

LECTURE / DISCUSSION / DEBATE
HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIFFERENCE

Terms and concepts to know:

Human Rights	Nuremberg Trials
Universalism vs. relativism	Universal Declaration (1948)
European Convention (1950)	Intuition and consensus (Donnelly)
Contractualism (Rawls)	Rational entailment (Habermas)
Natural rights (Finnis)	Cruelty and solidarity (Shklar and Rorty)
Difference	Dominant identity
Postmodern 'différance'	Liberal theory and difference
Feminist theory and difference	Democracy and difference

Study and discussion questions:

1. Some human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, have come under scrutiny for having a "selective" focus (examining some countries abuses while ignoring others). What are some of the reasons that Alpert is skeptical of HRW and are his criticisms fair? How do you believe these organizations can fight against "selectivity"?
2. If it can be shown that human rights discourse emerges from a Western tradition does this undermine the claim that they are universal?
3. Is the exercise of human rights compatible with respect for the environment?
4. Is the 'right to welfare' a coherent concept? Why or why not?
5. Examine Chomsky's insights to the concept of 'humanitarian imperialism', and Bricmont's critique of the modern concept of 'responsibility to protect' or R2P. Given U.S. history, are these concepts as cynical as they appear?
6. Does a person's identity revolve around one dominant feature? When you 'self-identify' does one aspect or your identity stand out among others?
7. Does the state facilitate the expression of difference among inhabitants? Does the American government enhance or depress this feature?
8. Back in 2008, Justin Smith commented on the differences between Obama and Hillary Clinton, who were competing in the Democratic primary. Analyze his argument and comment on where you agree or disagree with his position.

Readings:

Hoffman and Graham: Chapters 18 and 21.

Video:

Global Gay: The Next Frontier in Human Rights.