2015

CORE 100-33 Human Rights

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Our class is about the nature and history of human rights. We often appeal to human rights violations in our political discourse. We might say that a certain government violated the human rights of its citizens by denying them access to basic goods required for subsisting or living. We might charge that the military engaged in human rights violations by torturing prisoners of war. We might also call on governments and international organizations (the UN, for instance) to protect the human rights of vulnerable individuals and communities or non-governmental organizations (Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch) to keep track of any human rights abuses. The discourse of human rights pervades our news, politics, and calls for change.

But, do we really understand what a human right is? What, we might ask, counts as a human right? For instance, do suspected or guilty criminals, prisoners, or terrorists have the right not to be tortured, even if doing so may save lives? What about a right to basic goods required for survival like water or healthcare? If we do have such rights, how do we know we have them? Where did they come from? Are they simply the result of contracts we make with each other or are they based on human nature?

All of these questions are of great philosophical and political importance, but philosophy alone cannot answer them. For this reason we will engage a variety of disciplines to answer these questions with a focus on two disciplines in particular: philosophy and history.

By examining human rights from the standpoint of multiple disciplines we will see that the human rights political discourse is relatively new. But how new or recent is it? We might wonder whether or not human rights are recent inventions of the mid- to late 20th Century or discoveries about our human nature that should be traced back hundreds, if not thousands of years. Certainly, the discourse of rights extends back hundreds of years (our Bill of Rights was established in 1791), but does our human rights discourse extend as far back as well? By unifying historical and philosophical analyses we will critically examine these pressing questions.

**Required Reading**

4) On Canvas I will distribute some readings as PDFs.

**Course Requirements**

20% Argument Essay
15% Oral Presentation (Tutorial Style) and Paper (5% each)
30% Informed Opinion Piece (Library Assignment)
15% Philosophy Close Reading
10% Informal Writing Assignments
10% Participation
What Makes the First-Year Seminar Unique?

First-year seminars have a number of features that make them unique courses.

1) Every first-year seminar fits under a general theme. The general theme is the greater good. Our class will examine the greater good by:
   - Scrutinizing what that greater good might be;
   - Questioning whether or not there is even such a greater good;
   - And, asking whether or not human rights actually promote or help us realize the greater good.

2) Like all first-year seminars, this course is a seminar. What is a seminar? In general, college courses can be split into two kinds: lectures and seminars. Lectures are courses in which the professor typically takes most of the responsibility for teaching the material to students by using lectures and some class discussion. Lecture courses at Xavier tend to have 20 to 30 students, though sometimes they might have more. Seminars are different from lecture courses, first, because they are typically smaller (around 15 students) and, second, because the students take on more responsibility for teaching themselves and each other the material. In seminars, the professor typically spends less time “professing” and more time engaging in discussion with students by moderating the group’s discussion so that it is productive, critical, and focused. While there will be moments when I, as the professor, will take time to explain key concepts and ideas, my main job as the seminar leader is to initiate and facilitate discussion.

Your job in the seminar as a student is:

1. To actively engage each other;
2. Prepare for class by carefully reading the material and annotating it for class discussion;
3. To actively participate in class discussion by asking questions and answering questions;
4. To express views and informed opinions;
5. To expand on other students’ answers, views, and comments;
6. To actively listen and take notes on what is said during the seminar discussion.

A good seminar discussion involves many seminar participants (and is not dominated by a single voice or even a few voices), digs deep into the readings, ideas, and materials, is fairly focused, raises important questions and possible answers, and most importantly is respectful, intellectually challenging, inspiring and fun!

3) First-year seminars involve faculty-student mentoring. As this is your first year in college, it is helpful to have a faculty member available with whom you can discuss the transition to college. As a mentor, I will not serve as your adviser (I won’t advise you on what classes are required for you major). However, we will meet at least two times during the semester to talk about how the transition to college and your first semester at Xavier are developing. During our mentoring sessions we can discuss class material, the transition to college, writing, your future vocation, difficulties you might be facing in other classes, or we can talk about music, films, books, ideas, traveling or whatever you want to chat about.

4) First-year seminars are meant to get you thinking about your vocation. What do we mean by vocation? That’s a great question. Your vocation might include your future career or occupation, your goals in life, or your vocation as a student, scholar, citizen, or as a moral person. Perhaps, through this course, you will discover that human rights concerns fit within your vocation. We will not aim to settle any questions about your vocation. Rather, our approach to the question of vocation will be reflective.
5) As part of the first-year seminar, you are required to attend two events that have been organized for first-year students. The first event is called The Spark (September 16) and is a panel session on the Greater Good. At the second event, The Flame, students will present research from their first-year seminars, and you will have a chance to present some of your own research.

