Democracy, Globalization, and Human Rights

Texts:


Course Description:

Two features of modern globalization are an emerging global human rights culture and the growing trend toward democratization. The prospect of transnational extension of the ideas of democracy and human rights is transforming the scope of political philosophy, leading to a serious exploration of alternatives to the legitimacy of nation-state politics in the contemporary world. If democracy is understood as the political institution where the affected parties have a say in their governance, then the domain of political legitimacy in today's interconnected world needn't coincide with national boundaries.

This has important ramifications for our understanding of the moral foundations of democracy and human rights. Based on this newly emerging vision of global reality, ethicists, political philosophers, and legal and political theorists are now debating the cosmopolitan challenges to the older views in which democracy and human rights are regarded as embedded in national constitutions and having application exclusively to given nation-states. While the question of how to globally apply national norms has become the challenge of the contemporary era, the contested issues of identity and diversity have become the focus of heightened debate. Globalization of democracy and human rights raises new questions about the appropriate application of normative frameworks to diverse localities with differing cultural, social, political, and economic establishments.

This seminar explores the philosophical challenges of the "situatedness" of transnational democracy and human rights. It examines the theories of rights that provide for a cosmopolitan framework but have room for local variations consistent with alternative versions of democratic decision-making. The objective of the seminar is to acquaint students with some new questions regarding the foundations of democratic theory and practice, democratic legitimacy in a pluralistic world, justice and globalization, and human rights and their implementation.

Weekly Schedule (tentative):
Weeks 1 & 2: Introduction
Weeks 3 & 4: Democracy and Human Rights: Theoretical Issues
Week 5 & 6: Global Justice and Global Democracy: Theoretical Overview
Weeks 7 & 8: Human Rights and Cultural Relativism
Week 9: Identity, Group Rights, and Gender
Week 10 & 11: Justice, Equality, and Difference
Weeks 12 & 13: Globalization and Democratic Legitimacy
Weeks 14 & 15: Human Rights Talk: An Empty Rhetoric?

Reading schedule will be given out in the second or third week of the semester after individual consultation with students. Students should start reading the Gould text in the first two weeks.

Classroom Format:

The course will be taught in a seminar style, each class featuring a mixture of lecture and student participation. Students will be encouraged (but not required) to give a short class presentation and lead discussion on an assigned topic.

Work Required:

The seminar requires a 15-page term paper, which will account for 80% of the course grade. Class participation will count for 15%. A draft of the paper should be submitted two weeks before the last class meeting. The final draft is expected during the exam week. A class assignment on January 18 will count 5% toward the course grade. More about the assignment on the first day of class.

Please Note:

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, sensory, cognitive, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities. Please contact the Center for Disability Services (162 Union Building) if you will need any such accommodations.