

# Building a concept of human rights critical thinking sample

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



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## Introduction

The emergence of a collective consciousness towards attaining an enduring kind of peace among different nations of the world has helped foster the concept of human rights. The emergence of the United Nations (UN), a supranational covenant between several nations, has made human rights a compelling concept following years of international conflicts brought by the First and Second World Wars. Whereas there is an understanding that the concept of human rights constantly change over time, it is also equally agreeable that not all people agree with the concept of UN on human rights. At best, many see human rights conceptualized by the UN as a mere declaration through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) but without substantial foundations in terms of cultural conflicts. The prevailing concept of human rights in the status quo, according to some critics, resemble that of western characteristics and that the UDHR is an attempt by

the UN to universalize ideals of the west on the matter (Donnelly, 2013).

Is there really a genuinely universal concept of human rights? This study seeks to defend the premise that a concept of human rights based on dignity inherent in all humans is amenable across all kinds of differences, particularly those cultural in nature. The recognition that humans have inherent dignity stems from historical premises on natural rights and enhanced by philosophers from the Enlightenment period. Major conflicts throughout history, from the American and French Revolution to the First and Second World Wars, further influenced and compelled proponents to construct a concept of human rights that would transcend all equally inherent differences humans have with one another. Establishing the foregoing thus requires a perusal of literature mostly historical in nature, for identifying the origins of human rights concepts stands as an essential requirement for constructing a formidable defense for a universal concept of human rights based on human dignity.

## **Understanding Human Dignity**

Human dignity serves as a strong point for a universal concept of human rights. With that, gaining a full understanding of human dignity becomes an important point for this study. The inherent nature of dignity in humans stems from ideas coming from natural rights, which emanated during the medieval period as a crucial component of natural laws. Human nature at both the personal and social levels is a core basis of natural laws. A thorough analysis of human nature allows one to have valuable insights on the moral aspects covering the relations between humans. Therefore, it follows that

human rights find firm basis from the moral implications of human nature. The fact that human nature is inherent among humans makes human rights a universally accepted concept (Donnelly, 2013; Meron, 1989).

What exactly is human nature? How does human nature influence moral implications pertaining to human relations? In the most basic sense, human nature is devoid of cultural distinctions and influences – one that has become a major concern of critics of human rights declared by the UN through the UDHR. Yet, human nature has become a heavily debated concept. Many have stressed for a fix and determined concept of human nature, while several others as well have claims in favor of its fluidity. More importantly, however, is the fact that a neutral viewpoint on human nature exists, wherein insights on possible changes that may emerge undermine the premise that the nature of humans is fixed and determinable. Yet, the fact that the concept of human nature has several perspectives riddling it does not mean that a clear universal concept of human rights is impossible to attain (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink, 2002).

## **Universal Concept of Human Rights Based on Human Dignity**

Contrary to what most critics claim, the concept of human rights espoused by the UDHR is not merely a declaration made by the UN. The UN did not represent a single approach to human rights, for it has heavily considered the First and Second World Wars as urgent reminders of the need to impose lasting peace across all nations. Whereas some critics claim that the UDHR employs western approaches in defining human rights mostly based on its defiance of traditions appearing as oppressive that happened to originate

from places outside western nations, they have equally failed to justify the prudence of said traditions. A contentious instance is the case of religious traditions, particularly on the aspect of restricting the clothing of women to full body and figure-covering types in Islam, with severe punishments as retributive consequences for any violation thereof. Whereas the UDHR calls for freedom of choice without violating the rights of others, it proved inadequate as an argument that would end any debates on mostly religious matters. Given the case, adherents of Islam would say that Muslim women willfully submit themselves to following the rules without any malice or coercion whatsoever. Some Muslim women, for instance, would find themselves contented with the aforementioned traditional rule, perhaps as a matter of showing their religious faith or just a mere act of compliance to prevent unwanted altercations. Other Muslim women would claim for the oppressiveness of said tradition, which would later enable claims of oppressive acts brought forth by patriarchy in Islam or foreign influences brought forth by the globalizing world. Yet, what the UN could do to resolve said matter is to assist women against violent punishments in return for failing to practice strict abidance to tradition. Such fear effectively eliminates consent on the part of those afflicted, hence constituting a violation of their inherent dignity that makes up their rights as humans, in the universal sense. Verily, a universal concept of human rights based on inherent human dignity seeks to prevent any form of fear and repression caused against people, regardless if such finds trigger from religious factors. Therefore, a universal concept of human rights pertains to the need to stop inflicting fear and repression against any people for any reason. Such could prevail amidst

any differences, particularly religion (Clapham, 2006; Donnelly, 2013; Steiner & Alston, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

A close perusal of historical literature on human rights strongly remarks that the emergence of a universal concept of human rights has gone, and will continue to go through several endeavors. Therefore, it is noteworthy to think of human rights as one that finds universal acceptance through sheer regard for the inherent dignity of humans. Violations to human dignity in the form of oppressive actions need not find varying cultural interpretations. A person can rest his case against any action violating his rights as a human being just through a breach of his free consent. Consent, in that case, should not go to the expense of undermining that of other persons as well. Overall, a universal concept of human rights rests on the need to protect human dignity through peaceful means towards peaceful ends. Indeed, such is the view espoused by the UDHR, hence making clear the premise that it is not just a mere declaration.

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