

RIGHTS FOR ALL

EXERCISES IN
**Work It
Out!**

Political Animals

Il rapporto tra l'uomo e l'animale è stato sempre motivo di conflitto. Gli animali (domestici o selvatici) erano visti come specie inferiori agli esseri umani. Il filosofo canadese e difensore dei diritti degli animali Will Kymlicka vuole sovvertire questa concezione.





In the United States alone, ten billion land animals¹ a year are raised² and killed for human consumption, often kept in terrible conditions of industrial confinement. Across the world, the habitat of wild animals is being destroyed and their numbers radically diminishing³. Overharvesting⁴, pollution⁵, habitat destruction, overhunting⁶ and unsustainable human population growth are key causes of animal extinction.

YOU BEAST!

Today, the animal rights movement is strong, but there are still many people who believe that humans are superior to animals and that treatment not fit⁷ for humans is suitable⁸ for animals. Some even argue that to believe in the human rights cause we must also accept the idea of a hierarchy⁹ of species.

A MORAL CATASTROPHE

Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka argues that the way human rights are framed¹⁰ and justified in terms of what he calls “species narcissism” is a moral catastrophe. In the book *Zoopolis*, co-authored by the animal activist Sue Donaldson, he offers a new approach to the theory and practice of animal rights. Rather than focus¹¹ on moral issues¹², the book argues that animals are political entities and we should look at how they relate¹³ to human societies.

Clockwise from above: confined pigs; frankfurters; Jane Goodall researching chimpanzees in the 1960s.

UPPER INTERMEDIATE **B2**

ON CD 14

GLOSSARY

- 1 **land animals:** animali terrestri
- 2 **to raise:** allevare
- 3 **to diminish:** diminuire
- 4 **overharvesting:** sovracoltivazione
- 5 **pollution:** inquinamento
- 6 **overhunting:** caccia eccessiva
- 7 **fit:** appropriato
- 8 **suitable:** adatto
- 9 **hierarchy:** gerarchia
- 10 **to frame:** incorniciare
- 11 **rather than:** invece di
- 12 **issues:** questioni
- 13 **to relate:** relazionarsi
- 14 **to take into account:** prendere in considerazione
- 15 **sovereignty:** sovranità
- 16 **settlements:** insediamenti
- 17 **pigeons:** piccioni
- 18 **mice:** topi (singolare: mouse)

CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS

Kymlicka and Donaldson separate animals into three main categories: domestic animals should be given co-citizenship, they say, in which their best interests and preferences would be taken into account¹⁴. Wild animals, on the other hand, should be given sovereignty¹⁵ on their land enough so that they can sustain their way of living and prosper. And finally, they argue, animals that are wild but live in human settlements¹⁶, such as pigeons¹⁷ or mice¹⁸, should be seen as residents of our societies, but not fully included in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. ☺



INTERVIEW

THE EQUALITY
OF SPECIES

Will Kymlicka is a Canadian political thinker who has moved¹ his area of interest from multiculturalism in human societies to the rights of animals. Kymlicka, who is vegan, asks why human rights and animal rights are so often perceived to be in conflict. He also questions the logic and ethics of the supremacy of our species as a precondition for the human rights cause. In a conference on the subject, Kymlicka began with the unintentional origins of this latter² theory with the UN³'s adoption of the Universal Declaration in 1948.

**Will Kymlicka (Canadian accent):**

When the UN first adopted the declaration on human rights, the UN asked Jacques Maritain, who was a famous philosopher of the day, to explain to the world the point and purpose⁴ of the idea of human rights. And Maritain said: "The purpose of human rights is to... elevate humanity above animality and to liberate humanity from the animality which enslaves⁵ him." So for Maritain the whole point and purpose of human rights was to radically distinguish humans from animals.

AN OPEN DEBATE

As there was no organised animal rights movement at the time, this view was not controversial. From the 1970s on⁶, however, as animal activism developed, the human rights movement did too, and there was a flourishing⁷ of theories unattached⁸ to the ideology of human supremacy. The basic idea behind them was that humans were subject to certain threats in society and the state had an obligation to protect them.

