

## Philosophy of Animal Rights and Vegetarianism

Fall 2009  
Rhetoric 98 Section 3/Philosophy 198 Section 2  
Facilitator: Alex Setzepfandt  
Sponsor: R. Jay Wallace

Tuesday 5:30-7:00  
2 units  
106 Wheeler  
alexsetz@gmail.com

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### Course Description

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#### What?

We will discuss animal ethics from a philosophical point of view, meaning we will examine our obligations towards animals on how they should be treated. We will discuss topics ranging from whether animals have rights to whether our current treatment of animals is speciesist, meaning that that it is discriminatory in a manner akin to racism or sexism. The course is constructed with both philosophy and non-philosophy majors in mind. There will be time devoted to making sure all people are comfortable with the texts, understanding what philosophy is, and learning how to practice it.

#### Why?

The animal rights movement is an important contemporary social movement. Especially in the last few decades, the politics and ethics of the food we eat has been called into question. Many of the issues raised in the animal rights movement affect essentially everyone. People join the animal rights movement, I think, for its compelling philosophical arguments, many of which we will discuss in this class. The question we will ask is whether, by eating meat, we are doing something ethically acceptable. Like most ethics classes, it will provide insights into notions of common morality we take for granted. The animal rights movement is particularly unique because it's easy for anyone to participate in. People can join it, for example, by boycotting animal products when going to the grocery store.

#### How?

During the course, we will try to answer the essential question of whether vegetarianism is morally required. The course is not geared towards one answer; rather, both sides of the debate will be critically analyzed from a rational and unbiased viewpoint. The format of the class will primarily be discussion-based, with lecture used to make sure we are all on the same page. All viewpoints will be equally respected and open to criticism. We will start by considering whether animals have rights or moral standing; we will move on to whether we are morally required to be vegetarians; lastly, we will consider whether vegetarianism is a practical means for ending animal suffering.

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### Course Objectives

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- Become familiar with philosophical enquiry
- Understand the fundamental arguments behind the animal rights movement
- Consider possible answers to animal rights position

- Critically analyze arguments from both sides of the debate
- Improve writing skills in general and philosophical skills in particular
- Become comfortable with your food choices

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## Required Texts

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All texts will be available through either a printed or digital reader. Most texts are either journal articles or book excerpts. A list of required texts and discussion questions is given at the end of this document.

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## Evaluation Procedures

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There are four sections that each student will be graded on. A 75% is required to pass the class:

- **Participation (25%)**
  - Attendance
    - You are only allowed to miss two classes. Exceptions will be given only in extreme circumstances and will require make-up work.
  - Discussion
    - You are expected to do the readings before class and come prepared to discuss them. Since our class is relatively small, everybody will be expected to contribute their ideas and questions.
- **Journal Entries (40%)**
  - Journal entries are 2-3 page reflections done on any of the readings in a particular section. You can, among other things, use it to answer a discussion question, write about what you found problematic about a reading, or talk about something you are confused about.
  - There are two journal entries, the dates of which can be seen on the course calendar below. Early journal entries will be accepted, but late ones will not.
  - You should send your journal entry to my email address (alexsetz@gmail.com). Please send them in .doc format because I will use track changes in Word to comment on them. If you don't have Word, send them to me as a plain text or rtf file. Comments will be sent back within two weeks.
- **Presentation (35%)**
  - The presentation is a chance for you to synthesize what you have learned, make it into a coherent argument, and defend it in front of the class.
  - Students will write a 3-4 page paper in which they describe and object to an argument we discussed during the class.
  - Students will present their paper to the class and lead a 10-15 minutes discussion.
  - Rough drafts of the paper will be due the week before presentations begin, so I can give feedback and determine the order of the presentations.

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Course Calendar

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Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
<b>1-2</b>		<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
1	9/8	Why Take This Course?		
2	9/15	The Basic Argument	Rachels	
<b>3-6</b>		<b>Racism, Sexism and... Speciesism?</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
3	9/22	Is Speciesism Like Racism?	Singer 1	
4	9/29	Do Animals Have Unalienable Rights?	Regan	
5	10/6	Should All Suffering Be Treated Equal?	Steinbock	
6	10/13	Why is Suffering Important for Rights?	Fox	Journal Entry
<b>7-10</b>		<b>Is Vegetarianism Ethically Required?</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
7	10/20	Can We Eat Well-Raised Meat?	Pollan	
8	10/27	Is Only Factory Farm Meat Bad?	Singer 2	
9	11/3	Is Vegetarianism against Environmentalism?	Hettinger Everett	
10	11/10	Does Vegetarianism Increase Utility?	Frey Matheny	Journal Entry
<b>11-12</b>		<b>Is Vegetarianism Practical?</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>
11	11/17	Can Vegetarian Ethics Change Minds?	Rollin	
12	11/24	Should We Do More for Animal Rights?	Regan 2 Dillard	Paper Draft
<b>14-15</b>		<b>What Do You Think?</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

14	12/1	Presentations	None	Presentation
15	12/8	Presentations	None	Presentation

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### Reading List & Discussion Questions

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Rachels, James. "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism." Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat. Ed. Steve F. Sapontzis. New York: Prometheus Books, 2004. 70-80.

