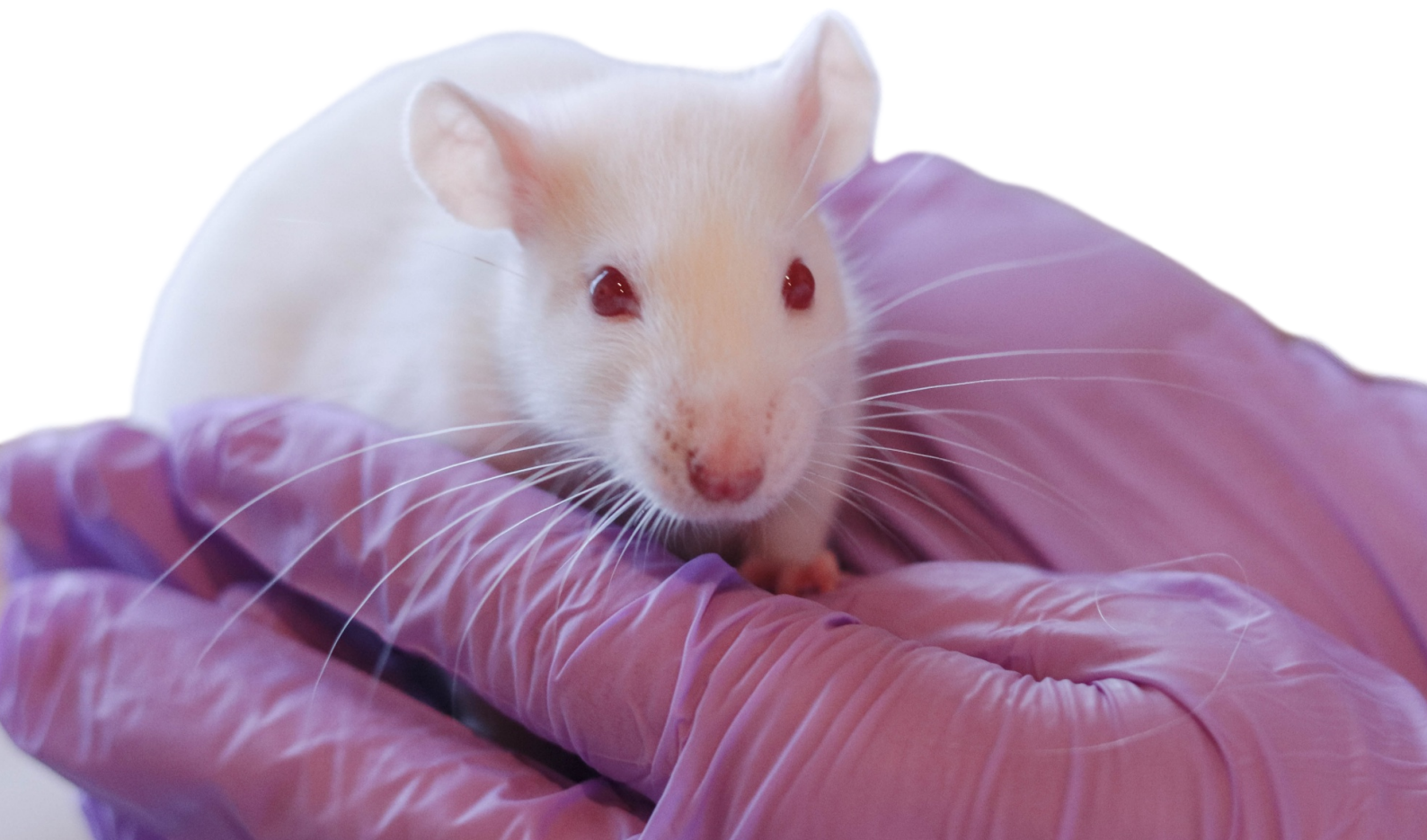


Ethics

Applied Ethics

Animal Ethics

Script Booklet



Preface

This script booklet is all about animal ethics. It is a series of presentation scripts that cover the important elements of this fascinating branch of applied ethics, introduce significant concepts and issues (like the use of animals for food, medicine and science, and sport), and investigate the ideas of the most famous thinker in the area, Peter Singer. They also cover how normative ethical theories (natural law, situation ethics, and virtue ethics) are applied to issues in animal ethics. They are designed to interest, inform, and inspire further independent enquiry among students.

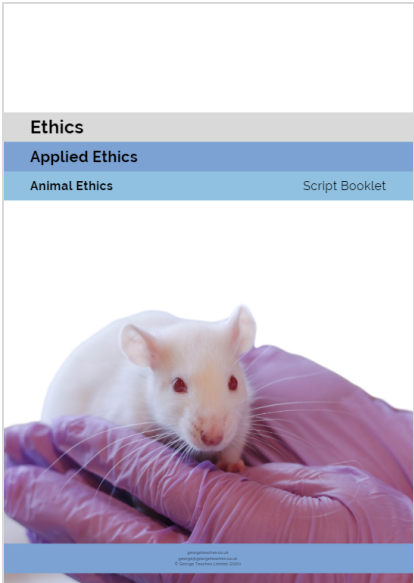
This script booklet follows the presentation available at George Teaches, and is designed for use in conjunction with it. It is accompanied by an information booklet and work booklet, which can be used to support teaching and learning. Additional materials on Peter Singer can be accessed online, which comprehensively summarise his famous work on animal ethics, Animal Liberation. Throughout this script booklet, interpuncts (·) are used to indicate forward presentation transitions, and presentation images are used to visualise areas the content covers.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues for the production of this publication, which has been inspired by their desire for more extensive and holistic resources for teaching and learning about ethics. At all times, I have attempted to produce material that covers popular and important content, but is not confined by the straitjacket of any particular curriculum or specification. Consequently, whilst this covers all of the relevant content for animal ethics at A Level, it goes far beyond. My earnest hope is that it is capable of helping teachers to both support students of all abilities and challenge the most able to embark upon their own self-directed enquiries in the area. Above all, it is my sincerest wish that it proves beneficial to your teaching, and the learning that you (like me) try to inspire among all your students.



George Teaches

London, UK
10 April 2020



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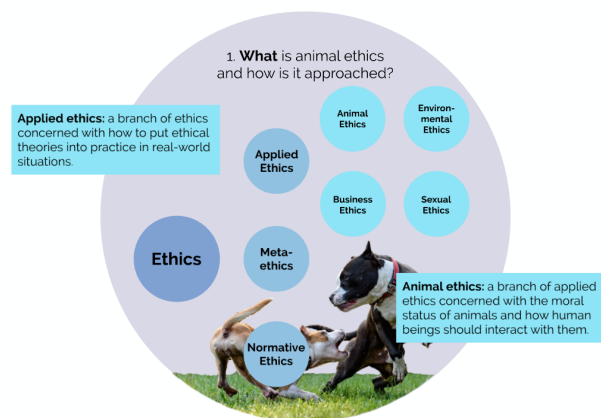
Introduction to Animal Ethics

Hi! This lesson is an introduction to animal ethics, which, just like environmental ethics, is a very hot topic these days. However, unlike environmental ethics, people have concerned themselves with animal ethics for centuries; in fact, the first animal rights law was passed in the first half of the seventeenth century in the United Kingdom, and outlawed attaching ploughs to the tails of horses and pulling wool from sheep (instead of shearing or cutting it). But this wasn't the start of some legislative flood that significantly improved the conditions of animals around the world; if anything, animal welfare continued to decline, until things reached something of a crisis point in the second half of the twentieth century. Today, animals are treated pretty poorly, especially those confined to factory farms and laboratories; efforts have been made to improve their lives, and some of them have been successful, but much abuse still occurs. Anyway, over the course of this lesson we're going to consider some of these issues and much more, including: one, what animal ethics is and how it's approached; two, how the approaches work; and three, why animal ethics and its approaches are important.

