

Phil 0017: Animal Ethics

This syllabus is subject to change. Please see Canvas for the latest version.

Instructor: Patrick McKee

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Office hours: by appointment (email me)

Course location and time: Tu/Th 9:00–10:20am in Corliss-Brackett 106

Course description:

This course is an introductory survey of philosophical issues in animal ethics. We affect the lives of non-human animals in myriad ways. What moral obligations do we have towards them? For example, is it wrong to eat meat? To experiment on animals? To keep pets? Should we try to reduce predation? How (morally) important is it that we save endangered species? Some take these to be among the most important ethical questions of our time. We will start with a brief overview of animal minds; then we'll examine several contemporary theories of animal ethics. Along the way, we'll pay careful attention to the implications of philosophy for everyday life.

Course goals:

You will learn how to read philosophy, how to write philosophy, and how to talk about philosophy with your peers. Hopefully, you will also learn to enjoy doing these things! You will also learn a good deal about animal ethics. And you will learn about ethics more broadly: on any view, the question of how we ought to treat non-human animals is connected to the question of how we ought to treat human ones.

Prerequisites:

None

Course materials:

All readings will be posted on Canvas. We will draw on several books, which you may wish to purchase, though you're not required to do so. These are:

Beauchamp, Tom L., and R. G. Frey, eds. 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Singer, Peter. 1980/2011. *Practical Ethics*. Third ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Regan, Tom. 1983/2004. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Kagan, Shelly. 2019. *How to Count Animals, More or Less*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Korsgaard, Christine M. 2018. *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Learning activities, assessments, and allocation:

15% *Attendance and participation*. Attendance is required. If you need to miss class for any reason, please let me know in advance. More than three unexcused absences may result in a lower grade for the course. Participation includes reading the assigned materials before class (ideally more than once), asking questions, and discussing constructively and respectfully. Discussion in office hours can count towards your participation grade.

15% *Short weekly writing assignments*. Every week, you will write a short response to a prompt concerning the coming week's readings. These will be graded for completion.

35%* *Midterm essay*. 4–6 pages.

35%* *Final essay*. 6–8 pages.

*If your final essay grade is higher than your midterm essay grade, I will rebalance the two so that the final counts twice as much as the midterm.

Time commitment:

Class sessions will total 35 hours. Reading, taking notes, and reviewing your notes from class will take about 6.5 hours per week. The weekly writing assignments will take about one hour per week. Each essay will take about 25 hours. The total time commitment will be about 180 hours.

Academic honesty:

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please be sure to familiarize yourself with Brown's academic code, which can be found at <https://college.brown.edu/sites/default/files/2022-04/Academic-Code.pdf>. Here is an excerpt from the academic code:

A student's name on any exercise (e.g., a theme, report, notebook, performance, computer program, course paper, quiz, or examination) is regarded as assurance that the exercise is the result of the student's own thoughts and study, stated in his or her own words, and produced without assistance, except as quotation marks, references, and footnotes acknowledge the use of printed sources or other outside help. (Brown Academic Code, p. 5)

Accessibility and accommodations:

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodation or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

Schedule of topics and readings:

Sep. 7 Introduction to the course (no reading)

Central applications: eating and experimenting on animals

Sep. 12 Rachels, “Vegetarianism”, §§1-2

Sep. 14 LaFollette, “Animal experimentation in biomedical research”, pp. 796-805
Andrews and Monsó, “Rats are us” (<https://aeon.co/essays/why-dont-rats-get-the-same-ethical-protections-as-primates>)

Background: animal minds

Sep. 19 Tye, “Do fish have feelings?”
Hill, “Insects: still looking like zombies”

Sep. 21 Godfrey-Smith, *Metazoa*, pp. 204-214
Veit, “Towards a comparative study of animal consciousness”

Sep. 26 Pigliucci, “Primates, philosophers and the biological basis of morality: a review of *Primates and Philosophers* by Frans De Waal”
Midgley, *Animals and Why They Matter*, Ch. 10, “The mixed community”

Welfare and utilitarianism

Sep. 28 Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Ch. 2, “What utilitarianism is”

Oct. 3 Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Ch. 2, “Equality and its implications”, pp. 16–24 and Ch. 3, “Equality for animals?”

Oct. 5 Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Ch. 4, “What’s wrong with killing?”, pp. 71–81 and 85–93

Oct. 10 Singer’s reply in *The Lives of Animals*, pp. 85–91
Singer, *Practical Ethics*, Ch. 5, “Taking life: animals”

Rights

- Oct. 12 Regan, “The case for animal rights” (the article)
Oct. 17 Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, Ch. 7, “Justice and equality” (but skip §7.7)
Oct. 19 Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, §9.4, “Against the use of animals in science”

Some reactions

- Oct. 24 Hursthouse, “Virtue ethics and the treatment of animals”
Oct. 26 Catch-up (no reading)
Midterm essay due Oct. 31
Oct. 31 Williams, “The human prejudice”
Nov. 2 Kagan, *How to Count Animals*, Intro and Ch. 3, “The argument from distribution”

A Kantian theory

- Nov. 7 Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, §§1.3–1.4 and Ch. 2, “Animal selves and the good”
Nov. 9 Korsgaard *Fellow Creatures*, Ch. 3, “What’s different about being human?”
Nov. 14 Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, Ch. 8, “A Kantian case for our obligations to the other animals”

Other applications: pets, predators, species, and more

- Nov. 16 DeGrazia, “The ethics of confining animals”
Nov. 21 Cohen, “The case for the use of animals in biomedical research”
Optional: Carruthers, “Against the moral standing of animals”
Nov. 23 *Thanksgiving (no class)*
Nov. 28 Marris, *Wild Souls*, Ch. 11, “Bloodshed for biodiversity” and Ch. 12, “The friendly toutouwai”
Nov. 30 McMahan, “The meat eaters”
Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures*, §§11.6–11.9 and 12.4
Dec. 5 Palmer, “The moral significance of the distinction between domesticated and wild animals”
Dec. 7 Ferrin, “Nonhuman animals are morally responsible”

Final essay due Dec. 14