

Lingnan University
Department of Philosophy

Course Title	: Animal Ethics
Course Code	: PHI3375
Recommended Study Year	: 2-4
No. of Credits/Term	: 3
Mode of Tuition	: Sectional approach
Class Contact Hours	: 3 hours per week
Category in Major Programme	: Programme Elective
Prerequisite(s)	: N/A
Co-requisite(s)	: N/A
Exclusion(s)	: N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	: N/A

Brief Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to Animal Ethics. It begins with foundational concepts such as speciesism, moral status, and sentience, alongside major ethical approaches including utilitarianism, rights-based theories, Korsgaard's neo-Kantianism, and Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. Building on this foundation, the course examines major issues in practical ethics: eating animals, including 'happy farming', new omnivorism, and synthetic meat; animal experimentation in science, medicine, and consumer safety; and the ethics of pet ownership, domestication, breeding, and genetic modification.

The course also explores the 'Political Turn' in Animal Ethics, including political representation for domesticated animals and duties toward domestic, liminal, and wild animals. It then examines questions at the intersection of animal and environmental ethics: the value of biodiversity, whether conservation practices such as rewilding and culling can respect individual animals, and our duties toward animals affected by climate change, pollution, and expanding human infrastructure. Finally, it considers speculative issues raised by new technologies, including reducing wild animal suffering, reviving extinct species, spreading animal life beyond Earth, and protecting animal interests in the long-term future.

Aims

The course aims to:

- (1) Provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the foundational issues in Animal Ethics, and the ways in which major normative ethical theories are used by Animal Ethicists
- (2) Give students the tools to think critically about the ways in which humans interact with animals
- (3) Clarify how Animal Ethics and Environmental Ethics overlap, and where they may be in tension
- (4) Introduce students to cutting edge research on the future of Animal Ethics

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Analyse and explain foundational concepts in Animal Ethics (LO1);
2. Compare and assess the different normative approaches to Animal Ethics (LO2);
3. Critically evaluate the ways in which humans use and interact with animals (LO3);
4. Develop, articulate and defend well-reasoned positions on contemporary and future issues in Animal Ethics, using clear argumentation and appropriate philosophical resources (LO4).

Indicative Content

1. Speciesism and moral status: What makes a being morally considerable? Is it wrong to discriminate morally based on species? (Singer, Caviola, Jacquet, Kagan)
2. Sentience: Is sentience an appropriate basis for moral status? Which animals are sentient and how do we know? (Singer, Birch)
3. Normative Ethical approaches to animals: Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Capabilities Approach (Singer, Regan, Korsgaard, Nussbaum)
4. Ethics of eating animals: Is it wrong to eat animals? Can it be justified if the animals are treated well? (McMahan, Zangwill, Milburn)
5. Animal experimentation: When is it permissible to perform experiments on animal subjects? (Sebo, DeGrazia)
6. Pet ownership and animal breeding: Is domestication of animals inherently wrong? What moral constraints apply to breeding animals with certain traits? (Francione, Palmer, O'Brien)
7. Political representation for animals: Should animals have political representation? If so, how should this be achieved? (Kymlicka and Donaldson, Cochrane)
8. Conservation, climate change, and the value of species: What do we owe to animals negatively affected by climate change? What makes species/biodiversity valuable? (Palmer, Milburn, Sebo, O'Brien)
9. Wild animal welfare: Is it feasible and morally desirable to intervene in nature to reduce wild animal suffering? (Horta, Ng, Faria, Johannsen, O'Brien)
10. Deextinction: What are the moral considerations relevant to 'bringing back' extinct animals such as the Dire Wolf? (Browning, Prosser)

Teaching Method

Lectures, presentations, and discussions.

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

1. Students are expected to actively participate in classroom discussions by asking and answering questions and by raising objections to arguments in the materials studied (LO1-LO3).
2. A midterm exam in which students will answer short questions on key concepts introduced in the first half of the course (to assess LO1, and LO2).
3. A term paper (1500-2000 words) on a topic of the course (to assess mainly LO2, LO3, and LO4). The students will be provided with a list of readings related to the specific topic they choose to write about. Students will present their paper in class and answer questions from the instructor and the other students.
4. A final exam, in which they will have to write long essay questions on the content of the course. Students will have to elaborate their views on the theories discussed in class (to assess LO1, LO2, LO3 and LO4).

