DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS


IPM029 Human Rights and the Transformation of World Politics

Dr Joe Hoover
Office: D522
Phone: 020 7040 8376
joseph.hoover.1@city.ac.uk

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00-12:00 and Wednesday 11:00-12:00
Lectures & Seminars: Friday 10:00-11:50
Introduction

Human Rights and the Transformation of World Politics is a core module for the MA International Politics & Human Rights and an optional module for other MA student, which explores the meaning of human rights for contemporary world politics. You will consider questions such as:

• Where do human rights come from and how have they changed world politics?
• What duties do universal human rights place on political authority?
• Is the notion of “humanity” in human rights actually universal?
• Do human rights create exclusion and serve powerful states?
• How are human rights used in political practice?

The module combines historical, philosophical and practical elements to help you develop a critical understanding of contemporary human rights. You will consider the multiple histories that have lead to human rights being a central political idea in the 21st century, while also examining the different ways human rights are understood philosophically, including question of what we can have a right to and which institutions are responsible for protecting our rights. Finally, you will examine the ways human rights are used in practice, as a type of politics and as a practical ethics.

Aims and Objectives

In the module you will consider how human rights were developed, how they have transformed international politics in myriad ways, and how different understandings of rights inform human rights practices. These contemporary practices will be put in historical perspective and you will be encouraged to critically reflect on the value of human rights as a set of transformative political practices. Finally, the module will help you to make your own judgements and reflect critically on world politics.

Learning Outcomes: Subject knowledge and understanding

On successful completion of this module, a student will be expected to be able to:

• Outline and criticise histories of human rights;
• Outline and criticise theories of human rights;
• Outline and criticise contemporary human rights practices;
• Apply philosophical and historical understanding to political events;
• Develop strong analytical reading skills, improve your written and oral presentation ability and learn to think critically about issues that bring together theoretical reflection and practical knowledge
Teaching Methods

The course is taught through a series of 10 lectures and 10 seminars. Main ideas and controversies will be presented in the lectures and you will have the opportunity to ask questions and develop your thinking in the discussion-based seminars. It is vital that you read deeply and widely for the course in preparation for the seminars, as they will be student led discussions.

You are expected to attend all the lectures and all the seminars. It is also vital that you attend your assigned seminars, as your classmates will be depending on you to contribute to presentations and class discussions.

During the term you will give a short presentation and produce a critical outline on the topic for your assessed essay.

The presentation will be given in class and you will present with a partner, though feedback will be given separately. In the class presentation you will be asked to respond to a set question by applying a theoretical perspective to a real-world event. Schedules for presentation will be worked out in the first seminar.

You will also produce a critical outline in preparation for your assessed essay that will lay out the argument you are making in response to your chosen question. This is not a traditional outline but an outline of the argument you will make, meaning you will have to write it as a series of propositions and conclusions – this outline is intended to stimulate your thinking on the topic of your choice and the actual argument you make in the essay may differ. The outline will be due at the end of the 8th week of the term (Friday 22nd November) and feedback will be provided before the end of term.

Assessment

The course will be assessed by one 4000-word essay due at the end of the term.

Deadline for Term 1 Assessed Essay: Monday 13 January 2014

In order to pass the module and acquire the associated credit, you must achieve a module mark of no less than 40%. Compensation is not permitted for failure of this module.

Essay Questions

You will develop your own essay questions with the course convenor and it is vital that have your question approved before you write your essay.

Reflective Learning Week (week 6)

Please note that there will be no IPM029 lectures or tutorials this week. There will be department wide activities for students this week. It also provides you an opportunity to catch-up on coursework and to begin thinking about your assessed essay topic.
Course Literature

Everyone is expected to read for each seminar. Try to read the majority of the Essential Reading each week along with a selection of the Further Reading that you find useful or interesting. Do note that the Essential Reading contains a number of shorter practical readings, please attend to these as well as the longer academic ones. You do not have to read all pieces listed under each topic but you should read widely – some pieces in detail and some just skimmed – until you feel you have a grasp of the subject. Presenters should try to read all of the Essential Reading, and much of the Further Reading. Where a chapter reference for a book is given, it is likely that the rest of the book will also be useful – don’t feel you have to stop at the end of the chapter if you’re gripped by the argument!

The following General texts will be quite useful and the library and bookshop have been asked to stock them. Students are encouraged to buy one or two and to co-ordinate purchasing so that they have access to a range of them.

General Texts

These texts provide an overview of the material covered on the course and you should consult a selection prior to the start of seminars and in the early weeks. They will also prove useful throughout the term and for exam preparation.


