

FIL4300, FALL 2018

Detailed course description

ANIMAL ETHICS

Nonhuman animals have been left out of the moral realm during most of the history of Western thought. At worst, they were thought of as natural *automata* or machines (Descartes). At best, if their mistreatment was ever condemned, it was not because of the suffering or harm directly caused to them, but because the perpetrator's conduct towards them indirectly reflected the perpetrator's conduct towards humanity (Kant). Standardly and with few exceptions (Montaigne, Voltaire, Bentham), nonhuman animals have been thought of as being there for the use and enjoyment of humans or, rather, *man* (Aristotle, Aquinas). Up until today, their status as property remains mostly unquestioned. And we keep using them and enjoying them for food, clothing, research, entertainment, and so on.

In this course, we will take Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975) as a starting point. Singer's claim that "all animals are equal" triggered the beginning of animal ethics as an independent field. After analyzing Singer's preference utilitarianism based on sentience as the relevant criterion for moral consideration, we will go on to consider the various arguments for direct moral consideration of nonhuman animals that have been developed since then. Specifically, we will explore deontological defenses of animal rights, as well as the place that (some) nonhuman animals have been accorded within theories of moral sentiments and feminist ethics.

After revising the different theoretical approaches that aim to include nonhuman animals within the moral universe, in the second part of the course we will focus on more specific connections between animal ethics and other fields. We will see what legal theorists have to say about the inclusion of animals as holders of legal rights, and their critique of the above defenses; we will inquire into the uneasy relationship between animalists and environmentalists, and we will see how nonhuman animals may be included in political theories of citizenship and territory. We also plan to visit an animal research facility, in order to get a better grasp of the place of animal ethics in daily practice.

All along, direct participation will be encouraged, and case studies will be discussed. Insofar as the course is focused on the ethical questions that arise in our treatment of non-human animals, it should be of interest not just for philosophy students, but also for those working directly or indirectly with nonhuman animals in the lab or in the field.

This handout, all my lectures, and all new information and updates will appear in Canvas, so you should familiarize yourself with it and check the course's site regularly. All the texts are available online if you follow the links below them.