

Approaching Inclusivity: Non-Human Animal, Rights, Welfare and Medicine

Hannah McCarthy

Interdisciplinary Major Committee Membership:

Dr. Jennifer Penner (Associate Professor, Psychology)

Dr. Jennifer Dearolf (Professor, Biology)

Major Advisor:

Dr. Jennifer Penner

Course Objectives:

7 Natural Sciences Courses:

4 from the following list:

- BIOL 150 Cellular Biology (w/lab)
- BIOL 220 General Zoology* (w/lab)
- BIOL 250 Genetics* (w/lab)
- CHEM 240 Organic Chemistry I (w/lab)
- CHEM 250 Organic Chemistry II (w/lab)

3 from the following list:

- BIOL 320 Animal Physiology* (w/lab) W2
- BIOL 300 Comparative Animal Behavior* (w/lab) W2
- CHEM 330 Biological Chemistry (w/lab) NS-L

4 Social Sciences Courses:

2 from the following list:

- POLI 235 Public Policy*
- PSYC 230 Social Psychology*

2 from the following list:

- PSYC 352 Social Cognition
- SOCI 380 Medicine & Culture*
- SOCI 285 Topics in Social Justice/Movements

2 Humanities Courses:

- PHIL 270 Environmental Philosophy
- PHIL 350 Philosophy of Science*

Capstone

- Independent Study with advisor

*Required Courses

The study of non-human animals is inherently an anthropocentric venture in that any attempts to better understand the non-human animal world are done through the lens of human interests. Fellow animals are used in experiments in order to determine the negative effects of make-up, cleaning products, and toxins, or to try to understand certain behavioral issues, such as a lack of motherly care or reactions to feelings of depression and helplessness. These experiments, which are largely funded by taxpayer money, are conducted by government bodies, federally funded universities, and private consumer corporations, such as those which stock our shelves with the latest products.

Peter Singer spoke of the history of animal experimentation in his book *Animal Liberation*, highlighting a study termed the Primate Equilibrium Platform, which was conducted in the 1980's by the United States Air Force (2015). In the study, monkeys were strapped to chairs and forced to manipulate a control stick to keep the platform on which they rested horizontal. This exercise was meant to simulate keeping a plane in flight, and each time the platform would rock, the monkey would receive an electric shock. Over the next two years, the monkeys would be subjected to the weekly experiments, as well as being exposed to toxic chemicals, gases, and radiation. Exposure to such toxins was meant to replicate what pilots might experience in war, and the monkeys' performance was used to estimate the effects of exposure on pilots' flight performance. The monkeys, unable to cope with the toxins, were incapacitated for weeks after each experiment.

The fact that such experiments are conducted leads to many questions: Why is it that we acknowledge the evolutionary similarities between humans and non-human animals for anthropocentric purposes, but deny the connection when it comes to the discussion of rights? Should ethical consideration be determined based on mental capabilities or on the organism's ability to experience pain and pleasure and to avoid situations that cause fear? Or perhaps both?

I want to explore these questions and gain a better understanding of non-human animals in a way that approaches non-anthropocentrism. However, I do not want to rely on one discipline to inform my understanding of non-human animals, as the subject is multifaceted. Thus, my study must be informed by the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences to even approach a holistic understanding.

The humanities are integral to my academic exploration in that they will provide an understanding of historical perceptions of non-human animals. Philosophy courses will analyze the historical relationships between humans, intelligence, and power, and non-human animals and the natural world, as well as inform human determinations of morality and sentience. Additionally, I hope to explore the topic of ethics as it has been depicted by religion and philosophy. As a discipline, philosophy has long prized Descartes who believed animals did not experience pain or pleasure but were similar to robots, arguing they did not possess the ability to reason. Similarly, an equally appraised Kant argued that the inability to possess reason meant that we need not extend value to animals, aside from their use to humans, saying "Animals are...merely a means to an end. That end is man" (Rollins, 2006). Thus, I wish to explore the philosophical theories that have so heavily influenced our views of non-human animals today. Similarly, I want to study the work of more modern philosophers who do include non-human animals in their circle of moral concern, such as the work of Bernard E. Rollins and Peter Singer.

Both philosophers advocate for animal rights in many spheres, including in research, based on the species' cognitive and emotive capabilities.

Additionally, social science courses will allow me to understand human cognitive tendencies and the mechanisms behind anthropocentrism. They will also allow me to explore the unequal distribution of power, rights, and ethical consideration as they relate to human and non-humans relations. Through a Public Policy course, I will come to better understand the nature of lawmaking and the government's role, both in the protection of the rights and welfare of oppressed groups, as well as its power to create laws that foster or eliminate such oppression. Sociology courses will broaden this discussion by providing a historical account of the distribution of rights and privileges across societies and cultures. The hierarchical social formations that exist in society are extended to the non-human animal realm, as we consider different species more or less worthy of respect and ethical consideration. For example, in the US, most people include cats, dogs, and horses, to some degree, in their circle of ethical and moral consideration, whereas farm animals do not receive the same consideration. In Medicine and Culture, I will explore how American ideals of health and the body, known as the Western Biomedical Model, influence our understanding and treatment of non-human animals. Sociologists identify physical reductionism, or the reduction of people to independently working body parts and systems, as a key component of western medicine. Furthermore, mind-body dualism is an equally important western tradition, in which one's mental and emotional functions are seen as separate from one's bodily functions (Freund, McGuire, Podhurst). I want to explore how Western ideas of health and the body affect our perception and understanding of nonhuman animals. Specifically, I want to explore how our inability to communicate with non-human animals leads to an even greater degree of mind-body dualism in which we disregard animals' emotional complexity almost entirely.

Lastly, natural science courses will inform my understanding of anatomy, physiology, evolutionary history, and behavior of animals. A strong background in the sciences is necessary for understanding the mechanisms that underlie health and welfare. Additionally, many of the courses are required for admission to veterinary school and will be helpful in my graduate studies in animal advocacy.

As part of my work in animal advocacy, I want to focus on animal experimentation and ethical alternatives to conventional research methods, which require a firm understanding of both animal behavior and anatomical processes. I want the acknowledgement of our similarities with non-human animals not to validate studies and experiments, but to inform and enlighten the conversation of inclusion and ethical alternatives. I hope to work for a future in which ethical alternatives to animal research and experimentation are the standard and for a greater understanding of animal's emotional and mental capabilities and experiences.

Through a multifaceted approach to the understanding of non-human animals, I hope to be able to answer the following questions: What makes one species worthy of companionship and respect, while another is treated as food and property? How are animal rights successfully discussed when, as is often the case, there is a conflict with cultural rights? Culture is undoubtedly important, and it strongly influences our perceptions of nature and of non-humans. However, attitudes toward animals are universal in that animals are almost exclusively viewed as lesser. What can we learn from

companion animals about the similarities between human and non-human emotions?
What ethical alternatives should exist for the humane study of non-human animals?

For my senior capstone, I will write a thesis, which will be graded by my advisor. We will do an independent study (preferably in the fall of 2017) to ensure that I have sufficient guidance in writing my thesis, which will be guided by the questions above. Additionally, I will do a presentation on campus to communicate the findings of my thesis.

Dr. Jennifer Penner

Signature:



Date:

4/20/2017

Dr. Jennifer Dearolf

Signature:



Date:

4/10/17