

Politics 9503A: Foundations of Human Rights

September-December 2016

Monday 10:30-12:30, SSC 4112

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Office Hours: Tues 3:00-4:00, Thursday 3:00-4:00 & by appointment

This course examines recent debates surrounding the philosophical foundations of human rights, the dominant legal, moral, and political concept of recent times. We examine four main questions: first, what are human rights?; second, what might justify them?; third, what do human beings have rights to?; and fourth, are there any human rights at all?. We survey the arguments of some of the foremost political philosophers from Rawls, Nickel, and Waldron, to O'Neill, Beitz, and Griffin.

During the term I will provide sets of questions on each week's readings and specific advice for the two *Essays*.

Text

Rowan Cruft, S. Matthew Liao, and Massimo Renzo (eds.), *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

How Your Final Mark is Determined

30%: Participation

20%: 2,000 word (5-6 page) *Short Essay* (Due Monday October 17th at start of class)

50%: 4,000-4,500 word (12-15 page) *Long Essay* (Due Friday December 9, to be handed in to me in my office, SSC 4129, between 10 am and noon)

Participation: 30%

To be eligible for this portion of the final grade, students must attend all classes except when there are medical or compassionate reasons, and **hand in at each class a weekly response to the readings (one page, single spaced)**. [*Note: you may miss two weeks' written responses without penalty; each further missed response will result in a two-mark

deduction from the participation grade.] This is to be one page, single-spaced, and should succinctly state what you take to be the main point and argument of each reading, and then state what issue or issues the readings pose for discussion. It will be assessed on a pass/fail basis.

Students who meet this requirement will receive a mark that reflects their contributions to seminar discussion – average contributions will receive marks that translate into the B range, excellent contributions will receive marks that translate into the A or A+ range. I expect that all students will contribute to every class, or at least will not fail to contribute to two classes in a row.

Short Essay: 20%

Answer this question: ‘What are the foundations of human rights?’

The *Short Essay* should be 2,000 words (roughly 5-6 pages, double-spaced). For advice, see my document, ‘How to Write an Essay’.

Long Essay: 50%

Answer one of the following questions:

‘Is there a human right to free speech?’

‘Is there a human right to freedom of religion?’

‘Is there a human right to security?’

‘Is there a human right to democracy?’

‘Is there a human right to health?’

‘Is there a human right to subsistence?’

The *Long Essay* (due Friday December 9, to be handed in to me in my office, SSC 4129, between 10 am and noon) is worth 50% of your course grade. The essay should draw on our required reading plus additional readings as appropriate. The essay should be 4,000-4,500 words (roughly 12-15 pages, double-spaced). Late essays are subject to a penalty of 2% per day. For advice, see my document, ‘How to Write an Essay’.

Weekly Meetings

At each meeting, I will begin by offering some background to a few of the issues covered in the day's assigned reading. This will *not* be a lecture on the readings themselves. Students will be expected to do this reading *before* the meeting. After my background comments, we will have an open discussion of the reading, focusing on its content, plausibility, and implications. Students are encouraged to contribute their own questions and comments.

September 12: No class. (I am at a conference out of town.) (Read the Overview, 1-41.)

Part 1: The Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights

September 19: Chapters 1 & 2 (Tasioulas, O'Neill)

September 26: Chapters 3 & 4 (Liao, Cruft)

October 3: Chapters 5-8 (Waldron, Simmons, Nickel, Stemplowska)

October 10: Thanksgiving: No Class Today

Part 2: Speech, Religion, Security, Democracy, Health, Subsistence

October 17: Chapters 19-22 (Brettschneider, Alexander, Zucca, Audi) **Short Essay due.**

October 24: Chapters 23-26 (Lazarus, Tadros, Christiano, Peter)

October 31: Chapters 27 & 28 (Wolff, Brownlee)

November 7: Chapters 29 & 30 (Ashford, Beitz)

Part 3: Critical Responses to Human Rights

November 14: Chapters 31 & 32 (Griffin, Renzo)

November 21: Chapters 33 & 34 (Ci, Hope)

November 28: Chapters 35 & 36 (Held, Mendus)

December 5: Chapters 37 & 38 (Flikschuh, Sangiovanni)

Friday December 9: Long Essay due before noon to SSC 4129.