

Human Rights and Animal Rights

Recommended Level of Instruction: Designed for an upper-level political theory course; does not require prior exposure to political theory or human rights course work. Could easily be used in an introductory-level course given the student-driven discussion nature of the lesson, especially if used to introduce the topic of what are human rights.

Keywords: theories of human rights, animal rights

Objectives: Students will reflect on what makes something a *human* right. They will question the meaning of human rights, and the basic structure of the idea. Students will analyze why only humans have human rights.

Reading(s)/ Material(s):

- Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights" (available to download at):

<http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/animals/regan-text.html>

Synopsis of Material: Regan works through different understandings of rights, duties, and obligations to discuss whether animals have rights. Regan considers the arguments by which animals can be said not to have rights, and what these rights then mean for different groups of humans if the logic holds. Regan depicts the animal rights movement as part of the human rights movement.

Recommended Background Information:

-None needed, but could be familiar with competing definitions of human rights

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be used as a frame for the discussion

Discussion Questions/Activity:

Warm up: students can write down their own answers to some of the following questions, or discuss the questions in small groups, before a broader class discussion. An alternative is to have students write down their thoughts, then talk in small groups, and then have a broader class discussion.

Discussion questions: (works best with board work to list students' conceptions, allowing for grouping of similar points or highlighting where different conceptions are in tension with one another)

- 1) "Human rights" are premised on two main components (human; rights) that raise three questions:
what are humans, or what makes someone a human? What are rights? What are human rights?
- 2) Are there important distinctions between "rights" and "human rights"? If so, what are they? What do these distinctions tell us about human rights? If there are no important distinctions, does that mean all rights are human rights? What are the implications for the current nation-state system if all rights are human rights?
- 3) Do human rights apply to everyone? Why? How are human rights guaranteed?
- 4) Does support for human rights require support for animal rights? Do animals have rights? Do they have human rights? Why?
- 5) What do you have to believe either about animals or about rights to believe that animals have rights?
- 6) On what bases can we deny animal rights? Do/Can these arguments be used to deny humans their rights as well?
- 7) On what bases can we support animal rights? What are the implications of doing so?
- 8) What does equality mean if animals have rights?

Developed by Daniel Tagliarina, PhD

Department of Political Science, Lycoming College