INSTRUCTOR

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This advanced undergraduate/graduate course will examine the notion of human dignity, with a special eye towards its role in contemporary human rights discourse. The course begins by tracing the historical development of the idea of human dignity both in philosophy and in law, and from there it moves on to examine contemporary usages. Questions to be examined include the following: What is the meaning of "human dignity"? Is it basic to morality? What sort of things does it prohibit or require? Is there a distinction to be made between dignity, on the one hand, and human dignity, on the other? What is the connection, if any, between having dignity and having rights? Is human dignity an inherently religious concept? What grounding might it have in secular ethics?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

(35%) Class Participation: All students will be expected to come to class prepared with a discussion question about the assigned readings for the day. The question can be critical (i.e., it may raise an objection against an assigned author), interpretive (i.e., it may raise an issue of interpretation in an assigned text), or thematic in nature (e.g., the question may interrogate a broad idea or theme that emerges from the readings). Since there won’t be enough time for every student to ask their question in any given class, the instructor will call on students to raise questions at random. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students to play an active role in lectures, and also to generate engaged classroom discussion. Student participation will be evaluated on the basis of (i) the quality of a student’s prepared questions, and (ii) a student’s effort and engagement in class discussions.
more generally. As far as general participation goes, my advice is: don’t be shy. If you have something on your mind, we are all interested in hearing it.

(65%) Final Writing Assignment (Due by end of day, March 15th – Email submission preferred): (Word Limit: 2500-3500 for undergraduates; 3500-4500 for graduate students) As a final written assignment, students will be expected to write a final paper that puts any two sections of the course into dialogue with one another. Students must convey their choice to the instructor by midterm, i.e., February 16th. Students are encouraged to submit an outline of their paper for consultation with the instructor before final submission.

By February 9th, the instructor will offer some suggestions of particular essay questions that might be fruitfully pursued, although if a student would like to propose an original topic that will be absolutely fine as well, so long as the instructor is consulted beforehand. The final paper is an opportunity for students to directly engage the material covered in the course, as well as to think about how research on different aspects of human dignity might interrelate. For instance, a student might try to determine which contemporary theory can best respond to a problem encountered by Stoic conceptions of human dignity. In general, research papers will be assessed on the basis of (i) lucidity, (ii) effort, (iii) relevance to the chosen question, (iv) independence of thought, and (v) comprehension of the relevant readings.

Note: Papers and prospectuses submitted late will be penalized by 1/3 grade per day (e.g. A- instead of A if the paper is one day late).

COURSE MATERIALS

There are three books required for purchase in association with this course. All other readings listed below are available on Chalk, electronically.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

SYLLABUS

I. HISTORICAL SOURCES

JANUARY

5 SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND


7 CLASS CANCELLED

12 STOIC THOUGHTS


(2) *Obergefell v Hodges*, US Supreme Court Decision (October 2014), pp. 1-28. Pay particular attention to the dissent of Justice Thomas, esp. pp. 16-17 thereof. I also recommend taking a look at Justice Roberts’ dissent.

Supplementary Readings


14 NAZI ORIGINS?


19 CHRISTIAN SOURCES I

(2) Pope John Paul II’s encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995). (Skim through it).

**Supplementary Readings**


**21 CHRISTIAN SOURCES II**


**Supplementary Readings**


**26 KANTIAN SOURCES I**


**Supplementary Readings**


**28 KANTIAN SOURCES II**


**February**

**2 KANTIAN SOURCES III**


**Supplementary Readings**

4 **Kantian Sources IV: Attempted Applications**


*The German Airliner Case*


*Dignity and Dwarf-Tossing*


**Supplementary Readings**


II. **DIGNITY, RANK, AND RIGHTS**

9 **Waldron’s View I**


11 **Waldron’s View II**


16 **Dignity and Rights I**

Supplementary Readings


18 DIGNITY AND RIGHTS II


Supplementary Readings


III. HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

23 HUMAN DIGNITY IN HUMAN RIGHTS LAW


Supplementary Readings


25 HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS I

(1) Preambles to UDHR and ICCPR (online).
1 Human Dignity and Human Rights


Supplementary Readings


IV. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

3 Skepticism about Dignity

(2) Ruth Macklin, “Dignity is a Useless Concept” in British Medical Journal (2003), No. 327, pp. 1419-1420.

Supplementary Readings


8 The Instructor’s View

(1) Adam Etinson, “What’s So Special About Human Dignity?” (DRAFT).