

Prof. James Dawes, Human Rights in the Humanities

This course is an introduction to the study of human rights by way of the arts and humanities. We will seek to better understand the contemporary norms and practices of human rights by examining its deep historical contexts, and by considering the philosophical and religious debates that continue to shape human rights theory and practice. We will also examine theories of trauma and torture, personal accounts of human rights and humanitarian fieldwork, representational ethics, and studies of human rights in film and media. We will scrutinize relevant literary texts as works of art, as case studies in human rights, and as models for understanding how words can change the world, whether in the form of human rights reports and newspaper accounts or of poems and novels. In other words, we will seek to better understand how spectators of suffering develop (or fail to develop) empathy for distant persons or for persons considered alien by also examining how they can so palpably feel for the dreams, desires, and dignity of fictional persons. In *The Defense of Poesy* Sir Philip Sidney describes the tyrant, Alexander Phraeus, “from whose eyes a tragedy well-made and represented drew abundance of tears; who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood, so as he that was not ashamed to make matters for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy.” What is the line that separates those who are merely moved from those who are moved to act? When does the story become real enough to change you? Our list of authors will span the range of intellectual and ethical endeavor, including Sophocles, Aristotle, Henrik Ibsen, Herman Melville, Dave Eggers, Franz Kafka, Ursula Le Guin, Hannah Arendt, Marx and Engels, Immanuel Kant, J. M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, John Rawls, Michel Foucault, Naomi Klein, Greil Marcus, Elaine Scarry, Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum, Lynn Hunt, Alan Dershowitz, and Kenneth Cain.

Reading Schedule

Part One: Introduction: Human Rights, Empathy, and Storytelling

August 27	Hunt, <i>Inventing Human Rights</i> , chapters 1-2
August 29	Eggers, <i>What Is the What</i> , 25%
September 3	Eggers, <i>What Is the What</i> , 75%
September 5	Meet in the bibliographic instruction room (Library, 2nd floor)
September 8	Eggers, 100%
September 10	Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum, Lugones and Spelman
September 12	Rorty, Nussbaum, Lugones and Spelman (We will meet with Prof. Gunderson's students)

Part Two. Background: Ethics, Justice, and Obedience

Justice (all selections are from Sterba, ed. Justice; read the entire section for each day listed)

September 15	Libertarian Justice
September 17	Socialist Justice
September 19	The Utilitarian Perspective
September 22	The Contractarian Perspective
September 24	The Discourse Ethics Perspective
September 26	Communitarian Justice

Punishment and Human Rights

September 29	Sophocles, Antigone (first writing assignment due)
October 1	Ibsen, Enemy of the People
October 3	Herman Melville, Billy Budd (We will meet with Prof. Gunderson's students)

On Being Human

October 6	Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 50%
October 8	Ishiguro, 75%
October 10	Ishiguro, 100%, Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics (Book 1) (We will meet with Prof. Gunderson's students)

October 13 **midterm exam**

Obedience and Disobedience

October 15	Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem, chapters 1-6, Social Psychology of Good and Evil, ch.2
October 17	FALL BREAK
October 20	Marcus, Lipstick Traces, Version 1

October 22 Marcus, Version 2 (up to but not including the assault on Notre Dame)

October 24 Marcus, Version 2, 100%

Part Three. Human Rights and Humanitarianism

Torture

October 27 Ursula Le Guin, Mark Bowden, Dershowitz and Krauthammer

October 29 Foucault, Discipline and Punish ("The body of the condemned," "The spectacle of the scaffold," "Panopticism")

October 31 Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain, chapter 1, Kafka, Blanchot, pp. 1-31 (We will meet with Prof. Gunderson's students)

November 3 Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians, 50% (**second writing assignment due**)

November 5 Coetzee, 75%

November 7 Coetzee, 100%

War

November 10 Elaine Scarry, chapter 2

November 12 Hemingway

November 14 Hemingway

The Needs of Humans

November 17 Naomi Klein, No logo, "No Space"

November 19 Klein, "No Choice"

November 21 Klein, "No Jobs" (We will meet with Prof. Gunderson's students)

Humanitarianism

November 24 Cain et. al., Emergency Sex

November 26	Cain
November 28	vacation
December 1	Cain
December 3	exam
December 5	group presentations
December 11	final paper due