Learning Outcomes	Assessment Methods			
	Participation and attendance	Midterm exam	Paper plus in-class presentation and oral defence	Final exam
LO1: Analyse and explain foundational concepts in Animal Ethics	✓	✓		✓
LO2: Compare and assess the different normative approaches to Animal Ethics	✓	✓	✓	✓
LO3: Critically evaluate the ways in which humans use and interact with animals	✓		✓	✓
LO4: Develop, articulate and defend well-reasoned positions on contemporary and future issues in Animal Ethics, using clear argumentation and appropriate philosophical resources			✓	✓

Assessment

Participation and attendance (10%)

Midterm exam (20%)

Paper plus in-class presentation and oral defence (30%)

Final exam (40%)

Required Readings

Selections from:

- Birch, Jonathan, (2024) *The Edge of Sentience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Donaldson and Kymlicka, (2011) *Zoopolis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Johannsen, Kyle (2017) 'Animal rights and the problem of r-strategists', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 20: 333-345.
- Faria, Catia (2023a) *Animal Ethics in the Wild: Wild Animal Suffering and Intervention in Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horta, Oscar (2010) 'Debunking the idyllic view of natural processes: Population dynamics and suffering in the wild', *Telos* 17: 73-88.
- Kagan, Shelley (2019) *How to Count Animals, More or Less*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Kagan, Shelley (2016) 'What's wrong with speciesism?', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 33, No. 1
- McMahan, Jeff (2016) 'The moral problem of predation' in A. Chignell, T. Cuneo & M. Halteman (Eds.), *Philosophy Comes to Dinner*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Milburn, Josh (2022) *Just Fodder*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha (2006) *Frontiers of Justice*, Harvard University Press.
- O'Brien, Gary David (2025) 'Bully for you? Breed Specific Legislation and dangerous dog breeds', *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 38(24)
- O'Brien, Gary David (2024). The Case for Animal-Inclusive Longtermism. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 22(03-04), 336-359.
- O'Brien, Gary David (2022b) 'Directed panspermia, wild animal suffering, and the ethics of world-creation', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 39(1): 87-102.
- Palmer, Clare (2021) 'Assisting wild animals vulnerable to climate change: Why ethical strategies diverge', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 38(2): 179-195.
- Regan, Tom (2004) *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sebo, Jeff (2022) *Saving Animals, Saving Ourselves*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Singer, Peter (1975) *Animal Liberation*. New York: Avon Books.

Supplementary Readings

- Animal Ethics (2020) *Introduction to Wild Animal Suffering: A Guide to the Issues*, Oakland: Animal Ethics, retrieved from <https://www.animal-ethics.org/introduction-wild-animal-suffering>.
- Caviola, Lucius, Everett, Jim A. C., and Faber, Nadira S. (2019) 'The moral standing of animals: Towards a psychology of speciesism', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 116(6): 1011-1029.
- Horta, Oscar (2017) 'Animal suffering in nature: The case for intervention', *Environmental Ethics*, 39(3): 261-279.
- Kahane, Guy (2023) 'Was evolution worth it?', *Philosophical Studies*, 180: 249-271.
- Sebo, Jeff (2023a) 'The Rebugnant Conclusion: Utilitarianism, insects, microbes, and AI systems', *Ethics, Policy and Environment*

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations and Course Work. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not,

as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.

(3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.

(4) To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.

(5) Students must adhere to the University's guidelines and practices when using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. The official documents "Guidelines for Using GAI Tools at Lingnan University" and "Best Practices for Ethical and Responsible Use of GAI Tools in Course Assessments" can be found here: <https://www.ln.edu.hk/cital/generative-artificial-intelligence/gai-guidelines-best-practices>.

Philosophy Department Rubric for Evaluating Class Participation

For evaluating participation in class discussions:

Excellent (85-100%)	Good (70-84%)	Fair (55-69%)	Pass (40-54%)	Failure (0-39%)
Attempts frequently to answer or raise questions; comments are mostly cogent and relevant; full attendance (except absence with prior notice and valid reasons.)	Attempts frequently to answer or raise questions; comments are often cogent and relevant; almost full attendance.	Attempts sometimes to answer or raise questions; comments are sometimes cogent and relevant; skips quite a few classes without notice.	Seldom attempts to answer or raise questions, but can sometimes offer relevant answers when asked; skips many classes.	Almost never makes cogent or relevant comment, even when asked; skips most classes.