6) This course, like all first-year seminars is part of your “first-year experience,” which also includes Manresa, and Goa: First-Year Co-Curricular Program, as well as the Spark and Flame events.

Here are the goals of First-Year Seminars: Students will...
- Become engaged in intellectually challenging and interesting questions and problems.
- Develop strong mentoring relationships with faculty in and out of the classroom.
- Join the community of scholars at Xavier University.
- Establish a solid foundation on which subsequent Core Curriculum courses will build.
- Engage with a common theme across all semesters: The Greater Good.

And, here are FYS Student Learning Outcomes: Students will...
- Core 1b: Apply the approaches of multiple disciplines to a significant issue.
- Core 6b: Articulate the evolution of their vocation and aspirations to contribute to the world.
- Core 3a: Identify and critically assess multiple dimensions of an ethical issue in an attempt to reach a conclusion. In FYS, this includes:
  - Interpreting challenging readings.
  - Employing effective library research and information literacy skills.
  - Constructing arguments supported with evidence.

Elaboration on Course Requirements

Argument Essay: You will write an argumentative essay that will be 1700 words. You will develop a thesis, present an argument in defense of your thesis, and examine and reply to an objection to your thesis.

Informed Opinion Piece (Library Assignment): You will write an opinion piece about a historical human rights abuse. You can write the opinion piece as a call to arms as if you were writing while the violations were taking place or you can write it after the abuse as a reflection about what happened and what we’ve learned. You opinion piece will be 1500 words and will be written in the style of op-ed essays from the New York Times and similar newspapers. I’m calling this an informed opinion piece since you will do an extensive amount of research to back up your claims and opinion.

The assignment is worth 30% of your grade. However, there will be a number of individual assignments that will make up the final grade for the informed opinion piece:

1) 10% Annotated Bibliography
2) 5% Library Research Narrative (500 words)
3) 15% Opinion Essay (Two Drafts: the “editor’s draft” with full citations and the “published draft” without citations) (1500 words)
Oral Presentation (Tutorial Style) and Paper: Each student will give a 10 minute oral presentation that will be followed by a 10 minute dialogue between the presenter and me. Then we will open discussion up to the class. In addition to the presentation, a short paper of two pages will be turned in that summarizes the content of your presentation. However, you are not allowed to read your two pages when presenting, though notes are permitted. You will be graded on the content, clarity, and organization of your oral presentation and paper. I will distribute more details about the presentations before we begin them.

Philosophy Close Reading: You will select a passage from a philosophical text and closely explain the main ideas and argument in the passage. The purpose of this assignment will be to explicate or flesh out the passage in your own words in such a way that anyone could grasp the main ideas and argument of the passage by reading your short essay.

Course Policies

Participation: Participation is required. Participation can take place in a number of ways: asking questions, responding to questions, raising objections, making points, sharing your views, and taking part in seminar discussion. Participation is not an automatic 10%—you actually have to take part, and I am very aware of who is doing so.

Attendance: You are allowed three unexcused absences. More than three unexcused absences will have a serious effect on your grade. Each unexcused absences after three will result in a lowering of your final grade by a +/- . If your final grade is an A- and you have 4 absences, then your grade for the course will be a B+. If your final grade is a B+ and you have 6 absences, then your grade for the course will be a C+. This policy will be strictly followed. Excused absences require an official note from a doctor or student affairs. If you have more than nine absences, whether excused or unexcused, then you will fail the course. If you do miss a class I strongly suggest that you get notes from another student and that you ask me for handouts I might have distributed and instructions for the next class. If you are absent, do not assume that you know where we are in the readings, since we will not always follow the syllabus exactly.

Writing Center: Everyone needs help with their writing. Even great authors need an editor or second pair of eyes. I strongly suggest that you visit the writing center before you turn in each paper. Your grammar will improve, your prose will become crisper, and your argument stronger. Overall, your writing skills and course grade will very likely increase. There is really nothing to lose, and everything to gain.

For more information:
http://www.xavier.edu/writingcenter/

Where: Conaton Learning Commons, Room 400
Phone: 745-2875

Writing Center Hours
Monday & Wednesday: 9 AM - 8 PM
Tuesday & Thursday: 9:30 AM - 8:30 PM
Friday: 9 AM - 3 PM
Plagiarism: Plagiarism will result in the failing of the assignment, and it may result in the failing of the course. The following statement on plagiarism is from Xavier University’s website on plagiarism, where you can read more about how to prevent plagiarism:

http://www.xavier.edu/library/xu-tutor/Preventing-Plagiarism.cfm

- Plagiarism is using the work of another as if it were your own, without enclosing the words of others in quotations.
- Plagiarism is copying from the Internet, from a web page, or from another person without giving credit.
- Plagiarism is using ideas which are not your own without citing those ideas.
- Plagiarism can be applied to ideas, research, art, music, graphs, diagrams, websites, data, books, newspapers, magazines, plays, movies, photos, and speeches.

