CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS, LOGIC AND ETHICS & ANIMALS

These chapters are intended to provide background to the readings, highlight important issues in the readings, introduce readings, and raise questions. This first chapter is longer than the rest.

Overview

Discussions of animal ethics are more fruitful when approached after an exposure to general thinking about ethics and methods of moral argument analysis. Theories of animal ethics are typically extensions or modifications of theories developed for addressing more familiar (and often less controversial) questions about human-to-human ethics. Therefore, it is important to be familiar with these theories and methods. These online readings will introduce readers to the more influential moral theories and methods of moral argument analysis, and we will read the introductions to our texts on animal ethics.

Readings

James Pryor (NYU Philosophy), Guidelines on Reading Philosophy:
http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html

Readings on argument analysis:

Since arguments for and against various uses of animals often have as a premise a moral principle derived from an ethical theory, we will first learn some basic concepts about arguments. We will then survey some ethical theories, some arguments in favor of some of them (i.e., reasons given to think that a theory is true), and some arguments against some of them (i.e., reasons given to think that a theory is false).

James Rachels, “Some Basic Points About Arguments,” from

http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/argument.html

Readings that introduce common moral theories (and critique some of them):

- James Rachels, “A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy,” from *The Right Thing To Do* (Google)
  http://ethicsandanimals.googlepages.com/regancase_for_animal_rights.pdf ; also available here:
  http://www.animal-rights-library.com/texts-m/regan03.htm

Our texts’ *short* prefaces and introductions:
ANIMAL LIBERATION – Preface to the 1975 Edition
ANIMAL LIBERATION – Preface to the 1990 Edition
ANIMAL LIBERATION – Preface to the 2002 Edition

EMPTY CAGES – FORWARD by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson
EMPTY CAGES – PROLOGUE: The Cat
EMPTY CAGES – EPILOGUE: The Cat

EMPTY CAGES – PART I NORMAN ROCKWELL AMERICANS
EMPTY CAGES – 1. Who Are You Animal Rights Advocates Anyway?
EMPTY CAGES – 2. How Did You Get That Way?

Part I of *Empty Cages* discusses the influence the media and special interest politics have on how ethics & animals issues
are typically approached. It also explains some different routes people might take to becoming involved in animal issues and Regan’s tells the personal story of how he became an Animal Rights Advocate. This part of the book is, strictly speaking, not philosophy or ethics (but it surely relevant to ethics) and is an interesting, easy read.

ANIMALS LIKE US – Editor’s Introduction

ANIMALS LIKE US – Introduction

Optional: Gruen, preface, and introductory matter.

Readers should sign up for these online email lists to keep up on major media coverage of issues concerning ethics and animals:

Dawnwatch News Service: http://dawnwatch.com
Vegan Outreach’s E-Newsletter:
http://www.veganoutreach.org/enewsletter/index.html

Some of the links on the readings might be incorrect. Please Google the title and you will likely find the file online.
Moral Questions

In this book we will attempt to reasonably answer moral or ethical questions concerning the treatment and use of animals.¹ Some of these questions are general², e.g.:

- Morally, how should we treat animals?
- Which uses of animals, if any, are morally permissible, and which are morally wrong?
- Do we have any moral obligations toward any animals? What is the extent of these obligations? Why do we have these obligations (if we do)? What is it about (various kinds of) animals that make them such that how we treat them matters morally?
- Are there different obligations toward different animals? Might certain uses of some animals be morally permissible, whereas using other animals in similar ways would be wrong? (E.g., might some experiments be wrong if done on chimpanzees, whereas morally permissible, or perhaps “less wrong,” if done on mice?)
- Morally, should we be concerned only with certain kinds of animals, e.g., those who are conscious and have feelings? What about insects? What about unicellular organisms? On what basis do we decide?

¹ The terms ‘ethical’ and ‘moral’ will be used synonymously throughout this course.
² These questions might be described as being about the “moral status” of animals. I will not use this term however, since it is better to just ask straightforward questions about whether some treatment or use is morally permissible or not (and why), whether some treating some being (e.g., some animal) one way would be better or worse than treating another being (e.g., some human being) in a similar way, and so on.
Other questions deal with specific uses of animals, e.g.:

- Is it morally permissible to trap and skin animals for their fur in our society, where alternatives to fur coats are readily available? If we lived somewhere where there were no such “alternative” means to keep warm would that make a difference to the morality of using animals for their fur?
- Is it morally permissible to raise and kill animals to eat them in our society, where nutritious alternatives to animal foods are readily available? If we were somewhere where there were inadequate non-animal foods would that make a difference to the morality of using animals for food?
- If it could be known, with certainty, that some experiments on animals would save the lives of many human beings (or even just one?), would these experiments be morally permissible? If there was only a slight chance that these experiments would lead to such benefits, or no chance, would this make a difference to the morality of these experiments?

