PHIL 489/689 – Special Topics: Animal Ethics and Science  
Fall 2009 – 4:10-5:25 MW – Room 213 Bolton Hall

Instructor: Gary Varner  
Office: 309D Bolton  
Phone: 845-8499

Associate Professor of Philosophy  
Office hours: 12:00-2:00 MW & by appointment  
Email: gary@philosophy.tamu.edu  
Web page: http://philosophy.tamu.edu/~gary/

General description: This course will introduce students to the main philosophical theories in animal ethics and survey the ways scientific research on animal consciousness and cognition informs (or could someday inform) their application to various animals and various human uses of animals. Philosophical theories covered will include animal welfare (utilitarianism), animal rights (rights as “trump cards” against utilitarian thinking), neo-Cartesianism (the view that non-human animals are not phenomenally conscious), and anthropocentrism (the view that non-human animals don’t “count,” morally speaking, even if they are conscious). Philosophers read will probably include Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Bernard Rollin, Peter Carruthers, and Carl Cohen. Related scientific research discussed will probably include all of the following: pain and nociception, mirror self-recognition, language acquisition, episodic memory and autonoetic consciousness, and “using a ‘theory of mind’.” Designed for students majoring in the life sciences, the course assumes no previous exposure to philosophical theories or methodology. Students must, however, be committed to studying alternative theories via reasoned debate informed by the best relevant empirical research currently available and adhering to such usual standards of classroom etiquette as responding to others’ positions in a respectful way, not dominating the discussion, and so on.

Prerequisite: Permission of instructor.

Course requirements: Letter grades recorded for the course will be based on a weighted average of the following components.

For undergraduate credit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Combined average</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five “reaction papers”</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 90%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two “issue papers” (8-10 pp.)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 80% &amp; &lt; 90%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical focus</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 70% &amp; &lt; 80%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical focus</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 60% &amp; &lt; 70%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>&lt; 60%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For graduate credit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Combined average</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five “reaction papers”</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 90%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two “issue papers” (12-15 pp.)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 80% &amp; &lt; 90%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical focus</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 70% &amp; &lt; 80%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical focus</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>=&gt; 60% &amp; &lt; 70%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation &amp; two presentations</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>&lt; 60%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details on course requirements:

“Reaction papers”: These will be very short essays describing and critiquing an argument, an experimental protocol, or the data analysis and interpretation given in one of the assigned readings.
They may be a maximum of one page in length, single spaced on one side of the page in type no smaller than that used in the body of this syllabus. In the course of the semester, half of each student’s reaction papers must be on assigned empirical/scientific readings and half must be on assigned philosophical readings. Each reaction paper must be turned in 24 hours in advance of the class meeting at which the reading in question will be discussed, by emailing it to everyone in the class as an attachment in PDF format. All reaction papers are considered required reading for the class meeting in question, so check your email for them 24 hours in advance of each class meeting. An individual student may not turn in more than one reaction paper for a given class period, and each student must turn in half of their reaction papers by the end of the 7th week of the course.

Two “issue papers” (25% each): One of these must be primarily philosophical or conceptual in focus, the other primarily focused on empirical issues, and the topics must be approved ahead of time. These must be 8 to 10 pages in length for undergraduates, 12 to 15 pages for graduate students, with one due by the end of the 8th week of class and the other due at the end of the semester. Papers turned in late will be penalized one letter grade per day.

Paper/essay grading standards: Here is a general description of how I assign grades to papers and essays.

1. An essay is presumed to be a midrange B (85%) "until proven otherwise."

2. For an essay to move up from a midrange B, it must be adequate overall and outstanding in one or more respects.
   (A) To be "adequate overall" it must do everything the directions asked for, and without making any significant mistakes.
   (B) Different essays are outstanding in different respects.
      (i) Sometimes an author does a particularly good job explaining the material we have studied, doing so in a succinct, but thorough and precise way.
      (ii) Other times an essay does an outstandingly good job on the critical or evaluative portion of the assignment, for instance by coming up with an original and insightful criticism of an argument we have studied, or by coming up with an original and insightful way of responding to an objection to an argument.

