



## COLLOQUIUM SERIES

# **“Human Rights and the Priority of the Moral”**

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The main point of contention between “naturalistic” and “political” theories of human rights concerns the need to invoke the notion of *moral human rights* (i.e. rights that all human beings have simply by virtue of their humanity) in justifying the international practice of human rights. Political theories argue that we should bypass the question of the justification of moral human rights and start with the question of which norms and principles should be adopted to regulate the practice. Naturalistic theories by contrast, claim that a convincing answer to the latter question will have to presuppose some answer to the former. An adequate justification of the system of human rights included in the international practice will ultimately have to rely on some appeal to moral human right. I call this view the “Priority of the Moral over the Political”.

This paper argues that the *Priority of the Moral* is harder to dismiss than political theories of human rights suggest, and that before we can assess the plausibility of these theories, they need to say more in defence of their claim that they can do without it. It is incumbent upon political theories to show that they do not surreptitiously appeal to something like the *Priority of the Moral*.

I then consider the two main objections that seem to have motivated many philosophers to abandon the naturalistic approach to the justification of human rights in favour of the political one. I conclude by suggesting that a variant of naturalistic justification, the basic needs account, has the resources to address these objections

**Friday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

**Room: 3202 River Building**

**Time: 3:00 pm**

***All are welcome!***