

The First Step in Understanding Human Rights

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Abstract

The ambiguity of the concept of human is of the main obstacles in understanding human rights. Traditional philosophers take the Aristotelian essentialist approach to define human and claim that such produced definition provides us with a needed basis for the discovery of human rights. In this article, I elaborate on the Platonist and Aristotelian approach to the understanding of human and show how Aristotelian definition of human is neither philosophically sufficient nor practically applicable. Furthermore, such an approach is the root of many misunderstandings of human rights. Next, through criticizing the basis of essentialism, I present an alternative approach for defining human in analytic tradition based on which the “definition of human” is equivalent to the “meaning of the term human.” This approach is both immune to the philosophical flaws of essentialist approach and properly applicable to identify the instances of human.

Keywords: Human Rights; Definition of Human; Aristotelian Definition; Essentialism; Definition as Meaning.

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