Foundations of Human Rights
HMRT 30600

Autumn Quarter 2014
Tuesdays / Thursdays, 1:30 – 2:50
Location: Cobb 119

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Adam Etinson
Lecturer in Human Rights
Pozen Family Center for Human Rights, University of Chicago

Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago

Email: aetinson@uchicago.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:00-12:00, or by appointment.
Office Location: Room 206, Pozen Family Center for Human Rights, 5720 S Woodlawn Ave.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar will provide graduate students with an advanced introduction to the study of human rights, covering key debates in history, law, philosophy, political science, international relations, social science, and critical theory. As a graduate seminar, this will be a small class (capped at 20 students), and a strong emphasis will be placed on in-class discussion and debate. The course will examine cutting-edge research on topics including: the origins of human rights (Section I); the concept of human dignity (Section II); the nature and grounds of human rights (Section III); the relationship between human rights morality and law (Section IV); the legality and morality of humanitarian intervention (Section V); the feasibility and claimability of human rights (Section VI); contemporary criticisms of human rights (Section VII); human rights and the accommodation of diversity (Section VIII); and the future of human rights (Section IX).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(20%) Class Participation: All students will be expected to ask questions and respond to questions posed by the instructor. The hope is that this will facilitate active and engaged class discussions of the course material. Students will be evaluated in accordance with their effort and engagement in class discussions. Basically: don’t be shy. If you have something on your mind, we are all interested in hearing it.

(30%) In-Class Presentation: Each student is expected to deliver a 10-15 minute critical commentary on a scheduled class topic. Students are asked to present on an argument or
critical exchange, drawn from the assigned texts, that they find interesting and compelling, and essentially offer their thoughts. In particular, the idea is for them to critically react to the material they have chosen to discuss, and to raise one or two questions that will spur class discussion on the topic. The student must email the instructor a brief synopsis of their presentation (including discussion questions) the night before their presentation at the very latest.

Note: Students are urged to pick a date for presentation as early as possible, i.e., ideally during the introductory class session on September 30th. The chosen topic cannot be the same as the topic of the final research paper.

(50%) Final Writing Assignment (Due in class on December 11th): As a final written assignment, students have the option of (a) writing a final paper that puts any two sections of the course into dialogue with one another, or (b) writing a mock thesis prospectus that draws on some set of readings from the course. Students must convey their choice to the instructor by midterm, i.e., November 6th.

(a) For those students who choose to write a final paper (13-18 pages or 3250-4500 words), the instructor will offer some suggestions of particular essay questions that might be fruitfully pursued, although if a student would like to propose an original topic that will be absolutely fine as well, so long as the instructor is consulted beforehand. The list of questions will be given out by midterm (November 6th). The general idea is for students to think about how research on different topics (and in different fields) in human rights might interrelate. For instance, we might wonder how, if at all, new research on the history of human rights should affect our theoretical understanding of, say, the nature and grounds of human rights. In general, research papers will be assessed on the basis of (i) lucidity, (ii) effort, (iii) relevance to the chosen question, (iv) independence of thought, and (v) comprehension of the relevant readings.

(b) The mock thesis prospectus (13-18 pages or 3250-4500 words) is primarily designed to give graduate students who are already working on a human rights related topic the chance to think about how to integrate some of the material from this course into their own work. It also has the benefit of giving MA and PhD students who will have to develop an MA or PhD thesis prospectus anyways a trial run. The prospectus should give the instructor (a) a clear sense of the question the thesis will address, (b) a statement of the proposed thesis, (c) an explanation of how it will be argued, ideally including the use of an example or an argument, and (d) a preliminary bibliography that will be used for reference, including a concise overview of that literature and explanation of how your research will add to it. If requested, the instructor will give students guidelines both for writing papers and prospectuses sometime during term.

Note: Papers and prospectuses submitted late will be penalized by 1/3 grade per day (e.g. A- instead of A if the paper is one day late).

COURSE MATERIALS
There is only one book required for purchase in association with this course. Two other books appear frequently in the syllabus, and would be required purchases under normal circumstances, but are not yet released for publication. As such, the instructor will make them, along with all other assigned readings, available on Chalk, electronically. There are also a few supplementary readings placed on library reserve.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**


There are a few books that appear infrequently in the syllabus but that would nevertheless be a useful purchase for any student intent on continuing to study human rights at the graduate level. These include the following:

**NON-REQUIRED TEXTS:**


**SYLLABUS**

**I. ORIGINS**

**SEPTEMBER**

30 **INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND BIRTH**

Supplementary Readings


OCTOBER

2 ABOLITIONISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS


Supplementary Readings


7 THE HOLOCAUST AND THE 1970s


Supplementary Readings


II. DIGNITY

9 DIGNITY IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

(1) Preambles to UDHR and ICCPR


**Supplementary Readings**


14 **PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIGNITY**


**Supplementary Readings**


16 **DEBATING THE POLITICAL APPROACH**

III. THE MORAL-POLITICAL DEBATE

**Supplementary Readings**


21 **METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS**


**Supplementary Readings**


IV. MORALITY AND LAW

23 **HUMAN RIGHTS LAW: INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL, DOMESTIC**

Supplementary Readings


28 Morality and Law


Supplementary Readings


V. HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

30 Humanitarianism as a Pretext for War


Supplementary Readings


November
HUMAN RIGHTS AND POWER


Supplementary Readings


VI. FEASIBILITY AND CLAIMABILITY

FEASIBILITY


Supplementary Readings


CLAIMABILITY


Supplementary Readings

VII. CRITICS

13 FROM THE “LEFT”


Supplementary Readings


18 CARE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

(3) Virginia Held, The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Ch. 10.

Supplementary Readings


VIII. HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIVERSITY
20 **ETHNOCENTRISM**


**Supplementary Readings**


(e) Adam Etinson, “Some Myths About Ethnocentrism” (DRAFT)

25 **IMAGINATION**


**Supplementary Readings**


IX. THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

DECEMBER

2 THINKING AHEAD


Supplementary Readings


4 CONCLUSION: AN EVOLVING PRACTICE


Supplementary Readings