**Journals**


**Office Hours**

I will hold scheduled office hours on Tuesday and Wednesday morning from 11:00-12:00. You are welcome to drop in at these times. If you need to schedule a longer appointment or those times do not work then send me an email and we can arrange a time to meet.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Lecture</th>
<th>Tutorial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 October 2013</td>
<td>“Ain’t I Human?”</td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11 October 2013</td>
<td>Histories of Human Rights, Part 1: Realising Humanity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18 October 2013</td>
<td>Histories of Human Rights, Part 2: Internationalising Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 November 2013</td>
<td>Philosophies of Human Rights, Part 1: Individual Autonomy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8 November 2013</td>
<td>Reflective Learning Week</td>
<td>NO LECTURES OR TUTORIALS Department-wide Careers Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>15 November 2013</td>
<td>Philosophies of Human Rights, Part 2: Political Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>22 November 2013</td>
<td>Philosophies of Human Rights, Part 3: Democratising Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>29 November 2013</td>
<td>Practices of Human Rights, Part 1: Torture and the War on Terror</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>6 December 2013</td>
<td>Practices of Human Rights, Part 2: Migration in the EU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Human rights are a contested concept, both as an ethical ideal and as a feature of contemporary international politics. This means that human rights are used in many different ways and that the meaning of human rights depends on who is using the language and institutions of rights. In this session we will look at what rights are and how the appeal to “humanity” alters rights thinking. Once we recognise that human rights are a way of making claims to particular privileges and protections by claiming a political status outside of given rights of citizenship or group membership, we can see that human rights open up a new kind of politics. This introductory session will then lay out how we can understand that new politics by attending to the histories, philosophies and practices of rights, which we will do in the remainder of the course.

Questions

1. What is a right?

2. Who counts as a human and on what grounds?

3. Does the disagreement about the meaning of human rights undermine it as a political project?

Essential Reading


**Applied Readings**


**Further Reading**


Human rights are undoubtedly a form of moral universalism, but in what ways is the rights tradition distinctive? Many scholars have sought to read human rights as part of a Western tradition of rights thinking with deep roots – going back at least until the Enlightenment, if not all the way back to Rome – but this focus on continuity and progress risks conflating distinct forms of political ethics and giving insufficient attention to social transformations. In this session we will consider how human rights grow out of a political and philosophical tradition that mobilises the idea of common humanity to justify revolutionary changes, but which at the same time has often excluded some human beings from the privileged category of “humanity” – particularly enslaved peoples, women and individuals coming from non-European societies.

**Questions**

1. Are the American or French Revolutions precursors to contemporary human rights? If so, why is the Haitian Revolution not included?

2. What function does declaring the self-evident rights of man serve in revolutionary politics?

3. Why is it appealing to read human rights as a consequence of previous political revolutions?

**Essential Readings**


Applied Readings


Further Reading


([http://www.historyisawapon.com/defcon1/zinnkin5.html](http://www.historyisawapon.com/defcon1/zinnkin5.html))
International human rights do not emerge until the middle of the 20th century, particularly around the Second World War. It is in this historical context that notions of natural and inalienable rights are explicitly expanded to the international level, heralding a transformation of international politics from a state-centric focus to one that considers the rights of individuals and the self-determination of peoples as paramount. This transformation, however, is both ambiguous and contested, with some seeing the human rights as leading to more international forms of authority, while others took it to emphasise the independence of sovereign peoples. Further, the Cold War impacted the development of human rights greatly as did the sudden hegemony of the US after the end of the Cold War. In this session we will trace the complex history of the internationalisation of human rights and consider their impact on international politics in the 20th century.

Questions

1. How was the development of a distinctive notion of international human rights related to the Second World War?

2. What was the relationship between human rights ideas and decolonisation?

3. How has the emergence of international human rights institutions and activism since the 1970s altered world politics?

Essential Readings


Samuel Moyn, The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), Chapter 2. (Chapter 3-5 are also relevant)

**Applied Readings**


**Further Readings**


Human rights have become increasingly prominent in world politics through the actions of states, international organisations and political activism, to the extent that they have become a dominant mode of politics – defined by institutions, a rights discourse and political practices. The increasing prominence of rights, however, has not brought about political homogenisation, rather the meaning of rights, conceptually and practically, is being contested. In this session we will look at the development of women’s rights, the issue of different rights cultures, and the use of rights to contest given political and economic structures.

**Questions**

1. Are human rights women’s rights?

2. Can human rights accommodate the claims of “culture”? 

3. How do human rights cultivate powerlessness despite the presumption that they guarantee freedom?

**Essential Readings**


**Applied Readings**


Malala Yousafzai, “Speech to the UN General Assembly,” (12 July 2013). ([http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jul/12/malala-yousafzai-united-nations-education-speech-text](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/jul/12/malala-yousafzai-united-nations-education-speech-text))


**Further Readings**


Week 5 – Philosophies of Human Rights, Part I: Individual Autonomy

At their most basic level rights make a kind of claim, to a privilege or a social good, which has historically been made by individuals. Conventional human rights justifications are made in terms of individual freedom. However, the kinds of rights individuals should have, the specifics of why those rights should be respected and whom the individual’s rights are claimed are all open to contestation. In this session we will consider accounts of human rights that are justified as protections of individual autonomy, of the individual’s capacity to think and act for themselves. We will look at the different ways in which rights of individual autonomy are understood and to some classic critiques of such rights.

