



Press Release

2012 Dr. Leopold Lucas Prize to go to US Political Philosopher Seyla Benhabib

The University of Tübingen honors the work of a lobbyist for universal hospitality in the age of globalization

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This year's Dr. Leopold Lucas Prize will be awarded May 8 to the U.S. Professor of Political Theory, Seyla Benhabib, of Yale University. The Prize of €50,000 is awarded annually in recognition of outstanding achievement in the fields of Theology, History or Philosophy, focusing on individuals whose work promotes tolerance among nations and religions. Seyla Benhabib's work on the coherence of civil societies under strain from the pressures of globalization, migration and conflict over the differing values of groups and individuals is respected around the world. It focuses on the ethical foundation and implementation of a basic duty of hospitality, a universal duty to set moral and civil concerns above the often biased interests of sovereign democracies when it comes to the rules of citizenship.

Above all, Seyla Benhabib's political philosophy addresses the contradictions and conflicts arising from globalization and having an effect on the political culture of liberal democracies. How do democracies deal with minorities and with those in danger of losing their human rights? How is coexistence possible within civil society in the light of increasing confrontation with the different lifestyles and values of migrants, refugees, exiles and asylum-seekers? What rights should they have? What is the relationship between democratic citizenship laws and universal human rights? Can even the most liberal political system retain its identity and sovereignty if it throws open its borders and recognizes the claims to identity without any restrictions?

Seyla Benhabib examines these and other questions, which are particularly relevant given the current confrontation between European and Islamic cultures. She discusses political principles and criteria with lucid analyses of current, controversial examples. Her work underlines her philosophical activism for universal human rights which are not to be forgotten in individual cases.

Benhabib takes up the arguments made in 1795 by the philosopher Immanuel Kant in his essay "Perpetual Peace," in which he makes the case for universal hospitality. She sees in this the basis of international human rights – a necessary condition in a globalized world, and not simply a social virtue.

Seyla Benhabib was born in 1950 to a Sephardic Jewish family in Istanbul. Benhabib was educated at English language schools in Istanbul. She received a B.A. from the American College for Girls in Istanbul in 1970.

She left for the United States in 1970. She received a B.A. from Brandeis University in 1972 and a Ph.D. for her thesis on Hegel's theory of law from Yale in 1977, following a two-year stint as an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the Max Planck Institute for research into life in the scientific and technical world under the philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker.

Prior to her appointment at Yale in 2001, Benhabib taught in the departments of philosophy at Boston University, State University of New York at Stony Brook, the New School for Social Research, and the Department of Government at Harvard University.

The Leopold Lucas Prize honors the memory of the Jewish rabbi and scholar Dr. Leopold Lucas, murdered at Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1943. The Prize was endowed by his son, Franz D. Lucas, in 1972.