While everyone has answers to these questions, we are not interested in anyone’s mere “opinions” or “feelings” about how they should be answered. We want to find out which answers are backed by the best moral reasons or strongest moral arguments, i.e., the arguments that we have the strongest reasons to believe are sound. We want to know why we should accept some answers to these questions and reject others. To do this we will attempt to improve our skills at reasoning morally.¹

¹ We will challenge our own answers to questions like these above and arguments in favor of them by considering contrary answers to these questions (i.e., answers that contradict your, and perhaps our, answers). If we carefully identify evaluate the arguments given by people we disagree with, we may find that their arguments are stronger than our own and so we should change our minds! Another possibility is that their beliefs about how animals should be treated
What the Question Is Not: Not “Morally Right,” but Morally Permissible and/or Morally Obligatory

One might think that the core questions in animal ethics are whether various uses of animals are morally right or morally wrong. This is not quite correct. Effective moral reasoning requires the clear and precise uses of words. Thus, when a word is ambiguous (i.e., has more than one meaning), we must identify these meanings and make it clear what meaning we are using. That way everyone knows what exact thought we have in mind when we make claims using that word: we’re on the same page and can communicate effectively. And we can think about whether what we are saying is true or false and supported (or supportable) by reasons and evidence or not.

This applies to the use of the word ‘right,’ as in morally right because the word is ambiguous. Examples show this. Suppose you saved a drowning baby by pulling her out of the bathtub. This was easy for you, not risky, and had you not been there the baby surely would have drowned. If someone says, “Your saving that baby was morally right,” this person probably means to say that your saving that baby, in these circumstances, was morally obligatory, morally required, or a moral duty: if you had not saved the baby, you should change and, perhaps, their behaviors toward animals should change also. Although change – in belief, attitude, feeling, action and policy – is a focus of this course, it is not about persuasion in the way that a course on advertising, marking, propaganda, and public / media relations might be. It is about persuasion, however, in that we are trying to identify which views people should persuaded to accept, if we wish to think critically and carefully about what we morally ought to do. If we are capable of such critical moral thinking (and, if so, how this is done) will be discussed below and in the readings on logic and argument analysis and practiced throughout the course.
would have done something wrong or morally impermissible.¹

Consider another example. Although you are a person of average income, you send $1000 a month to famine relief organizations to help starving children. Someone says, “Your making these donations is morally right.” Here this person probably does not mean to say your making these donations are morally obligatory, morally required, or a moral duty. Unlike the bathtub case, the common (but perhaps mistaken²) view is that your not donating would not be wrong or morally impermissible. So, this person probably means to by saying, at least, that what you do is morally permissible, i.e., not wrong or not morally impermissible. She might also mean that it is not merely permissible, but more positively good beyond that, but definitely not morally obligatory.

With these distinctions in mind, we can stop using an ambiguous word – “morally right” – and instead use these more precise terms for morally evaluating actions:

1. morally permissible: morally OK; not morally wrong; not morally impermissible; “OK to do”;
2. morally obligatory: morally required; a moral duty; impermissible to not do it; wrong to not do it; “gotta do it”;
3. morally impermissible: morally wrong; not permissible; obligatory to not do it; a duty to not do it.

We might also add a category “between” the permissible and the

¹ Of course, if story is that you didn’t save the baby because you can’t because you are paralyzed, or because you were already maxed-out saving 12 other drowning babies, then you weren’t obligated to save this baby.
² Perhaps, however, “common sense” is mistaken and affluent people are morally obligated to make donations like these. For arguments for this conclusion, see (among other sources) Peter Singer’s “Famine, Affluence and Morality” Philosophy and Public Affairs, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1972), pp. 229-243 (Google) and his “The Singer Solution to World Poverty,” New York Times, 1999 (Google).
obligatory for actions that are positively good, virtuous or admirable, and thereby morally permissible, but not obligatory: e.g., some argue that vegetarianism is in that category, and if this is correct then arguments for the conclusion that vegetarianism is morally obligatory are unsound. This category might be described as the “supererogatory,” meaning beyond the call of duty or what’s morally required.

Thus, the core questions in ethics and animals are what moral categories specific uses of animals fall into – morally permissible, morally obligatory, or morally impermissible or wrong – and, most importantly, why. Again, the reasons given for why we should think, e.g., that some use is permissible and another use is wrong, or whatever conclusions anyone advocates, are our main interest.

