

Ethics and Animals
Humane Society University
Spring, 2011

SYLLABUS

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and the Humane Society of the United States

Course Description

This course will provide an overview of the current debates about the nature and extent of our moral obligations to animals. Which, if any, uses of animals are morally wrong, which are morally permissible (i.e., not wrong) and *why*? What, if any, moral obligations do we, individually and as a society (and a global community), have towards animals and *why*? How should animals be treated? *Why*?

We will explore the most influential and *most developed* answers to these questions – given by philosophers, scientists, and animal advocates and their critics – to try to determine which positions are supported by the best moral reasons. Topics include:

- general theories of ethics and their implications for animals,
- moral argument analysis,
- general theories about our moral relations to animals,
- animal minds, and
- the uses of animals for food, clothing, experimentation, entertainment, hunting, as companions or pets, and other purposes.

Students will write a number of theoretical and practical ethical analysis papers, where positions on theoretical and practices issues concerning ethics and animals are developed, positive reasons are given in their favor and they are defended from possible objections and criticisms.

Prerequisites

None. No philosophical background is required for this course: the core readings, while written by professional philosophers (i.e., philosophy professors in universities), are intended for broad audiences (but they are often challenging, nonetheless!).

However, since this course will survey the results of scientific research on the mental and emotional lives of various animals, occasionally address how (US) law regards animals, and uncover the environmental impacts of animal use (especially animal agriculture), students are encouraged to take courses and do research on these topics concurrently or prior to this course for a richer educational experience.

Students come to this course with varying backgrounds and familiarity with philosophy, ethics, logic and related fields. The instructor is willing and able to adjust the course in various ways to better fit individual students' backgrounds, interests, goals, etc. The instructor will ask students for input on how the course might best fit their individual needs: please discuss these issues with the instructor.

Spring 2011 Term

January 30: Term Registration Begins

March 11: Term Registration Ends

March 12: Pre-week

- March 19: First Day of Classes
- March 26: Last Day to Drop Class (full refund)
- April 2: Last Day to Drop Class (partial refund)
- May 13: Last Day of Classes

Course Learning Outcomes

<p>At the conclusion of the course, students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand basic, fundamental concepts, theories and methods of reasoning from general ethics so that these might be fruitfully applied to particular moral issues concerning animals; • have developed stronger general skills in logic / critical thinking / moral argument analysis so that these skills might be used to more fruitfully identify and evaluate arguments given in defense of, or in opposition toward, particular uses of animals and general, theoretical claims about our obligations toward animals; • understand the most influential moral arguments and positions given <i>in defense of animals</i> and <i>for greater animal protection</i>, these arguments’ similarities and differences, the most common and influential objections that are raised against them and how these arguments’ advocates might respond in defense of their positions; • understand the most influential moral arguments and positions given <i>in defense of animal use</i> and <i>against increased animal protection</i>, these arguments’ differences, the most common and influential objections that are raised against them and how these arguments’ advocates might respond in defense of their positions; • understand and be able to evaluate claims about the morally-relevant empirical information needed to make informed moral judgments on ethics and animals issues; • understand what implications the various theories of ethics have for practical, concrete uses of animals, e.g., for food, for clothing, for experimentation, for entertainment, etc., as well as stronger skills at identifying and evaluating other reasons given for and against such uses of animals; • more deeply develop their own views on the nature of our obligations to animals and be more able to provide positive moral defenses of their views and respond to critical objections.