Questions

1. How does the individual’s ability to act for themselves justify human rights that limits what institutions and communities can do to the individual?

2. What human rights does our autonomy entitle us to?

3. Against whom do we claim human rights - other individuals, states or the international community?

Essential Readings


Applied Readings


Further Readings


Week 6 – Reading Week

Events during reading week to be announced.
Given the difficulty of justifying rights as universal moral claims, in terms of autonomy or need or any other value, there has been a turn to justify human rights in “political” terms. Human rights then are justified as the rights that are necessary to have a legitimate political order, the rights necessary to have politics rather than brute force and violence. This method of justification is seen to be more acceptable because it does not depend upon religious or metaphysical claims about morality, but rather practical claims about political life. This move, however, does not eliminate controversy as scholars debate how extensive or limited these rights should be, and critics criticise the conception of legitimate politics such accounts endorse.

Questions

1. What is the difference between a political justification and a moral justification?

2. Are there certain rights that are necessary to any legitimate political order?

3. Should human rights justify external interference in political communities?

Essential Readings


**Applied Readings**


**Further Readings**


In the previous two sessions we have looked at how human rights are justified philosophically, in each case the logic of justification tends to look to human rights as principles that constrain politics, limiting what states, groups and individuals can do, and protecting privileges that should be assigned to everyone. Another view of rights sees them as a way of challenging political authority, as tools of democratic activism. This view of human rights alters conventional debates between universalism and relativism, and between minimalist and maximalist accounts, focusing instead on the way rights are used to criticise existing political authority and create new political constellations.

Questions

1. How can human rights claims challenge existing authority?

2. Does conceiving of rights claims as political tools undermine their status as ethical principles?

3. Does justifying human rights claims as a kind of democratic politics address the concerns over their ethnocentrism?

Essential Readings


**Applied Readings**


**Further Readings**


Torture has traditionally been seen as an act that was clearly prohibited by human rights. From the earliest rights revolutions, there was a clear move to protect the individual body from the power of the state. Later human rights activism often coalesced around issue of torture and illegitimate imprisonment. It was in light of the history of prohibition that re-emergence of a debate about torture after 9/11 was so surprising and challenging to the sense that human rights had played a key role in delegitimising the practices. In this session we examine how the use of torture and indefinite imprisonment re-emerged as a practices being used by states traditionally seen as human rights supporters. We will also look at how human rights were used in the response to torture after 9/11.

Questions

1. Why has torture been seen as an obvious and widely agreed upon violation of human rights?

2. How were practices of torture and indefinite imprisonment justified after 9/11? Do you disagree with these justifications?

3. Does US policy after 9/11 show the weakness of human rights in constraining powerful states?

Essential Readings


**Applied Readings**

Andrew Cohen, “The Torture Memos, 10 Years Late,” *The Atlantic* (6 February 2012). (http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/02/the-torture-memos-10-years-later/252439/)


**Further Readings**


Week 10 – Practices of Human Rights, Part 2: Migration in the EU

Many supporters of the EU have claimed it as institution that promotes human rights and diversity. Recent events, however, have highlighted the exclusions within the EU, especially of irregular migrants coming to EU countries for opportunity and safety, as well as for the sons and daughters of earlier migrants facing social exclusion and disenfranchisement. In this session we look at the rights of migrants in the EU and the difficulty of protecting their human rights when it seems their status as “outsiders” imperils their rights.

Questions

1. In what cases should human rights protect migrants seeking to move to the EU?

2. How does the current EU rights regime threaten the rights of migrants?

3. Do the difficulties faced by migrants undermine the hope of developing post-national forms of political community?

Essential Readings


**Applied Readings**


**Further Readings**


The financial crisis that started in 2007/2008 – and which continues in various forms even now – has lead to a renewed focus on inequality and poverty. One of the most pressing areas of need is in housing, both in the global north and the global south, but it seems conventional human rights institutions are of limited use. In this session we will look at a set of linked movement to claim a human right to land and housing, operating in Brazil, South Africa and the United States of America. In all three countries rights activists are claiming the right to housing/land through direction action, justifying their actions both in terms of existing international standards and by appeal to a moral necessity of a right to housing/land for all human beings.

Questions

1. Is there a human right to housing or land? Either in legal or ethical terms?

2. Should activists use direct action that violates the law to claim human rights?

3. Does a human right to housing and land require the transformation of the economic order at a fundamental level?

Essential Readings


**Applied Readings**


**Further Readings**


