

**The Nonidentical of Human Rights:
The Individual and the Concept of Dignity in Post-1945 Human Rights Debates**

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The project focuses on post-1945 human rights debates, with special attention to dignity as a legal concept and to the political implications of various interpretations of individual and collective rights.

In the last 15–20 years, the academic field of human rights has undergone a remarkable expansion with a veritable flood of both empirically grounded and theoretical studies. The bulk of this academic work has focused on either the political history of human rights or the main concepts of human rights (self-determination, individual freedom, and dignity) and questions of their universalizability. Nevertheless, the field is still short of works that combine historical and sociological approaches with philosophical analysis in order to consider, on the one hand, the impact of current social conditions on individual freedom and personal responsibility and, on the other hand, the political implications of various interpretations of individual and collective rights.

The aim of my doctoral project is to contribute to filling this gap. I will bring under-discussed theories and actors into the human rights discussion, particularly Theodor W. Adorno's concept of the Nonidentical and his reflections on personal responsibility (*Mündigkeit*) as well as Franz R. Bienenfeld's theoretical writings and political activity. As a representative of the World Jewish Congress in the 1940s–50s, Bienenfeld commented on the draft Universal Declaration of Human Rights and combined a demand for a minimum standard of human rights with a universal idea of humanity. Drawing from these thinkers' insights, I argue that human rights cannot be understood if they are reduced to factual constraints or moral prescriptions — yet they are not free from either. Hannah Arendt's and Franz Neumann's ideas of political freedom and Judith Shklar's view of liberalism as a structure of norms by which to humanize public life can further sharpen our understanding of the limits, the possibilities, the role, and the meaning of human rights today.

In light of a growing acceptance of authoritarian regimes, even in established democracies, it is more urgent than ever to consider what kind of democratic awareness we need, and what the rule of law and human rights mean in a globalized world. The authors I turn to in this research can help to concretize the concept of dignity within legal and political theory and remind us of the normative promise that was once more closely associated with human rights.