3. For an essay to move down from midrange B, it must either be incomplete or get something wrong.
   (A) An essay is incomplete if it fails to do everything the instructions required.
   (B) Different essays get things wrong to different degrees.
      (i) Sometimes an author just doesn't write clearly. For example, "A reductio ad absurdum argument makes a false assumption" is an unclear and imprecise way of
expressing the thought that "In a reductio ad absurdum argument, one assumes the opposite of what one intends to prove."

(ii) Other times they say something that is just plain wrong. For example: "The ontological argument is an example of an a posteriori argument."

4. Sometimes an essay is incomplete in some way or gets something wrong, but it is also outstanding in some way. In such cases a judgment call must be made. Sometimes the outstanding aspects of an essay make up for, or more than make up for its inadequacies, and it gets a B or even an A. Sometimes the inadequacies outweigh the outstanding elements and the essay gets a C.

5. For an essay to warrant a D, it must be substantially wrong in multiple respects, and a D essay is almost never outstanding in any respect.

6. For an essay to warrant an F it must, in effect, have no redeeming features.

Attendance, participation, and class presentations (25%): The minimum and maximum grades students receive on this portion of their course grade will be limited in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unexcused absences</th>
<th>Minimum grade</th>
<th>Maximum grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 2</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 4</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may receive a grade above the minimum, but not exceeding the maximum, if in my judgment the quality (not just the quantity) of your participation in course discussions is above average or (to achieve the maximum) truly outstanding. Students taking the course for graduate credit will be required to lead class discussion twice in the course of the semester, and in assigning this portion of their grade, a heavy emphasis will be placed on these presentations.

Class email list: All students are required to subscribe to and read regularly the course email list (ANIMALETHICS@LISTSERV.TAMU.EDU), which they will also use to email copies of their “reaction papers” to class members.

Miscellaneous policies:

Excused absences and makeups: Makeups will be allowed only for assignments missed due to excused absences and these will be handled in accordance with part I, section 7 of the TAMU Student Rules. Students are advised to be aware of their responsibility for reporting excused absences pursuant to that section of the rules, which states (in section 7.3):

Students may be excused from attending class on the day of a graded activity or when attendance contributes to a student’s grade, for the reasons stated in Section 7.1, or other reason deemed appropriate by the student’s instructor. To be excused the student must notify his or her instructor in writing (acknowledged e-mail message is acceptable) prior to the date of absence if such notification is feasible. In cases where advance notification is not feasible (e.g. accident, or emergency) the student must provide
notification by the end of the second working day after the absence. This notification should include an explanation of why notice could not be sent prior to the class.

Extra credit: No extra credit assignments will be allowed, but I may, in individual cases, consider factors such as improvement and extenuating circumstances.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policy statement: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room 118 of Cain Hall, on the Internet at http://studentlife.tamu.edu/ssd/, or by telephone at 979-845-1637.

Academic Integrity Statement: The Aggie Honor Code states that “An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.” Effective September 1, 2004, Texas A&M University has an Honor Code that defines campus policy on academic misconduct. The Aggie Honor System is charged with the enforcement of this Code. Students are advised to familiarize themselves with definitions of "academic misconduct" and procedures for handling it under Rule #20 of the TAMU Student Rules: http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule20.htm. Ignorance of these definitions and procedures does not exclude a student from prosecution under the system.

Topics and readings: Readings for the course will be available from a password-protected portion of the class web site: http://philosophy.tamu.edu/~gary/animalethics/. Students registered for the course will be able to retrieve copies of assigned readings using a user ID: ______________ and password: ______________ that will be given out in class. The following list is representative of the kinds of readings we will do, but we probably will not be able to cover all of the numbered topics, and we certainly will not be able to cover anywhere near all of the specific readings listed below.

1. Philosophical essays:


2. Conceptualizing “animal welfare”:


3. Pain


4. Desires, learning, and planning


5. Language


6. Mirror self-recognition


7. Episodic memory and autonoetic consciousness


Hippocampus 8: 198-204.


8. “Using a ‘theory of mind’”


9. Having a biographical sense of self


10. Boredom


11. Play
