I. Introduction
Few ideas are discussed more frequently in international conversations than the idea of human rights. But what are human rights? And in virtue of what do people have them? In the absence of explicit laws, what reasons are there for thinking that human beings have rights? And, if people do, are some rights more basic than others and what compelling interests, if any, justify their violation? The course looks closely at international human rights policies and the moral issues to which they give rise as they are embedded in actual, concrete cases.

Opening sections of the course will be devoted to an examination of the rights of civilians and non-combatants in time of war, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, during the firebombing of Dresden, at Mylai, and the Nuremberg Trials.
Discussion will include the role considerations of human rights ought to play in the foreign policy of any country as well as an examination of the role such considerations actually have played — in Darfur, Serbia/Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Chechnya, and Somalia, as well as in China and Tibet, Cambodia, Burma, East Timor, Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Sri Lanka, Israel, Palestine and the West Bank, Saudi Arabia, Burundi, Somalia, Kenya, Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Sudan, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Germany, France, European Union, Spain, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia, United States Domestic Policy, US Foreign Policy, North Korea, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Columbia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela, and Guantanamo Bay.

Discussion will also include: territorial integrity and the ethics of humanitarian intervention, state sovereignty and human rights violations, U. S. intervention in Rwanda, Afghanistan, and Iraq, international terrorism and human rights, the morality of torture, the Geneva Convention and cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment of prisoners in the war against terrorism, the role of international peacekeeping forces, assassinations abroad (killing without trial), drone strikes, spying on Americans, rethinking surveillance, human rights activism and social media, censoring the news, the responsibilities of individuals and states to alleviate world hunger and famine, and the moral and political issues surrounding the plight of refugees and homeless persons, international war crime tribunals v. truth and reconciliation commissions and the case to be made for a human right to clean water and clean air, to an end to the overheating of the planet and to a minimal level of health care and of not falling into poverty.

A final section will be devoted to taking the pulse of the current state of human rights in the world today. By most accounts, "we do not live in a just world." What is to be done? Where do we go from here? As Thomas Nagel wonders it is far from clear "what, if anything, justice on a world-scale [means] or what the hope for justice should lead us to want in global institutions . . . and the policies of states." Do human rights have a future? Is there reason to hope? [Hope in Dark Times]

II. Class Times
The course will meet on Tuesdays & Fridays from 12:30 to 1:50 PM.
III. Reading

All texts are available at the University Book Store:

- Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, Basic Books
- Samantha Power, A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide, Perennial
- Henry Shue, Basic Rights, Princeton University Press
- Thomas Pogge and Hardon, Global Ethics, Paragon
- Thomas Pogge and Moellendorf, Global Justice, Paragon

IV. Writing

Three short papers are required on topics growing out of the readings and class discussions. The papers should be about 5-6 pages in length, typewritten.

V. Examinations

There will be no mid-term or final examination. There will, however, be a quiz on the reading with multiple choice and true or false questions given in class towards the end of the semester. There will be no other written examination of any kind.

VI. Rewriting

You will be given the opportunity to rewrite one of the three papers. Rewrites must be accompanied by a copy of the original paper with the comments, plus a cover sheet, attached to the original and the rewrite, stating how you have improved the paper and spelling out in detail, but simply and clearly, what you have done to make your paper, now a rewrite, that much more wonderful. The grade you receive on your rewrite will be the grade you receive for the rewrite, not be an average of the grade on the original and the rewrite. More will be said about rewriting when the first papers are handed back.
VII. Class Participation
You may keep a journal. The journal is not intended to be for note-taking or making commentaries on the readings (although you may also wish to keep a separate note-book for that). The journal is an opportunity for you to puzzle through some of the troubling issues raised by human rights concerns and to do this on your own terms and in your own words. You may also meet the participation requirement by speaking up in class, talking with others outside of class time, and by attending discussion sessions.

VIII. Grading
For the papers grading will be broken down as follows: 35% for your strongest essay, 30% for your next best effort and 25% for your paper that is the least successful of the three. 5% for the quiz and 5% for participation.

IX. Attendance
Attendance is required. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Otherwise, if you miss a class, you will need a documented excuse. Any undocumented absences over and above the one unexcused absence will have an impact on your final grade. Since Brandeis allows a shopping period, the attendance requirement will not "kick in," Until the start of the second week of classes.

X. Teaching Fellows
Several teaching fellows have been assigned to the Human Rights class. The Teaching Fellows will be primarily responsible for reading the papers and making comments on them as well as participating in and leading discussions on the readings and questions that come up in class. They will also be available to discuss your ideas for a paper with you. I shall also read all the papers before grades are handed out. If you are convinced an error has been made, first talk with the teaching fellow to whom you have been assigned. If you are still not satisfied, you may bring your paper to me.
XI. Films
A few films will be shown during the semester, among them, LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY. GHOSTS OF RWANDA and THE POLITICS OF FOOD

XII. Small Group Discussions
In larger classes discussion groups can be very helpful. Occasional discussion sections will be scheduled especially after paper topics are handed out and before a paper is due. Discussion groups will give you an opportunity to explore some of the complex issues of the course in greater depth.

XIII. Office Hours
I shall hold office hours from 2:00 to 3:00 on Tuesdays and by appointment. My office is located in RABB, Room 330.

XIV. Messages
If you wish to leave a messages for me, the best way to reach me is via email. My email address is “Andreas Teuber” teuber@brandeis.edu.

Note: If you a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and you would like to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in PHIL 19A, please see me.