• So, without further ado, what is animal ethics and how is it approached? • Well, first we're going to locate it within the field of ethics, which has three major branches: • applied ethics, • meta-ethics, • and normative ethics. • Animal ethics is a branch of applied ethics, and is located alongside others like • business ethics, • environmental ethics, • and sexual ethics, although there are plenty of others. • What defines applied ethics is its concern with how to put ethical theories into practice in the real world. It's practical! By comparison, meta-ethics and normative ethics are

abstract and theoretical. By way of very brief explanation, meta-ethics is concerned with investigating whether or not morality even exists, that is to say whether or not the words "right" and "wrong" actually mean anything; assuming they do, normative ethics is concerned with investigating how to decide whether an action is right or wrong (and the different ways of doing this). As we can see, both these branches are deeply theoretical. On the other hand, applied ethics deals with real-world situations: how to treat customers, how to treat the environment, how to treat sexual partners, and, of course, how to treat animals. • Which brings us nicely to our working definition of animal ethics: a branch of applied ethics concerned with the moral status of animals (in other words, their value and rights (if any)) and how we should interact with them. • Now, the extent to which animals have value and rights is largely dictated by beliefs that aren't directly related to animal ethics: • anthropocentrism, • and biocentrism. More on these later, but for now all we need to know is that they lead to two important approaches to animal ethics: • anthropocentrism leads to human supremacy, which involves using animals to serve the wants and needs of human beings, whatever they may be; • and biocentrism leads to animal liberation, which involves attempting to free animals from such use. Fundamentally, human supremacy is inspired by the idea that human beings are different from animals, • because they are simply human beings (a circular argument, I know), • because they have unique capacities, • or because they have something called "personhood". Animal liberation, on the other hand, is inspired by the idea that human beings and most large animals are fundamentally similar, • because they are sentient.

• So, how do the approaches to animal ethics work? Well, we know what they are: • human supremacy and • animal liberation. • Fundamentally, some people practice human supremacy, because they believe human beings are distinct from, and more important than, other animals. • They're inspired by anthropocentrism, which is the belief that we're the most important things in the universe. They believe animals should be used in any way we wish, to satisfy our wants and needs; in other words, they can be used or abused as we see fit. This view of animals ascribes them instrumental value: this means they don't have any value in their own right, they're just instruments for human use. • On the other hand, some people practice animal liberation, because they believe we're fundamentally similar to animals (in fact, we are animals). These people include those we think about when imagining animal rights activists breaking into laboratories and freeing animals from their cages (although not all of them are activists). • They're inspired by biocentrism, which is the belief that life is the most important thing in the universe. They believe many animals have moral status (and the most extreme claim all of them do). In other words, animals have



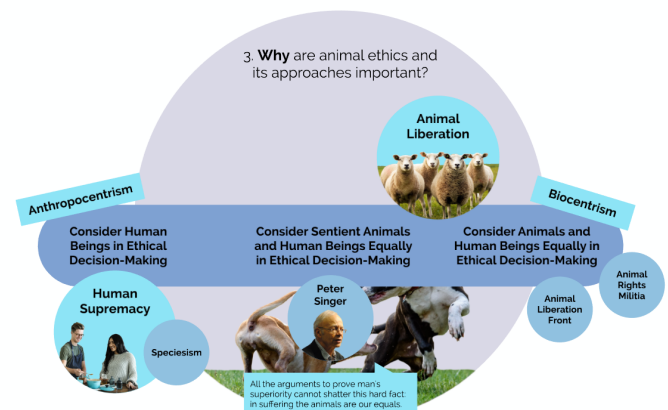
intrinsic value, and deserve to be protected from the whims of human beings who want to use them for trivial purposes. So, how do human supremacists justify their position? • Well, some appeal to human species membership; in other words, we should be free to use animals to serve our wants and needs, because we're human. • As Peter Singer has repeatedly indicated, this is speciesism: the act of discriminating between different species, despite their equal interests, because of their species membership. As far as he's concerned, it's no different from

discriminating against black people because they aren't white, or discriminating against women because they aren't men. As I've already indicated, this attempt at justification is a circular argument, and it's difficult to take seriously in this day and age. • Others argue that our capacities set us apart, like our capacity for language, abstract thinking, or engaging in sex for pleasure. However, research has increasingly shown that these capacities aren't unique, which makes them impossible to use as justification for human supremacy. • Instead, it's human personhood, • or the state of being a natural or legal person with rights and responsibilities, that seems the most solid foundation. As far as we're aware, we're the only species able to reflect on our own consciousness; like other animals, we have thoughts, but we're the only ones capable of thinking about the thoughts themselves. This fact makes us responsible for our actions: if we have an impulsive thought, we're able to think about whether or not we should act upon the impulse when animals can't. • Members of the animal liberation movement don't agree. They argue that many animals are essentially similar to human beings because they're sentient, and this justifies elevating their moral status. • Sentience is the ability to experience sensations subjectively, like pain. Subjective experience creates interests (like an interest in avoiding pain), and such interests are the foundations of rights and the laws that protect them.

•• This leaves us with only one thing left to contemplate, why animal ethics and its approaches are important, • and we're going to use this continuum to help us. On the left, we have one position that's taken in ethical decision-making regarding animals: the interests of human beings are the only ones that should be considered, which means the interests of animals are disregarded. In the middle we have another position: the interests of animals and human beings should be considered in ethical decision-making, but only if they're sentient (or capable of experiencing pain and pleasure). And on the right we have our final position: the interests of animals and human beings should be considered in ethical decision-making and treated equally. • Human supremacy is inspired by

• anthropocentrism, and falls squarely on the left-hand side of the spectrum. • It is a clear example of speciesism. On the other hand, • animal liberation, • which is inspired by biocentrism, is a little more complicated. • Relative moderates, like Peter Singer, claim that, "All the arguments to prove man's superiority cannot shatter this hard fact: in suffering the animals are our equals." They argue that animals should be given equal consideration to human beings in ethical decision-making, because they feel pain (and only because they do). Relative radicals (• like the nonviolent Animal Liberation Front, • and the violent Animal Rights Militia), are less interested in arguments about sentience; they argue that animals should be given equal consideration by virtue of being alive. In brief, animal ethics and its approaches are important, because they affect how much pain and suffering animals experience.

•• That brings us to the end of this introduction to animal ethics; now you know what it is, how it's approached, and why it's important. As I suggested at the beginning, even though improvements have been made, animals are still treated pretty poorly nowadays. In fact, the process of researching and writing about animal ethics, something I haven't done in years, has strengthened my agreement with the argument for vegetarianism on ethical grounds (although I haven't become one yet). Perhaps thinking about animal ethics will lead you to have similar reflections, perhaps not; but, whatever you do, please do reflect, because animal ethics is an area in which a lot of people make a lot of assumptions. And on that foreboding note, goodbye!



Issues in Animal Ethics

Hi! This lesson is all about issues in animal ethics. Broadly speaking, issues are areas of debate, and in this context they arise from the harmful effects that we have on animals, especially the ones that (like us) can feel pain and pleasure. Basically, some human activities cause pain and suffering to animals; sometimes a lot, sometimes a little. But, whatever the amount, causing pain and suffering leads to debate about whether or not we should engage in it; and, if we should, to what extent. As we'll discover, the issues raise some pretty tricky questions, and the answers people give depend almost entirely on their individual approaches to animal ethics and the beliefs that underpin them. Over the course of this lesson, we're going to explore what these key issues are, how they're approached, and what the consequences of these approaches are (in other words, why they're important).

