

Overcoming Sociological Naïveté in the Animal Rights Movement

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The following paper draws upon Milner's theory of social status to explain why nonhuman animals generally are not accorded equal status or the same level of compassion as human beings. The inexpandable nature of status means that one's position in a status hierarchy depends upon how one fares relative to everyone else. Acquiring status requires the ability to excel in terms of collective expectations, or the ability to conform appropriately to extant group norms. Moreover, social associations with high-status individuals usually further enhance one's relative status. Animals are disadvantaged along each of these aspects of status systems in most cases. Moreover, their relational and cultural distance from human beings reinforces their inferior position, reducing the likelihood of human beings defining them as "innocent victims" or otherwise according them full and equal rights. Yet animal rights activists who are aware of these sociological realities will be in a better position to advocate more effectively on behalf of at least selected nonhuman species. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2016 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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