Will Kymlicka: Starting in the 1970s, we've seen the emergence of an active



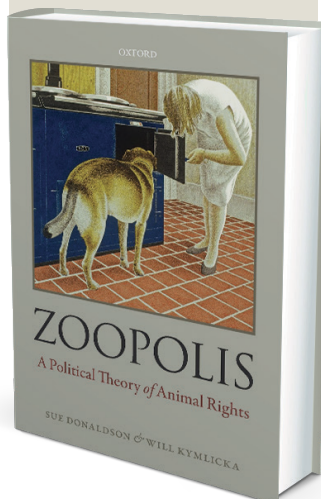
Above: human rights activist Eleanor Roosevelt reading the Universal Declaration in 1948. Below: Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's book *Zoopolis*.

ADVANCED C1

ON CD 15

GLOSSARY

- 1 **to move:** spostare
- 2 **this latter:** quest'ultima
- 3 **UN:** ONU (United Nations)
- 4 **the point and purpose:** il senso e lo scopo
- 5 **to enslave:** schiavizzare
- 6 **from the 1970s on:** dagli anni '70 in poi
- 7 **flourishing:** il prosperare
- 8 **unattached:** svincolate
- 9 **vocal:** veemente



vocal⁹ animal rights movement which has challenged¹⁰ ideologies of human supremacy. And many theorists of human rights have decided they don't want to and don't need to attach their defence of human rights to human supremacy. That trend increased and expanded in the 1990s and into the 2000s. And all of these ideas seem naturally to apply to animals as well.

COUNTER-REACTION

However, in the last ten years a new and increasingly influential group of human rights defenders that Kymlicka calls 'new dignitarians' has argued its case¹¹ from the perspective of a species hierarchy.

Will Kymlicka: In the past ten years, we've seen what I view as a very powerful counter-reaction to reconnect human rights to human supremacy. The 'new dignitarians' are people who say that the purpose of human rights is to protect human dignity. And their second claim¹² is that the essence of human dignity is that we're better than animals. It is a very powerful view.

HIERARCHICAL THINKING

Using dignity — a word that seems absurd when applied to animals — as a precondition for human rights ignores growing evidence of continuity between humans and animals, says Kymlicka, while it cov-



erty¹³ supports the billion-dollar industry of factory farming¹⁴. What's more, he argues, these human supremacists promote views that may place certain human groups at risk.

Will Kymlicka: I think this is bad, not just for animals, I think this is bad for human rights. Historically, some humans have been seen as less than fully human: women, racial minorities, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities... So, this doesn't just lead to prejudice and stereotypes, it also leads to violence. If you think that a member of another group [is] governed just by basic instincts you're going to view them as beasts who need to be governed through force.

LOVE ANIMALS TO LOVE HUMANS

Those that draw¹⁵ a sharper¹⁶ distinction between humans and animals are more likely¹⁷ to dehumanise other humans, Kymlicka argues, as it teaches us to deaden¹⁸ our ethical sensibilities. He believes that there is a more moral and more logical way to approach the debate.

Will Kymlicka: We have a large number of prisoners who are

kept in solitary confinement for long periods of time — racial minorities vastly overrepresented — the average public just sees them as animals who need to be caged¹⁹. It would be good to have an understanding of why it is wrong to keep animals in solitary confinement, in zoos and cages. We know that this causes self-harming²⁰ behaviour, depression, mental trauma, even PTSD²¹... and if people had a sense of why it's wrong, it would be very easy to persuade them that it's a human rights violation to keep humans in solitary confinement. ☒

Clockwise from above left: confiscated elephant tusks in Thailand; a lion destined for a rehabilitation centre in South Africa; UK animal rights campaigners protest against the leather industry.

↳ GLOSSARY

- 10 to challenge:** sfidare
- 11 to argue one's case:** difendere la posizione
- 12 claim:** affermazione
- 13 covertly:** di nascosto
- 14 factory farming:** allevamento industriale
- 15 to draw:** tracciare, disegnare
- 16 sharper:** più marcata (lett. più affilata)
- 17 to be more likely:** avere più probabilità
- 18 to deaden:** mitigare
- 19 to cage:** ingabbiare
- 20 self-harming:** autolesionarsi
- 21 PTSD:** sindrome da stress post traumatico (acronimo di *post-traumatic stress disorder*)