• So, without further ado, what are the key issues in animal ethics? There are, of course, quite a few, but we're going to focus on three of the big ones.

• The first is farming, which is the issue of whether or not human beings should use animals for meat and other products (like eggs, and milk); and, if so, to what extent. Factory farming involves confining animals like chickens, pigs, and veal calves to tiny cages, and mutilating their bodies without anaesthetic (we're talking about things like branding, debeaking, dehorning, and castration).

But, not all farming practices inflict pain and suffering on animals. At one end of the spectrum, the free range farming of eggs appears entirely humane; chickens

lead long and relatively natural lives, with plenty of room to roam, and don't appear to mind the removal of their eggs. At the other end of the spectrum though, things are far less pleasant; in factory farms, male chicks are gassed or ground-up alive. and female chicks are confined to tiny cages from birth and killed as soon as their egg production declines.

• The second is medicine and science, which is the issue of whether or not human beings should use animals for experiments in medical and scientific research; and, if so, to what extent. Animal testing almost always causes pain and suffering; in medical research, conditions like cancer, diabetes, and heatstroke are induced in animals to observe their physiological responses; afterwards, they're almost always killed. At the moment, there's also increased interest in xenotransplantation, which is the use of animal donors for human organ transplant patients. In scientific research, animals are frequently exposed to stimuli designed to condition them (like electric shocks), which are sometimes severe enough to injure or kill them.

• The third is sport, which is the issue of whether or not human beings should use animals for sporting pursuits (like bullfighting, and horse racing); and, if so, to what extent. Like farming, there's quite a broad range of pain and suffering. For example, bulls and pheasants lead relatively pleasant lives, but they're eventually killed for human entertainment. On the other hand, dogs and horses rarely die racing; nevertheless, their lives involve considerable hardship. And, whilst farming, and medicine and science, may bring meaningful benefits to human beings, it's difficult to see how sport does.

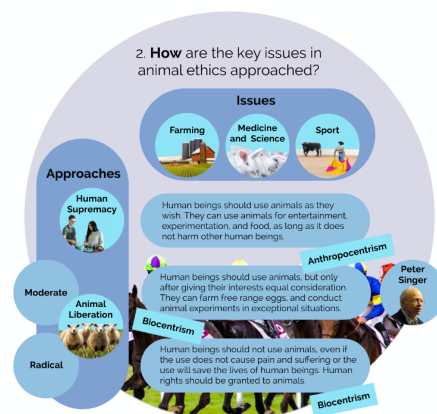
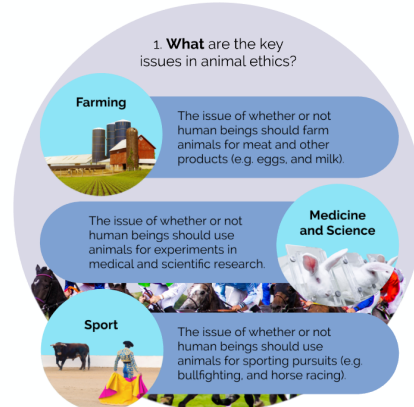
• Our next question is how the key issues in animal ethics are approached, and we're going to use a table to help us answer it.

• The issues we've just considered are along the top (farming, medicine and science, and sport),

• and the approaches from the introduction are down the side (human supremacy and animal liberation, which is divided into its moderate and radical camps).

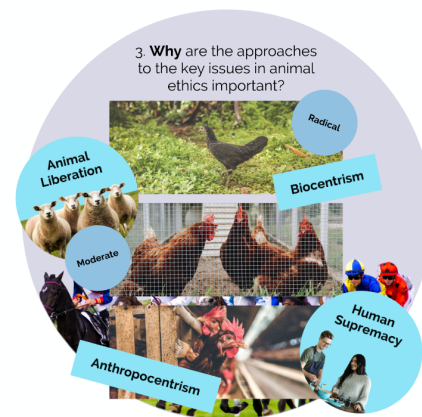
• Now, human supremacists (which is most people) argue that human beings should be free to use animals as they wish; for apparently vital things, like food, and animal experimentation, all the way through to essentially trivial things, like our own entertainment.

• Remember, human supremacy is inspired by anthropocentrism, which is the belief that human beings are the most important things in the universe.



Typically, people of this variety don't consider animals deserving of full consideration in ethical decision-making; basically, as long as the use in question doesn't harm other human beings, it's okay. • Next, we have moderate members of the animal liberation movement. They believe that human beings should use animals, but only after giving their interests equal consideration. In practice, this means that most uses of animals in both farming and medicine and science, and all uses of animals in sport, are prohibited; however, in theory, genuinely pain-free farming practices are permissible (like free range egg farming), as are animal experiments conducted under exceptional circumstances (for example, limited and unavoidable testing to cure lethal and highly contagious diseases). • This approach is inspired by biocentrism, which is the belief that life is the most important thing in the universe, • and arguably its most famous proponent is Peter Singer (although he generally steers clear of discussions of the intrinsic value of life, instead grounding his arguments in the right of living things to equal consideration of equal interests, according to a philosophical idea known as the principle of equality). • Finally, we have radical members of the animal liberation movement. They argue that human beings should not use animals, even if the use does not cause pain and suffering, or the use will save the lives of human beings. In brief, they argue that human rights should be extended to animals, on the basis that all life has intrinsic value • This approach is, of course, also inspired by biocentrism; however, it extends the idea that human life is intrinsically valuable and worthy of dignity to the rest of the animal kingdom (something the moderate camp also does, but with a few more caveats that we can unpick in the lesson on Peter Singer).

•• This brings us to our final question: why are the approaches to the key issues in animal ethics important? For me, the obvious answer is that it affects how animals live, and what their lives look like, which is important if you think they're deserving of at least some consideration in ethical decision-making. (Interestingly, it's worth noting that numerous countries take this view, but in an inconsistent and piecemeal fashion; although, having said that, it's a view that obviously isn't for everyone.) • Anyway, taking chickens as an example, • members of the animal liberation



movement • of the radical variety argue that we should allow them to live free like this. • Obviously, this is inspired by biocentrism, and the idea that animals have as great a right to freedom as we do. Most of Earth's chickens aren't wild though. • This is a picture of farm chickens at the extremely lucky end of the spectrum: they're free range. • Moderate members of the animal liberation movement think this is entirely acceptable. Yes, they're caged, but they have plenty of space, lead pleasant lives, and aren't killed prematurely; in fact, they derive quite a few benefits from the arrangement (like being protected from natural predators, and provided with abundant food). • Finally, this is an image of factory farmed chickens; they're the unlucky ones, but they represent the overwhelming majority of chickens on Earth. Typically, between two and six chickens are kept in each cage from birth, and they're slaughtered once large enough to eat or when egg productivity declines (depending on what they've been bred for); it's rare for any to live past two years of age despite a natural lifespan of around a decade. • Human supremacists argue this is entirely acceptable, because it provides us with affordable food; • an idea which is inspired by anthropocentrism, and the belief that human beings are more important and valuable than chickens. • Beyond this, there are three other reasons why issues in animal ethics and how they're approached are important. • One, they're pervasive: they affect literally billions of farm and laboratory animals that we keep in appalling conditions. • Two, they're potent: animal pain and suffering animates some members of the public, it's a powerful enough cause to propel some into violent and destructive activism. • And three, they're problematic: the way we treat intelligent and sentient animals reveals assumptions and double standards: we don't use severely mentally disabled human beings in painful experiments, but some countries subject primates to them without batting an eyelid.

