Students (TBA)

21.05.2019 Text: Sophocles, "Antigone", especially, V. 280-331, V. 441-525, V. 1155- 1180.

Presenters: Students (TBA)

28.05.2019 Text: Leshem
Presenters: Students (TBA)
04.06.2019 Text: Carnegie
Presenters: Students (TBA)
11.06.2019 Texts: Plato, "Republic", Book I, especially 340E-350B
Plato, "Laws", Book 11, 913A-E
Presenters
18.06.2019 Text: Bentham
Presenters: Students (TBA)
25.06.2019 Text: Loewenstein
Presenters: Students (TBA)
02.07.2019 Text: Jewett, "The Foreigner"
Presenters: Students (TBA)
09.07.2019 Text: Walker, "Everyday Use"
Presenters: Students (TBA)
16.07.2019 Lessons Learnt

Learning goals:

The seminar participants deepen the knowledge received from their own discipline and become familiar with perspectives from the other disciplines. The unique composition of expertise in the seminar will enable all participants to see the common ground and to identify discipline-specific points of view. These insights will sharpen the reflection of the respective disciplines and enhance the appreciation of a multitude of perspectives. Students will learn to present the results of their analysis in front of a group consisting of experts from different fields. This experience will increase their ability to argue convincingly in a heterogeneously composed group.

Bibliography

Required reading (accessible via ILIAS):

Economics

Bentham, Jeremy (1823/1780): An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Oxford Clarendon Press, Chapter 1.

Leshem, Dotan (2016): Retrospectives: What Did the Ancient Greeks Mean by "Oikonomia?", in: The Journal of Economic Perspectives 30(1): 225-238.

Loewenstein, George (1999): Because It Is There: The Challenges of Mountaineering... For Utility Theory, in: Kyklos 52(3):315-344.

Smith, Adam (1776): The Wealth of Nations. W. Strahan and T. Cadell, London. Book I, Chapter 2.

Tirole, Jean (2017): Economics of the Common Good. Princeton University Press, Introduction.

American Studies

Carnegie, Andrew. Wealth. 1889. An American Primer. Ed. Daniel J. Boorstin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966. 499-510. Print.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Query XIX: Manufactures." Notes on the State of Virginia. Ed. William Peden. 1788. New York: Norton, 1954. 164-65. Print.

Jewett, Sarah Orne. "The Foreigner." 1900. The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Fiction. By Sarah Orne Jewett. Oxford: OUP, 1996. 159-84. Print.

Walker, Alice. "Everyday Use." 1973. *Revolutionary Tales: African American Women's Short Stories, from the First Story to the Present*. Ed. Bill Mullen. New York: Laurel, 1995. 34656. Print.

Greek Studies

Hesiod: "Hesiod: Works and Days", in: Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*. Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most (Loeb Classical Library), Cambridge/ Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2006 (online).

Sophocles: Sophocles, "Antigone", in: Sophocles: *Antigone, The Women of Trachis, Philoctetes, Oedipus at Colonus* edited and translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones (The Loeb Classical Library), Cambridge/Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press 1994, 1127 (online)

Plato: "Plato, The Laws" edited by Malcolm Schofield, translated by Tom Griffith (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016 (online)

"Plato, Republic" edited and translated by Chris Emlyn Jones and William Preddy (The Loeb Classical Library), Cambridge/Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press 2013 (two volumes). Print and Digital, volume 1 (online)

Sabine Föllinger, *Ökonomie bei Platon*, Berlin; Boston De Gruyter 2016, 4954 (here you can find information about the concept of utility in Plato's Laws; it will be available in an English translation by April).

Please prepare these texts prior to the sessions to which they are assigned (see seminar plan). You find the texts on ILIAS.

Further reading:

Economics—introductory material

Tirole, Jean (2017): *Economics of the Common Good*. Princeton University Press.

In Chapter 2, Nobel laureate Jean Tirole offers his perspective on "the moral limits of the market", pointing at tensions between individual utility and the common good. Chapter 5 offers insights into non-materialistic motivations and how they are incorporated into Economic analysis.

Dasguta, Partha (2007): *Economics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

In his very short introduction, Partha Dasgupta illustrates the key concepts in Economics. In Chapter 8, he reflects on "social well-being and democratic government".

The CORE Team: *The Economy*, available at www.coreecon.org. This is a text book that has been collaboratively developed by a group of Economists. It is founded on concepts from information economics and strategic social interaction. Chapter 4 offers insights into fairness concepts.