**Students must keep their cell phones off during class, not on vibrate or silence. No texting at all!!

***Laptops are not allowed in class, unless you have a note from an office like the LAC.

Schedule

Week One: Torture

W 8/26 Introduction: Human Rights and Torture
1. Hersh, “Torture at Abu Ghraib” (Canvas)

F 8/28 Torture
2. “Findings and Conclusions” of The Senate CIA Torture Report (Canvas)

Week Two: Philosophical Comparisons

W 9/2 Natural Rights
1. Aquinas, Summa Theologica (PHR)
2. Grotius, The Rights of War and Peace (PHR)

F 9/4 Rights and the Social Contract
1. Locke, The Second Treatise on Government (PHR)
2. Rousseau, The Social Contract (PHR)
3. “The English Bill of Rights” (PHR)
Week Three: Debating Rights and their Value

W 9/9 Rights and the French Revolution
1. Burke, “Reflections on the Revolution in France”
2. Paine, “The Rights of Man”
3. “French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen”

F 9/11 The Value of Rights
1. Feinberg, “The Nature and Value of Rights” (PHR)

Week Four: The Development of Rights

W 9/16 Rights and the Declaration of Independence
1. Hunt, “Introduction: We hold these truths to be self-evident”
2. “Declaration of Independence” (PHR)
3. “The Bill of Rights” (PHR)

F 9/18 Rights in Development
1. Hunt, Ch. 1: “Torrents Of Emotion: Reading Novels and Imagining Equality”

Week Five: Declaring Rights

W 9/23 Torture Again
1. Hunt, Ch. 2: “Bone Of Their Bone: Abolishing Torture”

F 9/25 Declarations
1. Hunt, Ch. 3: “They Have Set A Great Example: Declaring Rights”

Week Six: Declaring Rights

W 9/30 Library Visit: Research Day

By this point you must know the topic, issue, or human rights abuse you are writing about for your informed opinion piece.

F 10/2 Consequences
1. Hunt, Ch. 4: “There Will Be No End Of It: The Consequences Of Declaring”
2. Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (PHR)

Week Seven: Rights in Question

W 10/7 The Critique of Rights
1. Bentham, Anarchical Fallacies
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F 10/9</td>
<td>Fall Break—No Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 10/21</td>
<td>Week Nine: Another History</td>
<td>Rights before Rights&lt;br&gt;1. Moyn, “Prologue” and Ch. 1: “Humanity before Human Rights”</td>
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<td>F 10/23</td>
<td>Human Rights and the UN: Birth or Death?</td>
<td>Human Rights and the UN: Birth or Death?&lt;br&gt;1. Moyn, Ch. 2: “Death from Birth”</td>
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<td>W 10/28</td>
<td>Week Ten: The Holocaust and Anti-Colonialism</td>
<td>Were Human Rights as a Response to the Holocaust?&lt;br&gt;1. Moyn, “The Intersection with Holocaust Memory” (Canvas)</td>
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<td>F 10/30</td>
<td>Anticolonialism and Human Rights</td>
<td>Anticolonialism and Human Rights&lt;br&gt;1. Moyn, Ch. 3: “Why Anticolonialism Wasn’t a Human Rights Movement”</td>
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<td>W 11/4</td>
<td>Week Eleven: The Struggle for Human Rights</td>
<td>The Human Rights Struggle&lt;br&gt;1. Moyn, Ch. 4: “The Purity of This Struggle” (pp. 120-161)</td>
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<td>F 11/6</td>
<td>The Human Rights Struggle</td>
<td>The Human Rights Struggle&lt;br&gt;1. Moyn, Ch. 4: “The Purity of This Struggle” (pp. 161-175)</td>
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Week Thirteen: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives

W 11/18  Human Rights and the Good Life
  1. Liao, “Human Rights as Fundamental Conditions for a Good Life” (Canvas)

F 11/20  Human Rights and the Good Live
  1. Liao, “Human Rights as Fundamental Conditions for a Good Life” (Canvas)

Week Fourteen: Thanksgiving Break

W 11/25  Thanksgiving Break—No Class

F 11/27  Thanksgiving Break—No Class

Week Fifteen: Welfare or Human Rights?

W 12/2   Are Human Rights Treaties Effective?

F 12/4   Are Human Rights Treaties Effective?

Week Sixteen: Women’s Human Rights

W 12/9   Women’s Human Rights
  1. Mackinnon, “Rape, Genocide, and Women’s Human Rights” (PHR)

F 12/11  Women’s Human Rights
  1. Engelhart and Miller, “The CEDAW Effect: International Law’s Impact on Women’s Rights” (Canvas)

  2. “Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women” (PHR)