

Animals and the Environment

Module Convenor: Steve Cooke

This module introduces students to topics connecting animal ethics with political philosophy. Students learn why we should value and care about nonhuman animals, and about how and why they should be included within theories of justice and political representation. Learning about these topics helps students to understand debates about the treatment of nonhuman animals in various policy contexts, such as agriculture and scientific research. At the same time, thinking ethically and politically about nonhuman animals provides valuable insights that can also be applied to the human condition.

The module is intended to serve as a third year theory option for politics students, and to be available to the Twycross Zoo partnership.

Learning Aims and Objectives:

The module will introduce and build upon political theory content from elsewhere in the degree. The aim is to grant understanding of ethical and political theory and then show how they are applied to particular case studies and policy areas. Students will gain a solid grounding of interesting and important areas of debate in animal rights and environmental political philosophy. By the end of the module, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate advanced understanding and capacity to engage with political philosophy as it relates to animal rights and environmental ethics.
- Reflect upon the moral status of nonhuman animals and the environment.
- Demonstrate transferable skills, such as group work, independent thought, and research methods.
- Apply philosophical theory to a policy area.

Teaching and learning

The module will be taught through weekly three hour seminars featuring short talks and group based discussion. Seminars will focus on understanding theory and applying it to case studies or policy areas. These will be supplemented with presentations, and time will be set aside within some seminars for tutor-supported group-work on the Group Policy Report.

Assessment Pattern:

- Research Essay: 50%
- Group Policy Report (applied theory): 50%

Indicative Module Content and Structure

Block 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

Introducing the module, methods, content, and expectations.

2. Valuing animals and the environment in policy-making

Why should we care about nonhuman animals? Introduces the concepts of sentience and welfare. Explains the difference between final and instrumental value. Case study: cephalopods and crustaceans in the Animal Welfare (sentience) act.

Readings:

- Woods, Abigail. "From Cruelty to Welfare: The Emergence of Farm Animal Welfare in Britain, 1964–71." *Endeavour* 36, no. 1 (March 1, 2012): 14–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2011.10.003>

Reading prompts:

- What was the most interesting or important thing you took from the reading?
- Were there elements you strongly agreed with? What were they?
- Were there elements you strongly disagreed with? What were they?
- Did the reading make you think about any particular topics or assumptions you have in a new way?
- Did you enjoy the reading?
- Can you summarise central claim/conclusions/findings?
- Were there any key terms you didn't understand?

Block 2: Ethical Perspectives

3. Utilitarianism and Eating Meat

Utilitarianism: what is utility, calculating utility, ethical monism, the equal consideration of interests principle. Case study: animal agriculture.

Readings:

- Singer, Peter. "All Animals Are Equal." *Philosophic Exchange* 5, no. 1 (1974): 103–16. https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex/vol5/iss1/6.
- Zangwill, Nick. "Our Moral Duty to Eat Meat." *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 7, no. 3 (September 2021): 295–311. <https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.21>.

4. Vivisection and Sentient Rights

The interest theory of rights, deontology, constructivism, justice, the *argument from marginal/awkward cases*, personhood, direct and indirect duties. Case study: animals in scientific research.

Readings:

- Cochrane, Alasdair. "From Human Rights to Sentient Rights." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 16, no. 5 (December 1, 2013): 655–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2012.691235>.

5. Hunting, Virtue, and Care

Virtue ethics, the importance of care and relationships, perfectionism in politics, good character. Case study: sport hunting.

Readings:

- List, Charles J. "On the Moral Significance of a Hunting Ethic." *Ethics and the Environment* 3, no. 2 (1998): 157–75.
- Hursthouse, Rosalind. "Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals." *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, October 26, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195371963.013.0005>.

Reading Week

6. Conservation and Ecological Ethics

Ethical holism vs ethical individualism, the good of ecosystems, species, and environmental entities. Case study: wildlife conservation.

Readings:

- Elliot, Robert. 1982. "Faking Nature." *Inquiry* 25 (1): 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00201748208601955>.
- Pearson, Richard G. 2016. "Reasons to Conserve Nature." *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 31 (5): 366–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2016.02.005>.

Block 3: Project work

7. Group Projects

Working in groups, expectations, approaches, selecting topics, understanding the assessment.

Readings:

- Assessment deadline this week so no readings.

Note: the last hour of each seminar from here onwards will be for supervised group-work.

Block 4: Politics

8. Animals as Citizens and Sovereigns

Animals as citizens, wild animal sovereignty. From sentient rights to membership rights. Justice.

Readings:

- Donaldson, Sue, and Will Kymlicka. 2015. "A Defense of Animal Citizens and Sovereigns." *Law, Ethics and Philosophy*, no. 1 (June).
<https://raco.cat/index.php/LEAP/article/view/294786>.

9. The Political Representation of Animals and the Environment

Democracy and representing nonhuman animals. Direct democracy, representative democracy, representing nature, multiculturalism and animal rights.

Readings:

- Eckersley, Robyn. 2011. "Representing Nature." In *The Future of Representative Democracy*, edited by John Keane, Sonia Alonso, and Wolfgang Merkel, 236–57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511770883.011>.
- Garner, Robert. 2017. "Animals and Democratic Theory: Beyond an Anthropocentric Account." *Contemporary Political Theory* 16 (4): 459–77.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-016-0072-0>.

10. Citizens' Jury: a bill of rights for nonhuman animals

Students will use the final session to act as political representatives of either a natural entity (river, forest, mountain, ecosystem, species, population) or animals more generally and to develop a modern bill of rights for them.

Readings:

- No readings.

Note: the first part of the seminar will be for student presentations on their group projects. Unassessed, formative.

Useful texts:

- Donaldson, S. and Kymlicka, W. (2013) *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Donovan J., and Adams, C. (2007) *Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cochrane, A. (2018) *Sentientist Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jamieson, D. (2008) *Ethics and the Environment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Korsgaard, C. (2018) *Fellow Creatures: our obligations to the other animals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2023) *Justice for Animals*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Palmer, C. (2010) *Animal Ethics in Context*, New York: Columbia University Press
- Regan, T. (2014) *The Case for Animal Rights*, California: University of California Press.
- Singer, P. (1975) *Animal Liberation*, New York: Harper Collins.

Essay Questions:

In no more than 2,500 words, answer one of the following questions:

1. Should it be illegal to farm nonhuman animals for food? Why/why not?
2. Should natural entities, such as forests, mountains, rivers, or ecosystems be granted rights and represented in democratic decision-making? How?
3. Should some non-human animals have a right against captivity? Why? Which ones?
4. What is the strongest argument in favour of trophy-hunting? Does it succeed?
5. Do the benefits derived from experimenting on nonhuman animals justify the harms done to them?

In answering the questions:

- Put particular effort into getting your introduction right. Your introduction should summarise your argument and signpost how the essay will be structured. Be specific – tell the reader what you will conclude and summarise the reasons you will give to support that conclusion.
- Please also pay attention to referencing. Make sure you provide an in-text citation whenever you quote an author; when you refer to someone else's argument or findings; or whenever rely upon evidence. Use the Harvard author-date system for citations and provide a well-formatted bibliography at the end of your essay.
- Make sure your essay addresses the readings and themes of the module, and that you pay attention to the methods taught. That means you should begin your research by using the reading list supplied. We expect you to make use of readings from the reading list in your essay.
- Try to include an example, perhaps taken from the news/current affairs to illustrate part of the theory and/or your argument.
- Additional advice on writing and researching can be found in the essay-writing guide.