

Erasmus Institute of Philosophy and Economics (EIPE)

EIPE Workshop

“Human Rights: Theory Meets Practice”

Friday, 19 June 2015

Venue: Campus Woudestein, Theil Building, room: C1-1

Erasmus Institute for Philosophy and Economics (EIPE)
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Aim and Topic: Few concepts are as frequently invoked and taken for granted and at the same time regularly attacked and disregarded as human rights. The absence of a firm philosophical grounding of human rights has frequently been pronounced as one of the reasons for this gap between the ideal and reality of human rights. What do human rights mean? Are they just moral aspirations without legal or philosophical foundation? Or can one propose a notion of human dignity, agency or freedom as a foundation of human rights? What is the relation between philosophical views of human rights and their practice? Can one legitimately make a connection between human rights and (civil) resistance?

This workshop aims to bring political theorists and activists together in order to explore a fruitful dialogue between the theory and practice of human rights. We aim to explore the two-way relation between theory and practice of human rights: What can be the contribution of the normative political theory to the practice of human rights? The other way around, which theoretical insights can be derived from political practice and activism of human rights?

Programme

Part I: Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights

Chair: Constanze Binder (Erasmus University Rotterdam)

15.00-15.45

Ayşen Candaş (Bogazici University)

Title: *Given the durable fact of diversity, what can we legitimately impose on one another?*

15.45-16.30

Robin Celikates (University of Amsterdam)

Title: *Is the Marxist Critique of Human Rights (Still) Valid?*

16.30-16:45 Coffee break

Part II: From Theory to Practice of Human Rights

(Panel Discussion with an input statement by Doutje Lettinga)

Chair: Ingrid Robeyns (Utrecht University)

16.45-17.30

Doutje Lettinga (Amnesty International Netherlands)

Title: *How revolutionary are global human rights?*

17:30 Drinks and Dinner

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Abstracts

Given the durable fact of diversity, what can we legitimately impose on one another?

Ayşen Candaş (Bogazici University)

Abstract: ...neither European countries nor Turkey can overcome their problems of inclusion/exclusion and begin to meaningfully address these before going back to the basic principles of inclusion, and to the basic principles of democracy as a basic rights guaranteeing regime.

Is the Marxist Critique of Human Rights (Still) Valid?

Robin Celikates (University of Amsterdam)

Abstract: In this talk I first give a brief account of the development of Marx's thought on (human) rights, before zooming in on the complex critique of human rights presented in "On the Jewish Question". I then discuss in which respects rights can be regarded as ideological from a Marxist perspective and what kind of politics of human rights might follow from these critical insights.

How revolutionary are global human rights?

Doutje Lettinga (Amnesty International Netherlands)

Abstract: In this presentation, I will discuss the relationships between international human rights organizations and new civic activism as displayed in global uprisings of the past several years. Contemporary action groups and protest movements express a broad range of grievances related to social justice, human dignity and "real" democracy. In their contestation of economic and political power structures that produce and reproduce inequality and injustice, people have adopted new modes and methods of protest. These differ from the institutionalized politics of human rights organization in terms of their understanding of social change, modes of organization, and action repertoires. I will discuss how new civic activism poses particular challenges to international human rights organizations (IHROs), which can be seen as too hierarchal, elitist, moderate and too politically contained to achieve the desired system change. I will argue that, in order to forge successful transnational linkages, IHROs need to seek for more reciprocal and horizontal relations with activists on the ground and create more space for diverse strategies and vocabularies for progressive social change alongside human rights. The new civic politics with an unruly character and conventional human rights advocacy are both valuable and need not be reconciled. IHROs can continue to play a supportive role by continuing to defend the basic rights of protesters, while enabling them to be their own agents of change and helping them articulate their own grievances and aspirations in more coherent and strategic ways on both national and international levels. They can also try to relate their economic and social rights work to claims for social justice, while recognizing the limits of a legal rights understanding for radical system change.