•• That brings us to the end of our quick survey of important issues in animal ethics. Now you know what they are, how they're approached, and why the approaches to them are important. Hopefully, it's got you thinking about some of the unthinking ways in which we use animals, and whether they're right or wrong. We don't have any pets in my family, but, why do we generally pamper animals like dogs and cats, and yet subject pigs (which are, by many accounts, far more intelligent) to short and painful lives, confined to crates in which they can't even turn around? These are the sorts of questions that arise from our use and abuse of animals, and I hope they inspire some reflection on any assumptions or double standards that you (like me) might hold. And on that meaty note, goodbye!

Peter Singer on Animal Ethics

Hi! This lesson is an investigation into Peter Singer's key ideas on animal ethics. As he himself admits, they aren't original, but the way he presents them is; in fact, he is widely credited with revitalising animal ethics, and both single-handedly and significantly advancing the animal liberation movement. In brief, Peter Singer's ideas form a strong argument against almost any use of animals, although he focuses on their use in farming, medicine and science. And they're challenging: they make a compelling case for vegetarianism, and charge anyone who continues to eat meat or otherwise use animal products with speciesism. This accusation renders most people just as morally reprehensible as racists or sexists; guilty of discriminating against other sentient beings based on a characteristic as arbitrary as race or sex: namely, species membership.

•• So, without further ado, who is Peter Singer and what are his key ideas? We're going to start with the first part of that question, and learn a little bit about this interesting character before diving into his thoughts on animal ethics. •• Born in Australia in 1946, • he received a BA (and, later, MA) from the University of Melbourne in 1967, • before accepting a scholarship to complete a BPhil at the University of Oxford. • In 1973, it was here that a chance meal with a vegetarian friend changed his life forever, • and inspired him to write his most famous work, *Animal Liberation*, which was

published in 1975, republished in a second edition in 1995, • and reissued in 2015. Although Peter Singer returned to Australia to work on other ethical problems, • before becoming Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, his work on animal rights remains his most significant contribution to applied ethics. • Which brings us to the question of what his key ideas are. In brief, they can be boiled down to three important points. • First, the principle of equality requires consideration of animal interests as well, • even though egalitarianism is usually defined as the belief that only all human beings are equal and deserving of equal rights. • Second, ignoring animal interests is a type of discrimination against animals, called speciesism. • Third, proper application of the principle of equality requires vegetarianism (• or the practice of abstaining from eating meat, and most other animal products), because all other ways of living impose intolerable pain and suffering upon billions of sentient beings.

•• So, how do Peter Singer's key ideas work? • Well, in order to answer that question, we're going to comb through *Animal Liberation*, • which was reissued in its second edition in 2015.

•••• First, Peter Singer adopts Jeremy Bentham's formulation of the principle of equality, "Each to count for one and none more than one." • And establishes that this requires the equal consideration of equal interests in ethical decision-making. •• Furthermore, he establishes that people's interests should be considered regardless of their characteristics, because

discrimination between people based on characteristics like race or sex is entirely arbitrary. So far, so uncontroversial. • But, in the final part of this paragraph, he drops a bombshell: the principle of equality requires the equal consideration of the interests of all beings, "black or white, masculine or feminine, human or nonhuman". •• It's here that Peter Singer reframes the principle of equality, arguing convincingly that equal interests require equal consideration in ethical decision-making; regardless of race, regardless of sex, and regardless of species. •• Peter Singer then introduces his second idea, and because it's really rather essential, we're going to cover it very closely. • Again, he returns to the writing of Jeremy Bentham, • this time quoting at length from a passage in which he wrote that the human subjugation of animals is tyrannical; • and, just as the colour of a person's skin is no reason to withhold their rights, neither is the number of legs an animal has, nor the villosity of its skin. •• In fact, the question of

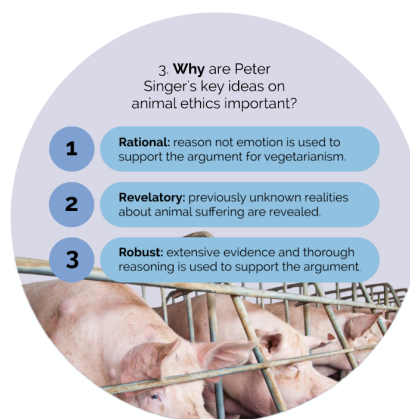


whether or not a being should have rights is not based on their ability to reason, or their ability to communicate, but on their ability to suffer. • Peter Singer wholeheartedly endorses this idea; • he claims the capacity for suffering and enjoyment (in other words, sentience, or subjective experience) is the essential characteristic that necessitates the consideration of another being's interests. But why? Why should we discriminate between beings based on their capacity for pain and pleasure rather than the colour of their skin or the number of their legs? • Well, and this is incredibly important, because discrimination based on the capacity for pain and pleasure does not arbitrarily exclude any interests from consideration in ethical decision-making, • because this capacity is what interests are based on. • Which tees up nicely a lovely comparison, which I'll quote verbatim, because Peter Singer's words are better than my own: "It would be nonsense to say that it was not in the interests of a • stone to be kicked along the road by a schoolboy. • A stone does not have interests because it cannot suffer. Nothing that we can do to it could possibly make any difference to its welfare. • The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is, however, not only necessary, but also sufficient for us to say that a being has interests - at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering. • A mouse, for example, does have an interest in not being kicked along the road, because it will suffer if it is." ... And there we have it: speciesism is a type of discrimination, because animals have interests by virtue of their ability to experience pain and pleasure. Black people have interests by virtue of this ability. Women have interests by virtue of this ability. Animals have interests by virtue of this ability. Indeed, by this reasoning, disregarding black people and women in ethical decision-making is no different from disregarding animals. Food for thought. • Peter Singer's third and final key idea is outlined here, where he argues that people should become vegetarian. • "What can we do about [speciesism]?" He asks. There are a number of things, of course, • but the most important is to become a vegetarian, because it underpins and makes consistent every other action a person makes. • The first step in addressing speciesism is to stop killing and eating members of other species for something as trivial as our taste preferences, perhaps unsurprisingly. • But what if we raise animals compassionately and kill them painlessly? • Peter Singer heads off this objection by arguing that it's practically impossible (something he substantiates in a lengthy chapter we've been unable to review, but I thoroughly recommend reading). In fact, even if it could be done, we couldn't produce enough to feed everyone and it would be astonishingly expensive. • So, even if it's theoretically possible, it's not the question we face in the supermarket: "We must ask ourselves, not: Is it ever right to eat meat? but: Is it right to eat this meat?" • Peter Singer concludes that those opposed to needless pain and suffering must join those opposed to the needless killing of animals, answering with an emphatic "no" to this question. ... Vegetarianism, for Peter Singer, is the only way of living that properly applies the principle of equality, because producing meat and other animal products is practically impossible without completely disregarding the most fundamental interests of billions of animals.

• This brings us to why Peter Singer's key ideas on animal ethics are important, and I've got three suggestions. • First, they're rational: Peter Singer explicitly claims his argument is based on reason, and he deliberately avoids appeals to emotion or sentiment in building his case for vegetarianism and the equal consideration of animal interests in ethical decision-making. • Second, they're revelatory. Whilst we haven't reviewed the relevant chapters, the bulk of *Animal Liberation* is devoted to laying out extensive evidence of the unavoidable suffering inflicted on animals in

factory farms and laboratories; they shine a light on some particularly shady practices, and expose an awful lot of abuse. • Third, they're robust: not only does Peter Singer support his argument with a considerable amount of evidence from farming, medicine and science publications (largely using the words of the industries that perpetrate the abuse), but he's also methodical in making explicit the philosophical underpinnings of his claims.

