

SPRING 2014
PHI 302, Section 01
PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES OF RIGHTS

Location: John Jay College of Criminal Justice
524 West 59th St. / Room N 2514
New York, NY 10019

Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:15 to 1:30

Instructor: Dr. Douglas Ficek

Email: dficek@jjay.cuny.edu

Office: If you would like to schedule an appointment with me, please speak with me before or after class or send me an email with your relevant information (full name and course section).

Description: Many people take human rights for granted. They act as though human rights have always been around, and they forget that the very idea of “human rights” is relatively new. They also forget that people have had to fight for human rights, and that these humanistic struggles continue in our contemporary world in a variety of ways. Consider, for example, the protests taking place all over the world against abusive, authoritarian governments.

The purpose of this course is to explore the philosophical foundations of human rights, starting with the ancients and finishing with our contemporaries. It is also to think through some of the major issues that are facing us today – from minority rights to environmental justice. This will not be a comprehensive analysis – it would be impossible to cover everything in one semester – but we will definitely be reading a lot of interesting stuff.

Requirements: This course is reading-intensive, and it is your responsibility to read the appropriate texts before class begins. To this end, I will be giving you several pop quizzes throughout the semester, all of which will be given at the beginning of class, so do not make lateness a habit. *You may use your hand-written notes on these quizzes.*

There will also be two paper assignments. Both will be eight-to-ten pages in length, and I will give you the details in a few weeks. As you will be able to decide the questions yourself, begin thinking about those aspects of human rights that interest you the most.

At the end of the semester, you will be doing a group presentation with a few of your classmates. These will be 30 minutes in length, and you will be expected to use PowerPoint or Keynote. The presentation topics will come from the “Contemporary Issues” section of our textbook.

Obviously, attendance is mandatory, and excessive absences (more than three) will negatively affect your final grade. Excessive tardiness will also affect your final grade. Bottom line: *If you cannot fully commit to this course, then you should not take it.*

Outcomes: John Jay College of Criminal Justice now requires that specific learning outcomes be specified on course syllabi. Here are three general learning outcomes for PHI 302: (1) Students will be able to identify and evaluate arguments; (2) students will be able to explicate key philosophical texts on the philosophy of human rights; and (3) students will be able to discuss these texts both in class discussion and in their written work.

Caveats: As an instructor, I am pretty easy-going. I do, however, insist upon a respectful atmosphere in

the classroom. What exactly does this mean? It means: no phone calls, no texting, no sleeping, and no ridiculously long bathroom breaks. If your phone does go off during class, you can either sing a song for the class – Johnny Cash would be fantastic – or I can assign an additional writing assignment that *everyone* must do. This is not a joke.

“My flash drive broke” has become the new “My dog ate my homework,” and I will not accept it as an excuse for late or incomplete work. Please use dropbox.com or docs.google.com to ensure the security of your written work. Also, they are *free*.

Finally, I take academic dishonesty *very* seriously and will fail anyone who plagiarizes on any of the written work. Do not test me on this. Please review the official policy:

“Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one's own creation. Using the ideas or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations to the original source.

Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. *Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism.*

It is the student's responsibility to recognize the difference between statements that are common knowledge (which do not require documentation) and restatements of the ideas of others. Paraphrasing, summarizing, and direct quotation are acceptable forms of restatement, as long as the source is cited.

Students who are unsure how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult with their instructors. The Library has free guides designed to help students with problems of documentation.”

Grading: Attendance – 10%
Pop Quizzes – 15%
First Paper – 25%
Second Paper – 25%
Group Presentation – 25%

Texts: Andrew Clapham, *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)
Patrick Hayden, ed., *The Philosophy of Human Rights* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2001)

Schedule: January 28 – Course Introduction
January 30 – *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-56
February 4 – *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 57-95
February 6 – *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 96-118
February 11 – *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 119-142
February 13 – *Human Rights: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 143-163
February 18 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 13-33
February 20 – NO CLASS

February 25 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 34-47

February 27 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 57-79

March 4 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 80-94

March 6 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 95-108

March 11 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 109-125

March 13 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 126-148

March 18 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 151-162

March 20 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 163-173

March 25 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 174-186

March 27 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 187-211

April 1 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 212-240

April 3 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 241-257

April 8 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 258-267

April 10 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 271-286

April 15 – NO CLASS

April 17 – NO CLASS

April 22 – NO CLASS

April 24 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 287-297

April 29 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 298-314

May 1 – *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, pp. 315-335

May 6 – Group Presentations

May 8 – Group Presentations

May 13 – Group Presentations

May 15 – Course Conclusion