Grading

<p>Class Participation</p> <p>As an online, instructor-mediated course, you are expected to attend class by logging into the course a minimum of 5 times a week and making at least 5 substantive postings (i.e., <i>at least</i> a half page to a full page, single spaced) <i>throughout</i> the week: at least 3 of these should be responses to the discussion prompts and at least 2 responses should be to other students’ posts, to contribute to discussion. These postings should respond to the assigned discussion questions as well as raise any questions, observations, criticisms and any other responses to the readings and issues. Class weeks will end on Sunday night, at midnight, Pacific time zone (3 AM Eastern). New lectures will be posted every Monday morning.</p> <p>Class participation will be measured in several ways. First, your attendance will be recognized through your contributions to the postings. Second, the quality of your postings will shape your participation grade. To fully benefit from and contribute to the</p>	50%
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<p>course, you should raise questions that stimulate discussion about aspects of the readings or the comments of the instructor or classmates. You should actively share thoughts based on your ideas and experiences. More details on netiquette and appropriate postings will be provided.</p> <p>For each discussion week, you be able to earn 15 points. Each of the five required posts will be graded on a scale from 3 to 0 as follows:</p> <p>3 points – an excellent post is analytical, integrates reading, and furthers discussion;</p> <p>2 points – a good post shows familiarity with topic and responds to instructor or classmate’s questions or comments on the week’s topic</p> <p>1 point – a poor post does not show familiarity with reading beyond classmate’s comments or is off-topic.</p> <p>Students who do not make five substantive posts will receive a “0” for each missing post. Students are encouraged to post more than five times. The instructor will grade the five strongest posts.</p> <p>If you face difficulties in posting during a particular week (e.g. travel, family emergencies, illness), please inform the instructor immediately. Accommodations will be made for you to complete a comparable assignment. However, students are urged to make every effort to participate regularly in class.</p>	
<p>Writing Assignments</p> <p>Over the course of the semester, you will be required to write argumentative essays, i.e., papers where you</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) advance a thesis (e.g., about whether some use of animals is morally permissible or not, whether some argument in favor (or against) some use of animals is sound or not, whether some theory about animal ethics is true or not, etc.), (2) give positive reasons in its favor, and (3) raise and response to potential questions and objections. <p>For guidelines on writing a philosophy paper, please see this page: http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html</p> <p>Philosophy papers sometimes seem daunting, but they need not be: they are basically a little “sales pitch” for an <i>idea</i>:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“You should believe this claim; here’s <i>why</i>; here are some common questions and objections you might have and my responses to them, to try to show you that these are not good objections to my idea; and here’s my conclusion, reviewing what I’ve done.”</p> <p>Undergraduates are required to write 3 papers. (16% of total grade each), and can write an additional paper for extra credit.</p> <p>Graduate students are required to write 4 papers. (12.5% of total grade each)</p> <p><i>Paper topic (1), on theories of animal ethics in defense of animals is required. Students can choose the topics of their other papers, from the topics below. Student can also</i></p>	50%

propose an alternative paper assignment, to serve as one of their paper assignments: this might be a research paper, a critical response paper to some article or book that makes a moral argument concerning animals, and other possibilities. .

All essays will be posted by students in order to allow other students to benefit from each other's work, and help students improve their work, through discussion, questions and debate, to serve as "peer review." Students will also be allowed unlimited opportunities to revise their papers, provided the revisions result in deep, significant improvement. ***Papers should focus on the readings from the course: a function of the paper is to demonstrate familiarity with and understanding of these readings.***

Students will have a week to complete each paper after we discuss the topics of the paper: e.g., one week we will discuss theories of animal ethics in defense of animals; that discussion will formally end or close Sunday night; students have until the *next* Sunday night to submit your paper on that topic. This means that while students are working on this paper we will be moving on to the next topic, with new discussion questions for that week. This requires organization and keeping up on the readings and assignments, of course!