• That brings us to the end of this investigation into Peter Singer, and the work that thrust animal ethics into the political limelight from the 1970s: *Animal Liberation*. It's a pretty challenging read. Not only does it detail the pain and suffering that billions of animals are subjected to, but it also reveals an uncomfortable truth: all meat eaters are complicit and ethically responsible for it. Of course, you may disagree; nevertheless, whilst the argument for vegetarianism has clearly been lost in practice, it's difficult to deny that it's been won in theory. A universally agreed standard that supports the consideration of human interests in ethical decision-making but rejects the consideration of animal interests doesn't exist. And on that stark note, goodbye!



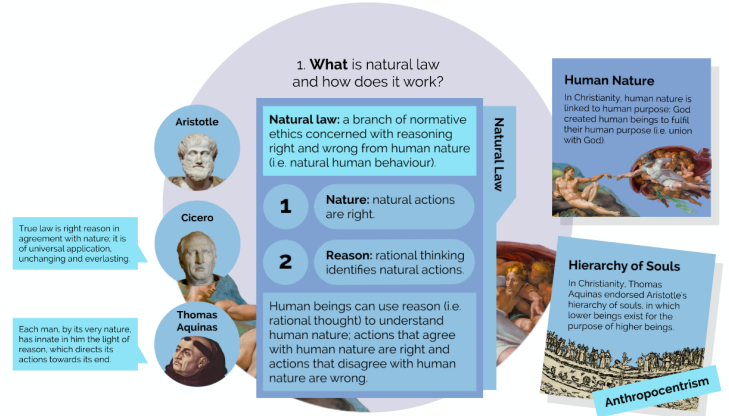
Natural Law and Animal Ethics

Hi! This lesson is all about how natural law is applied to animal ethics; in other words, how this normative ethical theory (natural law) is used to decide how to address issues in animal ethics. What's important to remember is we're looking at an intersection between two different branches of ethics: natural law, which belongs to the normative branch, and animal ethics, which belongs to the applied branch. To do this properly, we need to know a little more about normative ethics, and natural law in particular. In brief, normative ethics is concerned with investigating how to decide whether an action is right or wrong, and the different ways of doing this, whilst natural law is just one of these ways. Over the course of this lesson, we're going to consider what natural law is, and how it's used to adjudicate ethical actions; how it's applied to issues in animal ethics (like farming, medicine and science, and sport); and why its application to these issues is important.

• So, without further ado, what is natural law and how does it work? Unfortunately, this seemingly straightforward question is actually quite difficult to answer, because there are a lot of different versions of natural law. • Notwithstanding this, • I think this definition is a fair one: it's a branch of normative ethics concerned with reasoning right and wrong from human nature (or natural human behaviour); hence the word "natural" in natural law. There are two essential components to almost all versions of natural law: • one, the claim that natural actions are right. To use a slightly ludicrous

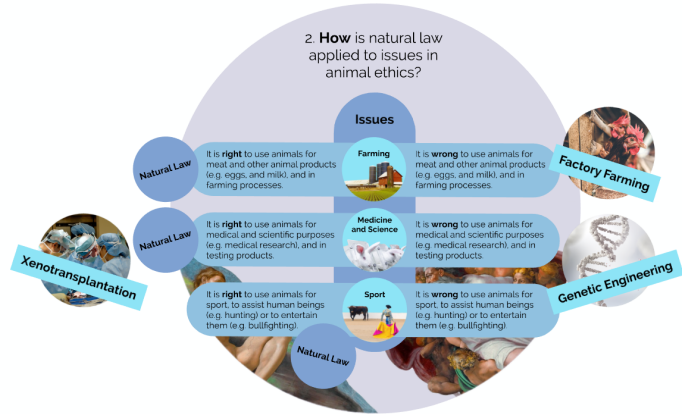
example, feeding fruit and vegetables to my infant daughter is right, because her nature (or the way her body works) means she can grow and thrive on such a diet; feeding her soil is wrong, because her body can't extract nutrients from soil and it would eventually prove fatal. Although this isn't the case for a worm, because its nature is such that it can grow and thrive on a diet of soil (so, you see, nature provides a clear steer for action). • The second component is the claim that reason can identify natural actions. Whilst trying to raise a child on a diet of soil is self-evidently unnatural (insofar as it's not in agreement with the way the human body works, because it eventually ends in death), plenty of actions aren't quite so obvious. To take a couple of famous examples the Catholic Church has historically fixated on: both homosexual sex and heterosexual sex with contraception are wrong according to their version of natural law, because, whilst neither of these actions are obviously unnatural (insofar as they aren't in such disagreement with the nature of the human body that they'll kill you), rational thinking apparently reveals that neither action uses the human body as intended. (This assumes, of course, that human beings are created with an intended purpose, but more on that later.) • In summary, human beings can use reason to understand human nature; actions that agree with human nature are right, and actions that disagree with human nature are wrong. Versions of natural law have a long pedigree: • Aristotle presented a version, • and so did Cicero, who claimed that, "True law is right reason in agreement with nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting." • Nevertheless, Thomas Aquinas's version (which is the one used by the Catholic Church) remains the most famous; he claimed that, "Each man, by its very nature, has innate in him the light of reason, which directs its action towards its end." Whilst there are plenty of things to know about Thomas Aquinas's version of natural law, I think two are worth picking out: • first, he understood human nature to be inextricably linked to human purpose: part of human nature is to fulfil human purpose (which he believed was union with God); so, natural actions are those that bring human beings closer to union with their creator. • Second, he endorsed Aristotle's hierarchy of souls: humans are above animals, and animals are above plants. Thomas Aquinas used the Bible to support this idea (principally, the so-called dominion passages in Genesis), which gives human beings the right to use beings lower down the hierarchy of souls to achieve their purpose. • This is an obvious example of anthropocentrism, which is the belief that human beings are the most important things in the universe. So, if you haven't already worked out where natural law is heading with regard to animal issues, you can probably make a good guess now.

• So, how is natural law applied to issues in animal ethics. • Well, take farming, you either believe it's right to use animals for meat, other animal products, and in farming processes, or you believe it's wrong. • According to natural law, farming animals is clearly right: it helps human beings grow and thrive, which is necessary for them to fulfil their

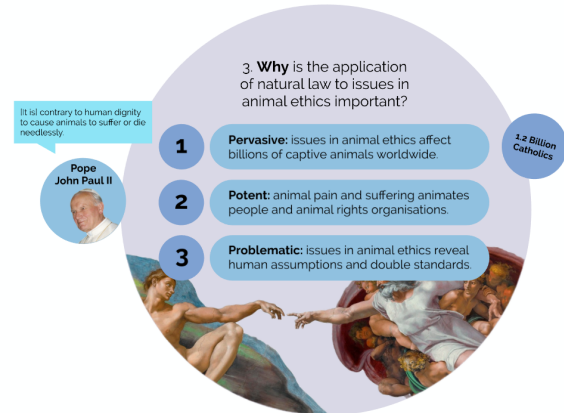


purpose, and animals are lower down the hierarchy of souls, so people can use them as they wish. Notwithstanding this, the modern world has thrown one fly into the ointment: • factory farming. Arguably, natural law prohibits factory farming; not because it causes pain and suffering to billions of animals, but because evidence increasingly shows that it drives climate change and famine (both of which threaten the lives of human beings). • Next, we've got medicine and science; and, again, you either believe it's right to use animals for medical and scientific purposes, and in animal testing, or you believe it's wrong.