What the Questions Also Is Not: Not (Necessarily) Animal “Rights”

A second possible interpretation of the core questions of animal ethics is that they are about whether animals have “rights.” On this view, to ask whether various uses of animals are morally permissible or not is just to ask whether animals have rights or not. It is very common for these two notions to be equated, but they shouldn’t be, for a variety of reasons.

Legal Rights: Not the Issue

First, the term ‘rights’ is multiply ambiguous. One kind of rights are legal rights. Legal rights are such that, in theory, if they are violated, somebody can be punished by the criminal system. Legal rights are “man-made” and vary by time and location: the legal rights women have in the US differ from the legal rights women have in, e.g., Afghanistan. To figure out what legal rights animals have is often easy: just check the law books. There you would find that there are few laws that protect animals from harm: they have few legal rights.

Legal rights are not of much interest to us as ethicists, however, because what’s legally permitted need not be morally permissible: e.g., slaveholding in the US South hundreds of years ago was legal
yet immoral; and what’s legally required may not be morally permissible: e.g., the legal requirement that drugs be “tested” on animals might be an immoral requirement. Although legal standards can be sometimes seen as a highly imperfect expression of a society’s general views on what’s moral and immoral, we will generally not discuss the law beyond our readings’ occasionally observations that animals have few legal rights.

Moral Rights: Not *Necessarily* the Issue

A second possible kind of rights are moral rights. What are moral rights? Later Chapters will address some common misunderstandings and resulting confusions about moral rights, but the most important reason to not equate the questions of what uses of animals are permissible and whether animals have moral rights is this: although this might sound odd to some people, it’s possible that many uses of animals are wrong even though animals have no moral rights. Various uses of animals might be wrong for other moral reasons besides their having rights, so even if animals have no rights, it doesn’t immediately follow that harmful animal use is morally permissible. Equating the two issues conceals this possibility.

Again, the core questions in ethics and animals are what moral categories we should think specific uses of animals fall into – morally permissible, morally obligatory, or morally impermissible/wrong – and the reasons why we should think this. Thinking in terms of moral rights can make the issues more confusing than they have to be.

Some Basic Concepts about Arguments: Introduction to Logic

To attempt to try to figure out which moral views about animals are correct, we will try to find out which views are supported by the best reasons. To do this, will identify and evaluate arguments. The James Rachels (“Some Basic Points About Arguments” (Google) and James Pryor (at http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html) readings give excellent overviews of what arguments are and what makes
arguments good and bad.

An argument is a conclusion that is supported by premises. The premises should lead to the conclusion, forming a “chain” of reasoning; this makes the argument “logically valid” (a technical term with a precise meaning that differs from how non-philosophers often might use the term). In a valid argument, since the premises lead to the conclusion (and this chain of reasoning is clearly identifiable), if the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true as well. When an argument is valid and the premises are true, then the argument is sound (and the conclusion is thereby true, given the definition of “valid” and the fact that the premises are true). If the argument is valid and, with good reasons, you think the premises are true, then you should think the argument is sound. We want to find sound arguments and reject unsound ones.

Our main concern is finding the arguments, understanding what exact conclusion(s) is being defended and what exact premises are given in its favor. We have to figure out whether the premises lead to the conclusion, i.e., is valid, or if we can “tweak” the argument by adding premises to make it valid. We then try to figure out if it is sound. Here are three rules for carefully identifying arguments:

1. Make the stated conclusion(s) and premise(s) precise in quantity: is something said to be true (or false) of all things (or people, or animals, etc.), or just some of them (and if so, which ones)?
2. Clarify the intended meaning(s) of unclear or ambiguous words in conclusions or premises.
3. State (any) assumed premises so that the complete pattern of reasoning in an argument is displayed and it is clear how the stated premise(s) logically leads to the conclusion.

Other important logical tools are that of necessary condition(s), sufficient condition(s), necessary and sufficient condition(s), and counterexamples. (See Pryor especially). The importance of these concepts for animal ethics will be apparent as we work through the issues.
Moral Principles as Premises: Introduction to Ethics

Moral arguments often have a moral principle as a premise. We will attempt to figure out if these premises are true. Moral principles often assert that an action having some feature(s) is a sufficient condition(s) for that action being morally wrong, permissible, or whatever. E.g., here are two possible moral principles:

A. If an action causes pain, then that action is morally wrong.
B. If an action benefits someone and harms nobody, then that action is morally permissible.

(Can principle A can be refuted, i.e., shown false, by counterexamples, an exception to the proposed rule? Is principle B true? How would we try to figure that out?). Moral principles might also claim that an action having some feature(s) is a necessary condition for that action being morally wrong, permissible, or whatever, e.g.:

C. A being has a “right to not suffer needlessly” only if that being is capable of reasoning morally.

(Can principle C be refuted, i.e., shown false, by counterexamples?).

