

Henry J. Steiner, Philip Alston, and Ryan Goodman, *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals*. 3th Edition. Oxford University Press, 2008, 1560pp.

This course book examines the world of contemporary human rights, including legal norms, political contexts, moral ideals, humanitarian laws of war, human rights discourse, state interests, international relations and institutions, governmental (state) and nongovernmental (nonstate) actors, and economic development. The boundaries of the subject are steadily expanding. Since the Second World War, the human rights movement which grew out of that war has become an indelible part of our legal, political and moral landscape. The book uses the term ‘movement’ to include governmental and intergovernmental, as well as nongovernmental developments since 1945. Unlike some contemporary usage that restricts the term to nongovernmental actors, given the breadth and complexity of the movement, including its engagement with law, politics, morals and radically different cultures, the course book necessarily includes materials from a wide range of disciplines.

The three principal themes of law, politics and morals are interrelated, indeed inseparable, to achieve an understanding of the movement. The political and moral aspects of international human rights are self-evident; it is the international ‘legal’ aspect that is novel. The rules and standards of contemporary human rights are expressed not only through state constitutions, laws and practices, but also through treaties and international custom, as well as the work products (decisions about action, forms of adjudication, studies, investigative reports, resolutions, recommendations) of diverse international institutions and agencies. Throughout, the materials underscore the youth of this movement, and the task of students and others committed to its ideals is to see themselves not as apprentices learning about an established, even static, framework of ideas and institutions, but rather as shapers and architects of the movement’s ongoing development.

The book’s goal is then not only to train students to work effectively within the present structure and boundaries of the human rights movement, but also to impart a broad as well as critical understanding of it, and to provoke ideas about the directions in which it may be or ought to be heading. Human rights are violated within individual states, not in outer space or on the high seas. One might therefore argue that the study of rights should concentrate on different states—say, human rights in Nigeria, in Pakistan, Peru, China, the United States, Iran, or France. Such a book could offer contextual studies of human rights issues—police brutality, freedom of the press, religion and the state, discrimination, political pluralism, and so on—that would draw upon different national histories and political cultures. It would have the character and high value of studies in comparative law, history and culture. This book follows a different path. The distinctive aspect of the human rights movement over the last half century has been its invention and creation on the international level. Hence the stress is on the international human rights system as well as on the vital

relationships between that system and states' internal orders. Although many examples throughout the book draw on human rights violations within one or another state, most of the materials address international norms, processes and institutions, both in their own terms and in terms of their relationships with states' internal orders.

In many states, courts will at best be marginal actors overseeing human rights issues. With the exception of the European human rights system (and, to a lesser extent, the Inter-American system), the same can be said today about the permanent international tribunals or committees, with respect both to dispute resolution and development of human rights norms. The serious and systemic issues—torture, raw discrimination, corrupt process, ethnic cleansing, genocide, unspeakable poverty, political repression—figure in political processes within states and in international organizations. For such reasons, and unlike the typical 'casebook', this course book devotes less than a fifth of its space to opinions of courts and other tribunals. Many of these opinions are very recent, for it is true that the significance of state constitutional courts has expanded over the last decade. South Africa provides one striking example: the range of readings readily accessible to university students from academic backgrounds as varied as law, government, political economy, philosophy, theology, business or public health.

Human rights courses benefit greatly by including students from such diverse backgrounds, as well as from diverse states and cultures. The first edition, which served as the principal course book in human rights courses in a surprising number of countries, was used by faculty in both graduate schools and colleges, including departments of law, government, and international relations. About fifty percent of the text and materials in the book is either new or substantially revised. The text and materials are too extensive to be covered in their entirety in most human rights courses. Choice will surely vary among professors, depending on the time available for a course and the purposes for which the course is offered.

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