• According to natural law, this sort of use is clearly right, because it supports industries that improve people's lives. • This includes practices like xenotransplantation, which is the use of animal organs in human transplant patients. (A friend of mine actually received an early pig skin transplant, after horrific burns to his chest and stomach; the pig died, but it saved his life.) • Nevertheless, one thing that natural law does place off-limits is genetic engineering; it wasn't possible during Thomas Aquinas's lifetime, but it involves "playing God" by manipulating the God-created natures of human beings or animals. Anything that does this could alter God-given purposes, which is highly problematic and must be avoided. • Finally, we've got sport; and you either believe it's right to use animals for sport, or you believe it's wrong. Things get a little more complicated here, • because, whilst natural law takes the position that human beings can use animals as they wish to fulfil their purposes (as supported by the hierarchy of souls), it's not clear that using animals in sport helps to do this. In fact, Thomas Aquinas feared that violence against animals desensitised people to violence against human beings, which would definitely make it wrong to use animals in sport. Additionally, animals have God-given purposes, too, and whilst Thomas Aquinas believed it's right to kill an animal to fulfil human purpose (despite the fact it curtails the fulfilment of the animal's purpose), he did not appear to consider whether or not it's right to kill an animal when it doesn't fulfil human purpose (which would appear to be the case in blood sports like bullfighting). In sum, using animals in sport is right, but only unambiguously so when it doesn't desensitise people to violence and it helps fulfil human purpose, which is a relatively high bar.



• This leaves us with only one thing left to contemplate, why the application of natural law to issues in animal ethics is important, which is really about why the issues in animal ethics are. • First, animal issues are pervasive: they affect billions of farm and laboratory animals that are kept in appalling conditions. Natural law is material to their welfare, • because 1.2 billion Catholics subscribe to it. Consequently, Thomas Aquinas's version of natural law affects how a huge number of people treat animals. • Two, animal issues are potent: animal pain and suffering animates some members of the public powerfully enough to propel them into violent activism. Interestingly, this may have caused the Catholic Church to reflect on what natural law actually permits. • Ever since Pope John Paul II declared, "[It is] contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly," the Catholic Church has increasingly come out against practices like factory farming and animal testing, which suggests natural law is relatively flexible. • And finally, issues in animal ethics are problematic: the way natural law allows people to treat animals reveals significant assumptions about humanity's privileged place in the universe.



• That brings us to the end of this investigation into natural law and animal ethics; now you know what natural law is, how it's applied to issues in animal ethics, and why it's important. Natural law receives a fair bit of criticism, because it appears to allow appalling animal abuse, but I think much of it's unfair. Thomas Aquinas's version is a product of its time; and, in truth, the sort of pain and suffering that human beings inflict on animals today was inconceivable back then, before factory farms and laboratories even existed. Anyway, you can make up your own mind about whether natural law can deal with issues in animals ethics today as well as it did in the past, but the recent behaviour of the Catholic Church should show you that it's possible to adapt it. And on that retrospective note, goodbye!

Situation Ethics and Animal Ethics

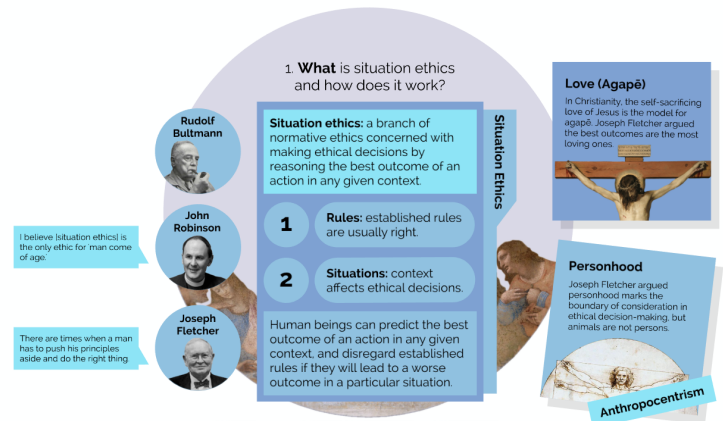
Hi! This lesson is all about how situation ethics is applied to animal ethics; in other words, how this normative ethical theory (situation ethics) is used to decide how to address issues in animal ethics. What's important to remember is we're looking at an intersection between two different branches of ethics: situation ethics, which belongs to the normative branch, and animal ethics, which belongs to the applied branch. To do this properly, we need to know a little more about normative ethics, and situation ethics in particular. In brief, normative ethics is concerned with investigating how to decide whether an action is right or wrong, and the different ways of doing this, whilst situation ethics is just one of these ways. Over the course of this lesson, we're going to consider what situation ethics is, and how it's used to adjudicate ethical actions; how it's applied to issues in animal ethics (like farming, medicine and science, and sport); and why its application to these issues is important.

• So, without further ado, what is situation ethics and how does it work? The answer to this question is muddled by the fact that different people have devised different versions of situation ethics since the beginning of the twentieth century.

• Nevertheless, the following definition is broadly accurate: a branch of normative ethics concerned with making ethical decisions by reasoning the best outcome of an action in any given context (and, in this case, context is a synonym for situation). Additionally, there are two essential components to almost all versions of situation

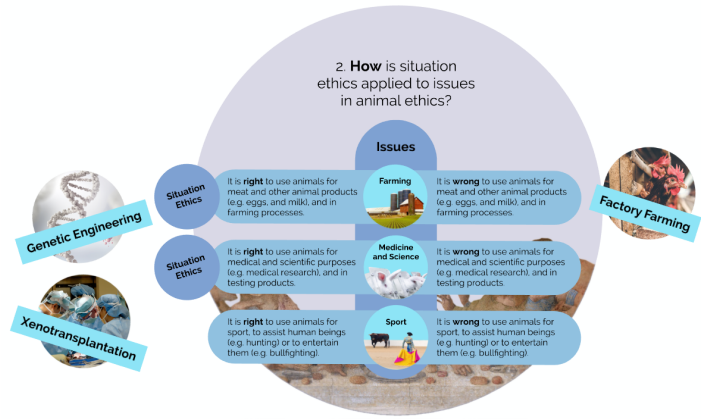
ethics: • one, the claim that established rules are usually right. Within Christianity, which is overwhelmingly responsible for the development of situation ethics, this means the ethical imperatives found within the Bible should usually be followed. This is important, because situation ethics is sometimes misrepresented as a normative ethic that disregards rules, reducing ethical decision-making to an exercise in predicting the most loving outcome. As you'll notice, we haven't even discussed love yet; because love is peculiar to one version of situation ethics (albeit a very famous one), and even then it only becomes relevant when established rules don't appear to provide loving outcomes. • The second component is the claim that context affects ethical decisions. Put simply, established rules are usually right, because they lead to good or positive outcomes in most contexts; however, in some circumstances or situations, established rules may be wrong, because they lead to bad or negative outcomes. To use an extreme but clear-cut example: murder is wrong; however, if a cleaner at the Wansee Conference (where the leadership of Nazi Germany devised the Holocaust) had overheard the plans and taken it upon herself to kill the Nazi leadership in cold blood, a situation ethicist would consider her actions entirely justifiable. • In summary, human beings can predict the best outcome of an action in any given context, and disregard established rules if they will lead to a worse outcome in a particular situation. As we've already discussed, versions of situation ethics began to appear in the early twentieth century: • Rudolf Bultmann presented a version, • and so did John Robinson, who claimed that, "It is the only ethic for 'man come of age'," by which he meant the only ethic for human beings morally developed enough to make their own ethical decisions (rather than slavishly following established rules regardless of their outcomes). • Nevertheless, Joseph Fletcher's version remains the most famous; using the words of a cab driver, he claimed that, "There are times when a man has to push his principles aside and do the right thing." Whilst there are plenty of things to know about Joseph Fletcher's version of situation ethics, I think two are worth picking out: • first, he believed the best ethical outcomes are the most loving ones, and used the self-sacrificing love of Jesus (or *agapē*) as the model for this. Generally, he agreed that the established rules of the Bible lead to the most loving outcomes, but not in all situations. • Second, he claimed personhood marks the boundary of consideration in ethical decision-making, and excluded animals from consideration using his definition of the word. • Again, this is an obvious example of anthropocentrism, which is the belief that human beings are the most important things in the universe, and hints at the fact that the lot of animals under situation ethics may be no better than under natural law.

