The language of human rights has permeated the discourses of many fields of study and endeavor. From international politics and law to political theory and philosophy to welfare economics, human rights have become the conceptual foundation for political demands, political movements, and political decisions. So it is important that we come to understand both the history and the theoretical grounding of human rights.

What are human rights and where do they come from? Who has them? What counts as a human right and what doesn’t? What does having a human right entail, presume, or entitle one to? Have we gone too far in our pursuit of human rights? Not far enough? And where to next? These are questions engaging both theoreticians and practitioners of human rights. In this course we will explore the philosophical foundations of human rights and how disagreements concerning them affect their place in human relations and politics.

**General Requirements:** This is a research seminar, and as such is aimed at providing a broad foundation in contemporary issues in human rights theory, as well as generating ideas for in-depth research. **Required readings are just that, and I will ask students unprepared for seminar to leave.** Suggested readings serve two purposes: first, participants preparing short papers for any one class should dip into suggested readings for that class. Second, suggested readings can serve as a basis for beginning research or exploring the possibility of a seminar paper on any given topic.

In addition to our usual emphasis on class preparation and discussion, students will write 2 short papers (6-8 pages), and will prepare a seminar-length paper on a topic mutually selected in consultation with me. I can also recommend research materials and sources on a variety of topics. Each participant will make at least one in-class presentation of one of her or his short papers. Also, remember that a substantial portion (25%) of the final grade will be based on participation in the seminar meetings. **Attendance is, of course, mandatory.**

**Required Books** (available at Coop, roughly in order of use):

- Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*
- Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*
- Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*
- Henry Shue, *Basic Rights*
- Richard P. Hiskes, *The Human Right to a Green Future*
Suggested Books (available in short supply at the Coop)

*Richard A. Wilson and Richard Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering*
*Alan Gewirth, *The Community of Rights*
*Michael Ignatieff, *Human Rights as Politics and Idolatry*
*Thomas Pogge, *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right*

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND READINGS

Introduction: Rights in the (Western) Public Sphere

**Reading:** Hunt, all  
**Suggested:** Wilson and Brown, Introduction, Chapter One

Historical Foundations

**Reading:** -Wollstonecraft, all

-Immanuel Kant, “On the Common Saying: This May be True in Theory, But it does not Apply in Practice.” Available online at:  
  [www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/sefd0/tx/tp2.htm](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/sefd0/tx/tp2.htm)

**Suggested:** Thomas Paine, The Rights of Man  
Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Civil War in France  
Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan

Early Objections

**Reading:** *Jeremy Bentham, Anarchical Fallacies* (downloadable thru Google)  
on reserve in *Nonsense Upon Stilts*, Jeremy Waldron, ed.

*Karl Marx, On the Jewish Question* (downloadable thru Google)  
on reserve in Waldron

**Suggested:** J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, On the Subjection of Women*  
Jeremy Waldron, “Introductions” and “Nonsense Upon Stilts—A Reply.” In Waldron.

A Serious Modern Theory

**Reading:** Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, chs. 1-8; 12-13
Suggested: *Gewirth, chapter 2

**Human Rights: For and Against**

**Reading:** H.L.A. Hart, “Are There Any Human Rights?” *Philosophical Review* 64 (1955)


**Politics, Political Science and Human Rights**

**Reading:** - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Available online at [www.un.org/Overview/rights.html](http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html)

-Donnelly, all

*Suggested:* -*Gewirth, chapter 1

**Fundamental Human Rights**

**Reading:** Shue, all

*-Alan Gewirth, Duties to Fulfill the Human Rights of the Poor,” In Pogge.
Different Foundations for Human Rights

**Reading:** Alan Gewirth (1984) “Why There are Human Rights.” *Social Theory and Practice* 11; 235-248.


Persistent Controversies I: Universalism v. Cultural Relativism


Persistent Controversies II: Human Rights and Gender


New Directions: Environmental Human Rights

Reading: -Hiskes, All