

Exam question - HUMR 5131 (autumn 2013)

Choose one of the two questions below:

1. The Increasing Importance of Human Rights

It is generally claimed that over the last half-century human rights have entered the political agenda internationally as well as on the national level, and moreover that they have spurred significant political changes. However, as for explaining and understanding the exact role(s) of human rights in, for instance, transitions from dictatorship to democracy, or justifying international cooperation, different scholars offer different perspectives.

Starting with the various explanations of the growing impact of human rights offered by the authors on your reading list, compare and discuss relevant theories about how human rights spread and take hold. Use empirical examples and conclude with your own opinion on the issue.

2. The Status of Human Rights

Even as 'human rights', as a phrase, has become familiar all over the world among scholars and politicians as well as laypeople, there is no full agreement about the exact meaning of the concept nor in justifying their status as universal law. Studying meaning and justification involves philosophical as well as empirical inquiries about the status of human rights.

From your reading list, choose at least two different attempts at proving (or disproving) the universal validity of human rights and use least two empirical examples. Discuss the relative merits of these approaches and draw your own conclusions.