Assignments will be graded on analysis, argument, and writing (e.g., clarity, organization) on a scale from 100 to 0. Due dates for papers are firm. Unless you receive an extension from your instructor in advance of the due date, late papers will be penalized. For example, an "A" paper will receive an "A-" if it is one day late, a B+ if it is two days late, a B if it is three days late, and so on. Assignments and due dates are as follows:

Paper 1: Theories of Animal Ethics: In Defense of Animals <i>This is a required paper; you can choose from the other topics.</i>	Due on 4/10.
Paper 2: Theories of Animal Ethics: In Defense of Animal Use	Due on 4/17.
Paper 3: Wearing and Eating animals	Due on 4/29.
Paper 4: Pets, Zoos and Other Uses	Due on 5/5.
Paper 5: Experimenting on Animals	Due on 5/12. Note: shorter time for this paper option

100%

Required Texts

The course is organized around an initial presentation of three of the most influential methods of moral thinking for *human to human* interactions. We then see how these ethical theories have been extended to apply to *human to animal* interactions, i.e., how humans ought to treat non-human animals.

These perspectives are, first, a demand for equality or *equal moral consideration of interests* (developed by Peter Singer); second, a demand for respect of *the moral right to respectful treatment* (developed by Tom Regan); and, third, a demand that moral decisions be made *fairly and impartially* and the use of a novel thought experiment designed to ensure this (developed by Mark Rowlands, following John Rawls). We will see what these moral theories imply for the

general “moral status” of various kinds of animals and for particular uses of animals, e.g., for food, fashion experimentation, entertainment, and other purposes. We attempt to evaluate these theories as true or false, well-supported or not and the arguments based on them as sound or unsound.

We will also survey general moral theories that imply that we have few, if any, moral obligations to animals and other arguments given in defense of various uses of animals. One challenge for teaching an ethics and animals class is that there are fewer defenses of harmful animal use *developed by professional ethicists* than critiques of animal use. Since the common view is that animal use does not raise serious moral issues, perhaps people often do not see much need to defend that assumption. Nevertheless, we will find materials that provide the strongest and most common defenses of various uses of animals so that we might evaluate the arguments in favor of these positions.

There are four required books: they are all available online, used and are inexpensive:

1. Peter Singer, [*Animal Liberation*](#), 3rd Edition (Ecco 2002, 1990, 1975).
<http://www.princeton.edu/~psinger/>

A classic, the book that started the modern animal protection movement.

2. Tom Regan, [*Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights*](#) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). <http://tomregan-animalrights.com>

A descendent of a classic, Tom Regan’s 1983 The Case for Animal Rights. In addition to an argument that many animals possess moral rights, the book tells the stories of animal advocates’ personal development (including Regan’s) and discusses the influence of the media and animal use industries have in shaping how people often address ethics and animals. The best general introduction to ethics & animals issues.

3. Mark Rowlands, [*Animals Like Us*](#) (Verso, 2002). <http://www.markrowlandsauthor.com/>

According to PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) some people think Animals Like Us is the next Animal Liberation.

4. Angus Taylor, [*Ethics and Animals: An Overview of the Philosophical Debate*](#) (Broadview, 2009). [Any edition](#) will do.

Provides a general, “secondary source” overview of the theoretical and practical issues concerning ethics and animals.

5. OPTIONAL: Lori Gruen, [*Ethics and Animals: An Introduction*](#) (Cambridge University Press, 2011): <http://www.lorigruen.com/>

This is a brand new book, which might not be available for our course, but will likely be excellent!

Policy Statements

Academic honesty, a necessary foundation of a learning community, is expected of all students. Violations are unacceptable and are subject to academic penalties, including failure of the course. A record of the violation is submitted to the Office of Academic Affairs; repeated violations may result in suspension or dismissal from the University. Violations of academic honesty include cheating on examinations, plagiarism, and submission of papers for credit in two or more courses. Plagiarism is the act of presenting the intellectual work of others (words, ideas, artwork, computer programming code, etc.) as if it were one's own. Some common forms of plagiarism are (1) submitting someone else's paper as one's own; (2) copying a passage from another source without citing the source; (3) expressing a published idea or theory in different words, without crediting the source of the idea. Plagiarism constitutes intellectual dishonesty and undermines trust between members of the college community. Penalties involving plagiarism are serious offenses, and can result in loss of grade and loss of class standing.