• So, how is situation ethics applied to issues in animal ethics. • Well, take farming, you either believe it's right to use animals for meat, other animal products, and in farming processes, or you believe it's wrong. • According to situation ethics, farming animals is clearly right: it has loving outcomes for billions of people who survive on eating



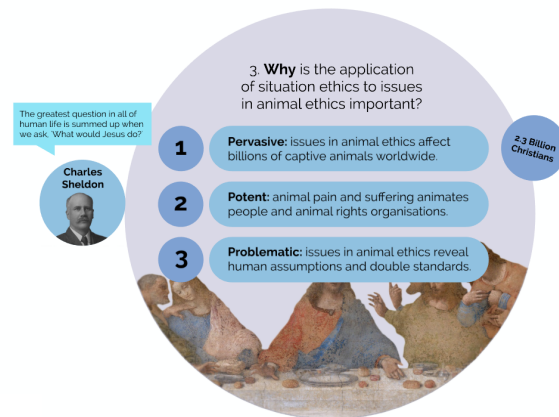
animal products, and the millions of people who earn a living from associated industries. Nevertheless, • factory farming poses something of a problem. Some people argue that this practice leads to unloving outcomes for hundreds of millions of human beings, because evidence increasingly shows it drives climate change and famine (both of which threaten the lives of people in less economically developed countries). • Next, we've got medicine and science; and, again, you either believe it's right to use animals for medical and scientific purposes, and in animal testing, or you believe it's wrong.

• According to situation ethics, this sort of use is unambiguously right, because it supports industries that improve people's lives, thereby producing loving outcomes for human beings. This includes practices like both • genetic engineering • and xenotransplantation, which is the use of animal organs in human transplant patients. Joseph Fletcher was a pioneer in the field of bioethics, and supported almost any use of animals in medicine and science that produces loving outcomes for human beings. In fact, he was a member of the American Eugenics Society, and even accepted practices like genetic engineering and voluntary sterilisation in human beings, provided they have loving outcomes. By comparison, situation ethics is far more permissive of the use of animals in medicine and science than natural law, because it's an area in which people can more easily argue that the use of animals has loving outcomes for human beings (specifically, those cured by medicines tested on animals). • Finally, we've got sport; and you either believe it's right to use animals for sport, or you believe it's wrong. Things get a little more complicated here, and we're not actually going to place situation ethics on this continuum, because it's unclear that the use of animals in sport is an ethical issue for situation ethicists. The point is debatable, but the use of animals in sport does not appear to produce loving outcomes for human beings, at least not of the self-sacrificing type encapsulated by the word *agapē*. Joseph Fletcher famously claimed, "We ought to love people and use things". However, the use of animals in sport involves using things (namely animals; they're not people, because they don't have personhood) without producing clearly loving outcomes for human beings. In sum, using animals in sport is neither something people ought to do nor ought not to do; if you accept my argument, it isn't an ethical issue.



• This leaves us with only one thing left to contemplate, why the application of situation ethics to issues in animal ethics is important, which is really about why the issues in animal ethics are.

• First, animal issues are pervasive: they affect billions of farm and laboratory animals that are kept in appalling conditions. Situation ethics is material to their welfare, • because 2.3 billion Christians frequently ask themselves the question central to situation ethics, • and first articulated by Charles Sheldon, "What would Jesus do?" It's the answer to this question that influences how plenty of Christians treat animals. • Two, animal issues are potent: animal pain and suffering animates some members of the public powerfully enough to propel them into violent activism. In fact, the increasing popularity of situation ethics may eventually cause friction between Christians and the animal rights movement, unless Joseph Fletcher's definition of personhood is expanded to include at least some species of animals. • And finally, issues in animal ethics are problematic: the way situation ethics allows people to treat animals reveals significant assumptions about how being human justifies special rights and treatment that is denied to animals.



• That brings us to the end of this investigation into situation ethics and animal ethics; now you know what situation ethics is, how it's applied to issues in animal ethics, and why it's important. Generally, situation ethics is considered a soft and fluffy manifestation of Christian ethics, based on love, which justifies the bending of otherwise inflexible Biblical rules. But that's not the full picture; generally, situation ethicists regard animals as things in ethical decision-making, and because actions are evaluated according to outcomes for people, it makes life much easier to ignore the pain and suffering of animals. Of course, you might disagree, but given how frequently Joseph Fletcher and situation ethics are misrepresented, it's important to take a critical stance. And on that challenging note, goodbye!

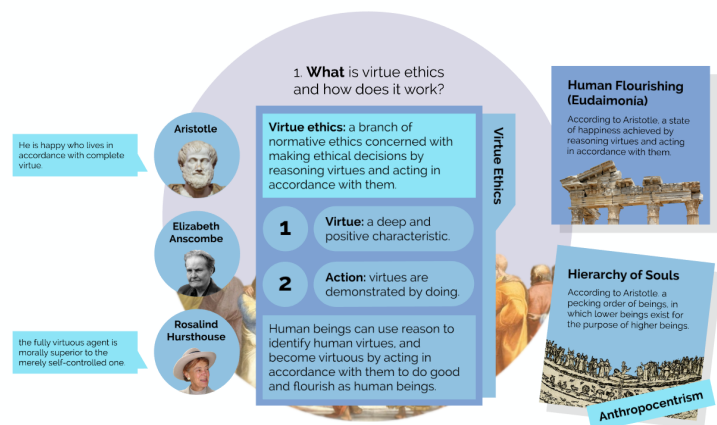
Virtue Ethics and Animal Ethics

Hi! This lesson is all about how virtue ethics is applied to animal ethics; in other words, how this normative ethical theory (virtue ethics) is used to decide how to address issues in animal ethics. What's important to bear in mind is that we're looking at an intersection between two different branches of ethics: virtue ethics, which belongs to the normative branch, and animal ethics, which belongs to the applied branch. To do this properly, we need to know a little more about normative ethics, and virtue ethics in particular. In brief, normative ethics is concerned with investigating how to decide whether an action is right or wrong, and the different ways of doing this, whilst virtue ethics is just one of these ways. Over the course of this lesson, we're going to consider what virtue ethics is, and how it's used to adjudicate ethical actions; how it's applied to issues in animal ethics (like farming, medicine and science, and sport); and why its application to these issues is important.

