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PHL 504.01: Topics in Environmental Philosophy - Ethics and Animals

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Philosophy/Evst 504: Ethics and Animals
Fall 2011
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O.H.: tba

According to the U.S.D.A., Americans kill 8 billion animals each year for food; that's 260 animals per second. Eight to ten million animals are killed for fur each year in this country. Millions are used in biomedical experiments, product testing, and education annually (including hundreds at U. of M). Thousands of animals are used in rodeos, films, circuses, zoos, and on race tracks. A great many wild animal species worldwide are on the brink of extinction largely due to human development and technologies. Can we justify this morally? What sorts of moral and legal claims do (and should) these animals have against us? And why?

We're going to begin with two classics in this literature: essays by the "father" of the animal "liberation movement," Peter Singer and then Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights*. After that we look at more contemporary work that's largely critical, work that's inspired by a novelist. In 1999 the Nobel Prize-winning writer Jim Coetzee wrote his experimental novel *The Lives of Animals*, which features a fictional, acclaimed novelist, Elizabeth Costello, who delivers two very provocative lectures on the moral status of animals at Appleton College. Among other things, the lectures raise serious questions about the ability of analytic philosophy to represent moral life in general and about the Singer-Regan approach to animals and ethics in particular. Some very prominent philosophers, most of them sympathetic with Costello, responded to the novel. These writers include Cora Diamond, Stanley Cavell, Ian Hacking, and John McDowell. We'll spend a good part of the semester talking about those responses. By the way, Cora Diamond, a world-class Wittgenstein scholar who has written some of the most insightful literature on animals in the last century will be here as a Presidential Lecturer on 10/10.

Syllabus

8/29 Hello, Business
8/31 "Fragility," Martha Nussbaum (x); "Shooting an Elephant," Orwell (x)
9/7 Prefaces and chapter 1 from *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer (x)
9/12-9/14 *The Case for Animal Rights* (CAR), Regan, chapters 4, 5 (sections 1,2, 5, 6, 7 only), and 6
9/19-9/21 CAR: chapters 1, 2, 3; excerpts from *The Mind of the Horse*, Smythe (x); excerpts from *Horse Heaven*, Smiley (x)
9/26 "All Animals Are Not Equal," Rogers and Kaplin (x)
9/28 CAR: chapter 7
10/3 CAR: chapter 8
10/5 CAR: chapter 9
10/10-12 "Anything But Argument," Diamond (x)
10/17-10/19 "Eating Meat and Eating People," Diamond (x)
10/24-10/31 *The Lives of Animals*, Jim Coetzee

11/2 *Lives* continued, Garber
11/7 *Lives* continued, Singer
11/9-11/14 “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” Diamond, in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (PAL); “Elephant Crack-Up?” (x)
11/16 Cavell in PAL; “Of Mice and Men,” MacKinnon (x)
11/21 McDowell in PAL
11/28-11/30 Hacking in PAL; “The Old Way,” Elizabeth Marshall Thomas (x)
12/5 & 12/7 Catch-up days and pay back for our hike in September

Texts

The Case for Animal Rights (CAR), Tom Regan
The Lives of Animals, J.M. Coetzee
Philosophy and Animal Life, Cavell, et.al.

Requirements

10 2-page response papers (no more than one per/week)= 60 points
Presentation= 15 points
Final paper (You may expand on one of the response papers.)= 25 points

About the response papers: Please do not simply summarize the readings. You’ll need to hone in on a **very** specific point from one of the readings and work that point in as much depth as you can in 2 or so pages. For example, you might be struck by a particular aspect of what Regan calls the “subject of a life” criterion or you might wonder if Singer’s analogy between racism and speciesism is apt or be bothered by Costello’s analogy with the Holocaust or disagree with a particular point that Diamond makes about the inability of philosophy to represent moral life. Isolate your concern and develop it. Explain why it’s inconsistent with the rest of the essay or explain why the concept is unclear, for example. You may also be struck by an idea that you think is novel and brilliant or that sheds light on something in another essay. Develop your insights. The key here is FOCUS and DEPTH.

About presentations: Each student will give one presentation (more, depending on enrollment). Basically you’ll do the same thing in the presentation that you’re doing in the response paper. You will hone in on some specific point that you want very much to share and discuss with the class. You will need to put copies of your response paper in my mail box by 5 p.m. on the Monday before your presentation. That way everyone will have an opportunity to think about the topic prior to class and be prepared to discuss it. Work with and cite specific passages that you wish to discuss. Cite those in the response paper so we can all reread them ahead of time. When you present, you will simply summarize, briefly, the high points of the response paper, then open it up to discussion. You’ll need to facilitate discussion too so that everyone has an opportunity to talk and so that we stay focused.

About the final paper: The paper is due on our finals day (I’ll need to check on this date). It should be roughly 15 double-spaced pages. You can develop one of the response

papers or work on a different topic. In either case, please come by the office and talk with me about your topic before you start writing.