Economics—advanced material

Falk, Armin et al. (2018): Global evidence on economic preferences, in: *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133(4):1645-1692.

The authors study the global variation in economic preferences, and correlations with demographic and cultural variables.

Kahneman, Daniel (2011): *Thinking, fast and slow*, Penguin Books.

Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman elaborates (among many other things) on reference-dependent preferences, time-inconsistent preferences and experienced utility

American Studies—introductory material

Abbott, H. Porter. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 4th ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2017. Print.

Campbell, Neil, and Alasdair Kean. *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. 4th ed. New York: Routledge, 2016. Print.

Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. Print.

Deloria, Philip J., and Alexander I. Olson. *American Studies: A User's Guide*. Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2017. Print.

Holland, Owen, and Piero. *Introducing Literary Criticism: A Graphic Guide*. London: Icon, 2016. Print.

Klarer, Mario. *An Introduction to Literary Studies*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2013. Print.

Kusch, Celena. *Literary Analysis: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2016. Print.

Paul, Heike. *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*. Bielefeld: transcript, 2014. Full text open access at <https://www.transcriptverlag.de/978-3-8376-1485-5/the-myths-that-made-america/>

American Studies—advanced material

Tyson, Lois. *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2014. Print.

Watts, Michael, and Robert F. Smith. "Economics in Literature and Drama." *The Journal of Economic Education* 20.3 (Summer 1989): 291-307. Taylor & Francis <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1182306>. 4 Dec. 2018.

Greek Studies—introductory material

- West, Martin L.: *Prolegomena*, in: *Hesiod, Works and Days*. Edited with *Prolegomena and Commentary* by M.L. West, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978, p. 1-3, 30-50 (introduction to the poem with summary of the poem).

- Cairns, Douglas: *From Mythos to Plot*, in: *Cairns, D.: Sophocles, Antigone*, London; Oxford: Bloomsbury 2016, 1-28 (short introduction to the context of "Antigone" and summary of the plot).

Nails, Debra: *The Life of Plato of Athens*, in: *Benson, Hugh H. (ed.): A Companion to Plato*, Malden/ MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2009, 112.

Schofield, Malcolm: *Plato in his time and place*, in: *Fine, Gail: The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, Oxford: University Press 2008, 366-2 (very short introduction, helpful for the first approach)

Annas, Julia: *Plato. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2003 (this small book gives a short introduction to Plato's works and ideas which is easy to understand).

Sauvé Meyer, Susan: *Plato on the law*, in: *Benson, Hugh H. (ed.): A Companion to Plato*, Malden/ MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2009, 373-387 (this article presents a helpful summary of the importance of laws from Plato's point of view)

Greek Studies—advanced material

- Strauss Clay, Jenny: *Works and Days: Tracing the Path to Arete*, in: Montanari, Franco; Rengakos, Antonios; Tsagalis, Christos (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Hesiod*, Leiden; Boston: Brill 2009, 71-90 (this contribution presents the context of Hesiod's idea of 'utility')

- Cairns, D.: *Sophocles, Antigone*, London; Oxford: Bloomsbury 2016 (this book offers a modern approach which also focuses on the political dimension and on the reception of this famous tragedy)

Pradeau, J.F.: *Plato and the City. A New Introduction to Plato's Political Thought*, transl. by J. Lloyd, with a Foreword by Ch. Gill, Exeter 2002 (this book presents an instructive and clear idea of Plato as a political thinker who underlines the importance of education of citizens and human beings in general)

Santas, Gerasimos: *Plato on Pleasure as the Human Good*, in: Benson, Hugh H. (ed.): *A Companion to Plato*, Malden/ MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2009, 308-322 (the role pleasure plays in the Platonic philosophy is important when we study the importance of utility)

Schrieffl, A.: *Plato on the Incompatibility of Wealth and Justice: the Property Arrangements in the Republic*, in: *History of Political Thought*, XXXIX, No. 2, 2018, 193-215 (this contribution helps in understanding why the Platonic dialogues "Republic" and "Laws" recommend more or less radical statal measures in order to restrain the insatiable desire of humans)

Föllinger, S.: *Ökonomie bei Platon*, Berlin 2016 (for students who are able to read German) (by presenting a general introduction in Plato's ideas of economics and of their position in his philosophy this books gives the context of Plato's concept of utility)