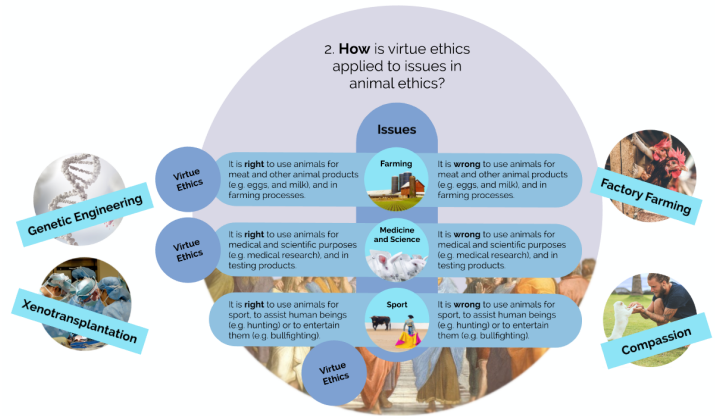
• So, without further ado, what is virtue ethics and how does it work? Well, although different thinkers disagree about what the virtues are, it's relatively straightforward: you use reason to identify virtues, and then you act upon them. • In fact, the following definition sums it up quite neatly: a branch of normative ethics concerned with making ethical decisions by reasoning virtues and acting in accordance with them. Of course, it's easier said than done, but, in a nutshell, this is what it is. Just to hammer this home, there are two essential components to virtue ethics: • one, virtue;

by which we mean a positive characteristic that's identified using reason. Sometimes characteristics are referred to as "traits"; and, arguably, this is the most controversial aspect of virtue ethics, because different thinkers don't always agree on the characteristics or traits that should be identified and cultivated. However, and unsurprisingly, at the heart of virtue ethics are the virtues that people should aim to act in accordance with, whichever are eventually identified and agreed upon. • The second component is action, and the idea that virtues can only be cultivated and demonstrated by doing; in fact, action is the mechanism by which these positive characteristics or traits become deeply embedded within us. The most famous proponent of virtue ethics, Aristotle, believed that virtue was a consequence of habit; in other words, acting habitually virtuously actually makes a person more virtuous. Somehow action embeds the characteristic or trait more deeply into people's personalities. To use Aristotle's own words, "Virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions"; or, as encapsulated by the historian and philosopher, William Durant, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit," by which he means a habitual act. • In summary, human beings can use reason to identify human virtues, and become virtuous by acting in accordance with them to do good and flourish as human beings. As we've already discussed, • Aristotle was the most famous proponent of virtue ethics, writing in *Nicomachean Ethics*, "He is happy who lives in accordance with complete virtue." However, after Aristotle, the influence of virtue ethics declined, until it experienced a belated twentieth century revival through the work of • Elizabeth Anscombe, a professor of philosophy from my alma mater, the University of Cambridge, • and Rosalind Hursthouse, who famously claimed, "The fully virtuous agent is morally superior to the merely self-controlled one." Notwithstanding these relatively recent developments, the focus of our discussion will remain on Aristotle's presentation of virtue ethics, and I think there are two things worth picking out about it before going any further. • First, Aristotle believed the purpose of acting virtuously was to achieve human flourishing (or *eudaimonia*); a state of being in which people do good because they are good, so deeply embedded are the virtues in their personalities. • Second, he believed in the existence of a hierarchy of souls: humans are above animals, and animals are above plants, which gives human beings the right to use beings lower down the hierarchy of souls to flourish (or achieve *eudaimonia*). • This is an obvious example of anthropocentrism, which is the belief that human beings are the most important things in the universe; as with other anthropocentric ethical theories, this should give you a good idea of where virtue ethics is heading with regards to the treatment of animals.

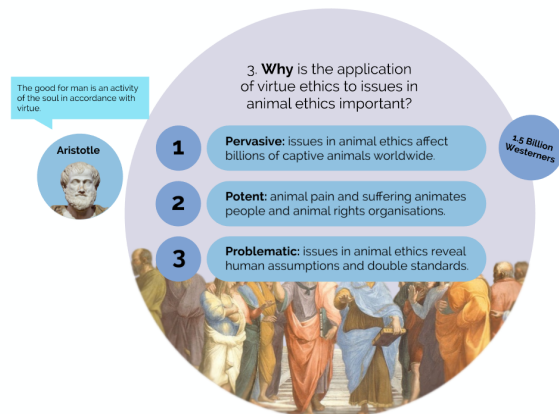
• So, how is virtue ethics applied to issues in animal ethics. • Well, take farming, you either believe it's right to use animals for meat, other animal products, and in farming processes, or you believe it's wrong. • According to virtue ethics, farming animals is right: providing food for others is virtuous, as long as it's motivated by the virtues (for



Aristotle, these may have included friendliness and liberality). However, as with other normative ethical theories, • factory farming poses a problem, because it may be motivated by vices (like greed) instead of the virtues; if so, it's wrong, even though animals are lower down the hierarchy of souls than human beings. In brief, the practice of factory farming is unlikely to involve acting in accordance with the virtues, which may only be possible using traditional farming methods. • Next, we've got medicine and science; and, again, you either believe it's right to use animals for medical and scientific purposes, or you believe it's wrong. • According to virtue ethics, this sort of use is right, because it's motivated by the virtues. Of course, the powerful companies that control animal experimentation, and generate considerable profits from it, may not be acting in agreement with the virtues at an institutional level. Nevertheless, the doctors and scientists who actually undertake animal experimentation likely are; in fact, Aristotle, would have probably concluded that they act with friendly and liberal intentions for other people. Given Aristotle's belief in the hierarchy of souls, practices like both • genetic engineering • and xenotransplantation, which is the use of animal organs in human transplant patients, are ethically acceptable as long as they're undertaken for virtuous reasons. Compared with natural law, virtue ethics (like situation ethics) provides more of a free hand when it comes to the use of animals in medicine and science; however, this free hand depends on having virtuous motives rather than predicting loving outcomes. • Finally, we've got sport; and, again, you either believe it's right to use animals for sport, or you believe it's wrong. As is the case with situation ethics, things get a little more complicated here, but for different reasons: in brief, it's difficult to find virtues that might inspire people to use animals in sport. For example, bullfighting might be inspired by courage; but, given the way the odds are stacked and its official designation as an art form, it appears to be a manifestation of cowardliness and vanity (both of which Aristotle considered vices). Furthermore, modern proponents of virtue ethics, like Rosalind Hursthouse, argue for different virtues than those proposed by Aristotle; • in fact, Rosalind Hursthouse includes compassion in her list, which it's only possible to act in accordance with if the interests of both other human beings and animals are considered when making ethical decisions. • So, perhaps the best we can say is that the jury is out here, and depends a lot on the perspective of the particular virtue ethicist.



• This leaves us with only one thing left to contemplate, why the application of virtue ethics to issues in animal ethics is important, which is really about why the issues in animal ethics are. • First, animal issues are pervasive: they affect billions of farm and laboratory animals that are kept in appalling conditions. Virtue ethics is material to their welfare, • because 1.5 billion Westerners find both it • and a great deal of Aristotelian thought at the bottom of their ethical systems. • Two, animal issues are potent: animal pain and suffering animates some members of the public powerfully enough to propel them into violent activism. In fact, the renaissance that virtue ethics has recently experienced may require it to endorse more biocentric virtues (like compassion) if it's revival is to be sustained. • And finally, issues in animal ethics are problematic: the way virtue ethics can allow people to treat animals reveals significant assumptions about how being human justifies special treatment.



• That brings us to the end of this investigation into virtue ethics and animal ethics; now you know what virtue ethics is, how it's applied to issues in animal ethics, and why it's important. From my perspective, for what it's worth, virtue ethics is a promising ethical platform from which to cultivate a more enlightened approach to animal ethics, but only if Aristotle's ideas about virtues are updated. Ultimately, he was concerned with the way people treated one another, and largely ignored their interactions with animals and the environment; consequently, his formulation of virtue ethics isn't great at helping us work out how to address some of the big issues in animal ethics. But, you need to form your own opinion on the matter. And on that important note, goodbye!