1. Do you think that the basic argument is convincing? If so, why do you think it has failed to convince so many people?
2. Do you think that animals and humans deserve separate moral categories?
3. Should we give moral consideration to all beings that can feel pain?

Singer, Peter. "All Animals Are Equal." Animal Rights and Human Obligations. Ed. Tom Regan and Peter Singer. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1989. 148-162.

1. Because animals cannot do many of the same things as us (e.g. voting), do they deserve no rights at all?
2. If one race were, in fact, less intelligent than another, would it be fair to give the more intelligent race special rights?
3. Should the principle of equal consideration of interests be extended to animals?
4. What is the difference between equal consideration and equal treatment?
5. Do you think that humans have inherent dignity?

Regan, Tom. "The Case for Animal Rights." In Defense of Animals. Ed. Peter Singer. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985. 13-26.

1. Do you think the case of Aunt Bea refutes utilitarianism?
2. Is there any reason to think that only *Homo sapiens* should have rights?
3. Do you agree that "inherent value ... belongs equally to those who are the experiencing subjects of a life"?

Steinbock, Bonnie. "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality." Philosophy 53.204 (1978): 247-256.

1. Do you agree with Steinbock's argument that "taking care of one's own" (6) plays an important part in preventing suffering?
2. Should we value human interests over animal interests, or rather think that most humans have *more* interests than most animals?
3. Are you convinced that the reason why we should not experiment on severely handicapped humans as opposed to chimpanzees is because we have a duty to care for beings who cannot survive on their own?

Fox, Michael. "Animal Liberation': A Critique." Ethics 88.2 (1978): 106-118.

1. Do Regan and Singer's arguments only depend on the ability of animals to suffer?
2. Does the fact that there are people with "congenital universal indifference (or insensitivity) to pain" (110) show that the ability to incur pain is unimportant for determining moral rights?
3. Does the fact that Singer would eat plants even if they felt pain show that he believes humans are morally superior?

Pollan, Michael. "An Animal's Place." The New York Times 10 Nov. 2002.

1. Pollan notes many objections that he thinks fail against Singer's argument. Do you think that any of the objections have merit?
2. Considering Regan and Singer, do you think that it is ethical to eat well-raised meat?
3. Does the fact that chickens are evolutionarily predisposed food domestication entail our right to eat them?

Singer, Peter, and Jim Mason. "The Ethics of Eating Meat" The Ethics of What We Eat. Rodale: 2006. 241-269.

1. Considering what Singer says, would you think that family farms adequately consider the interest of animals?
2. Are there reasons to become vegetarian related to social responsibility?
3. Is it ethical to eat meat that has been dumpster dived or accidentally killed?

Hettinger, Ned. "Bambi Lovers versus Tree Huggers." Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat. Ed. Steve F. Sapontzis. New York: Prometheus Books, 2004. 294-301.

1. Does our history of being predators require that we still be predators?
2. Is predation really part of the "advancement and flourishing of life" (298)?
3. Can the animal rights activist reconcile predation and the welfare of animals?

Everett, Jennifer. "Vegetarianism, Predation, and Respect for Nature." Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat. Ed. Steve F. Sapontzis. New York: Prometheus Books, 2004. 302-314.

1. Does the fact that wild animals need meat to survive justify them eating meat but not us eating meat?
2. Why does it not matter whether we are naturally disposed to being meat eaters?
3. Are eating Chicken Nuggets a form of symbolic predation?

Frey, R. G. "Utilitarianism and Moral Vegetarianism Again: Protest or Effectiveness?" Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat. Ed. Steve F. Sapontzis. New York: Prometheus Books, 2004. 118-124.

1. Will an individual not eating factory farmed meat change the system?
2. If an you as an individual cannot change something, does that mean you should try to? Think about voting, for example.
3. Is protest a good reason to become vegetarian?

Matheny, Gaverick. "Expected Utility, Contributory Causation, and Vegetarianism." Journal of Applied Philosophy 19.3 (2002): 293-297.

1. Is the case of the 100 Bandits a good parallel to the case of the utilitarian vegetarian?
2. Are you convinced that we should go by expected utility, instead of actual utility, when making decisions?

Rollin, Bernard E. "Reasonable Partiality and Animal Ethics." Ethical Theory and Moral Practice 8.1 (2005): 105-121.

1. Should the animal rights movement call for incremental change?
2. Do you think that most people would "recollect" their pro-animal rights intuitions if they were simply asked instead of told?
3. Do you think the growing feelings we have towards our pets will affect the ways we treat food animals?

Regan, Tom. "Understanding Animal Rights Violence." The Animal Rights Reader. Ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler. London: Routledge, 2003. 563-567.

1. Do you think that violence is an appropriate response to animal rights abuses?
2. Would it always be wrong to injure a human captor in order to save thousands of animals from torture?

Dillard, Courtney L. "Civil Disobedience: A Case Study in Factors of Effectiveness." The Animal Rights Reader. Ed. Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler. London: Routledge, 2003. 568-572.

1. Do you think that, when it comes to protest, open confrontation is better than symbolic representation?
2. How would you design a protest for animal rights?