In his very useful introduction to the concept of "rights" (which we will be reading), Tom Campbell argues that as critical philosophy, the study of rights can be broken down into five themes: (1) what are rights? (2) who can have them? (3) what are the rights that they can have? (4) are these sufficient, or are we deserving of other rights? and (5) how do we best secure the rights we already have?

This seminar accepts those as basic questions, but places them within an historic (i.e., continually changing) framework, not just a philosophical one; and, in so doing, regroups these questions into two larger questions. By focusing on "human rights" (and the wrongs of which human seem endlessly capable), I intend to focus on the historical (rather than biological) question of "humanness". While the concept that humans are inviolable (i.e., that rights adhere to their very humanness) is an ancient one, even if it is more observed in the breech, the question of who is human - and therefore deserving of rights - has been contested for millennia. This may seem odd, even quaint or pathetic - but it is useful to remember that in 2006 we are still debating what it is that separates humans from our closest non-human cousins. Don't forget, we are only a little more than two centuries removed from the drafting of the U.S. Constitution which, for census purposes, established that slaves would be counted as "three-fifths of a Person"