Philosophy Department Rubric for Grading a
Presentation

	Excellent (85-100%)	Good (70-84%)	Fair (55-69%)	Pass (40-54%)	Failure (0-39%)
Communication (Weight: 25%)	Excellent presentation; closely engages audience; persuasive delivery. Answers questions excellently.	Generally holds attention; generally good delivery. Answers questions very well.	Delivery is fair, somewhat engaging; makes an attempt to command attention of class. Answers questions adequately.	Delivery is apparently detached; fails to command attention of class. Answers questions poorly.	Little or no attempt to communicate with the class; non-existent presentation skills. Doesn't answer questions.
Organization (Weight: 25%)	Excellent structure; transitioning from topic to topic is clear and logical	Generally good structure; transitioning from topic to topic is mostly clear	Generally acceptable; some organization skills demonstrated	Lack of organization; jumps from topic to topic without proper signals	Ideas are apparently randomly expressed
Argumentation and use of references (Weight: 25%)	Reasoning is almost impeccable; excellent usage and accreditation of supporting evidence	Reasoning is strong; supporting evidence is demonstrated clearly	Reasoning is fair; some usage of supporting evidence i	Contains major fallacies in reasoning; scant usage of supporting evidence	Little or no demonstration of reasoning skills
Content (Weight: 25%)	Content is rich and novel; original ideas expressed; strong take home message	Content is extensive; take home message is clear	Content is, present; fair use of materials. Take home message somewhat discernible	Content is weak, message largely non-existent	Very little content, or there is plagiarism.

Philosophy Department Rubric for Grading an Essay

	Excellent (85-100%)	Good (70-84%)	Fair (55-69%)	Pass (40-54%)	Failure (0-39%)
Knowledge of Course Material (Weight: 40%)	Demonstrated knowledge goes substantially beyond what is expected of students in this course.	Demonstrates knowledge of most important points; shows understanding of the basic philosophical positions and disagreements.	Demonstrates knowledge of most important point, and the most important points of disagreement, but with some unclarity or inaccuracy.	Some of the basic points are understood, but the student shows substantial misunderstandings.	Student's understanding deviates significantly from the positions discussed in class/Student fails to write on the assigned topic.
Argumentation and Originality (Weight: 40%)	Presents compelling arguments, shows understanding of important objections, and offers novel arguments or ideas.	Presents compelling arguments and shows understanding of important objections. Novel aspects are less compelling or absent.	Presents arguments that successfully motivate the main claims, but details are overlooked, and objections are not handled as well.	Arguments are often vague and impressionistic, or supported with dubious claims or fallacious modes of reasoning.	No discernible arguments/ No engagement with the ideas of the class.
Clarity and organization (Weight: 20%)	Ideas are clearly arranged to allow easy understanding of their relations.	As excellent, but with slightly more mistakes in arrangement of ideas.	Basic structure is good, but sometimes arrangement of ideas is confusing.	Essay seems to switch topics at points or is difficult to follow due to unclear structure.	Lack of organizational structure/ Largely incomplete.

Philosophy Department
Rubric for Grading an Examination

For questions with clear-cut answers (e.g. definitions of key terms or explaining an argument or position from the literature):

Perfect (100%)	Partial Credit (20-80%)	Zero (0%)
The concluding answer is correct, with a clear, sound, and sufficient argument or explanation, if needed.	The concluding answer is correct, but the argument or explanation is unclear or insufficient, or the concluding answer is incorrect, but some intermediate steps are correct.	Neither the concluding answer nor anything in the argument or explanation is correct.

For essay questions or open-ended questions:

	Excellent (85-100%)	Good (70-84%)	Fair (55-69%)	Pass (40-54%)	Failure (0-39%)
Knowledge (Weight: 40%)	Demonstrates knowledge of all the relevant points, with a clear and accurate exposition.	Demonstrates knowledge of most relevant points, with a largely clear and accurate exposition.	Demonstrates knowledge of most relevant points, but the exposition is unclear or inaccurate.	Demonstrates only a limited understanding of the basic points.	Demonstrates very little understanding of even the basic points.
Argumentation and originality (Weight: 40%)	Presents novel, compelling arguments with enough details.	Presents compelling arguments, with less novelty or some gaps.	Presents reasonable arguments that are not novel or very compelling.	Attempts to express an argument, but the result is unclear or messy.	Makes little or no attempt to present arguments.
Clarity and organization (Weight: 20%)	Ideas are clearly arranged to allow easy understanding of their relations.	As excellent, but with slightly more mistakes in arrangement of ideas.	Basic structure is good, but sometimes arrangement of ideas is confusing.	Switches topics at points or is difficult to follow due to unclear structure.	Lack of organizational structure/ Largely incomplete.

Mapping from total scores to letter grades:

85-100%: A
70-85%: B
55-70%: C
40-55%: D
0-39%: F