Moral principles are often justified by appeal to moral or ethical theories. A moral theory attempts to answer these kinds of questions:

- What makes morally right actions right and wrong actions wrong? (Or, what makes permissible acts permissible, obligatory actions obligatory, etc.?)? What is it about actions that give them the moral status (permissible, obligatory, etc.) that they have?
- What’s the basic, fundamental, essential difference(s) between permissible and impermissible actions? What features of actions mark that divide?
• What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for an action being permissible, obligatory, etc.?

Before looking at influential theories developed and refined by philosophers, it is useful to start by developing your own moral theory (or theories). Here is one method to do that:

Make a chart with three columns. In the left column, make a long list of actions (and we can use character traits too, if you’d like) that you think most people would think are obviously wrong or bad. In the right column, make a long list of actions or character traits that you think most people would think are obviously morally permissible, obligatory or otherwise good. In the middle, list any actions that come to mind but don’t fall into either category. Share your list with others to compare, change, revise, etc.¹

Now ask, what is it about the wrong actions on your list that makes them wrong? Why are they on the “wrong” list? What is it about the right/good actions that make them right or good? Why do they belong on that list? What moral hypotheses best explains this? Your answers here could result in your revising your initial judgments if you see that some emerging moral principles are inconsistent with any initial judgment.

A complementary approach is this:

Describe how animals are treated in, e.g., the food industry, the fur industry, in experimentation, etc. Would treating (any?) human beings in these ways be morally permissible, or would

¹ From Christina Hoff-Sommer’s “Teaching The Virtues” (Google): “It is wrong to mistreat a child, to humiliate someone, to torment an animal. To think only of yourself, to steal, to lie, to break promises. Torturing a child. Starving someone to death. Humiliating an invalid in a nursing home. On the positive side: it is right to be considerate and respectful of others, to be charitable and generous.”
this be wrong? What moral hypotheses – about what makes wrong actions wrong – best explain why this is so, e.g., why it would be wrong to treat humans in these ways?

These exercises might result in you developing basic theories that are similar to many influential moral theories that have been developed over the last few centuries, if not longer. Thinking for yourself can lead to many of the same moral insights many of the philosophical “greats” have had.

James Rachels, in “A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy” (Google) and Tom Regan (“The Case for Animal Rights” article, not book; Google) discuss the (arguably) more plausible moral theories last after they discuss and sometimes argue against the (arguably) inferior theories. Here are the theories they discuss:

  - Rachels argues relativism and skepticism are false.

- **Divine Command Theory** (Rachels “Short Introduction” 3-5)
  - Rachels argues the divine command theory is false and even that religious believers should not accept it. (See below on religion and ethics).

- **Virtue Theory** (Rachels, “Short Introduction” 5-6); “Cruelty-Kindness” (Regan, 217)
  - Regan argues that a kind of virtue theory, which he calls the cruelty-kindness view, is mistaken.

- **Natural Law** (Rachels, “Short Introduction” 6-8). Not a very popular theory any more outside of some Catholic contexts.

- **Contractarianism / the Social Contract** (Rachels “Short Introduction” 8-10); Regan (214-216). (Regan also discusses Rawls’ improved version of contractarianism; Mark Rowlands modifies this theory to argue in defense of animals.)
  - Regan argues that contractarianisms are false.
• **Utilitarianism** (Rachels “Short Introduction” 11-14; Regan 217-220)
  o Regan argues that utilitarianism is false.

• **Immanuel Kant’s Ethics** (“Short Introduction” 17-19); “The Rights View” (Regan 220-223), which is developed out of a modification of Kant’s 2nd Categorical Imperative; Regan has a broader view of who should be treated as “ends in themselves.”

Here are two categories for ethical theories:

• **Altruistic Ethical Theories** (Rachels “Short Introduction” 10-11): a broad category of ethical theories; they contrast with “egoistic” theories where the only intrinsic moral concern is for yourself and how your actions affect your own interest.

• **Ethical Theories that Require Impartiality** (Rachels “Short Introduction” 14-16): a broad category of ethical theories; contrasts with “partialist” theories that allow special preference to family and friends.

Animal advocates typically argue that the moral theory(s) that best explain how we ought to treat human beings (especially vulnerable human beings: the very young and very old) have positive implications for animals. Whether their arguments are sound, we shall see.

**Religion and Ethics: A Brief Comment**

Ethical issues are sometimes addressed in the context of religion; indeed, it’s often assumed that the two are inseparable. For this book, we will reject this assumption, largely for the reasons that Rachels presents, following Socrates. Their reasoning is this:

If some religious text, authority, or even God makes a moral judgment (e.g., about whether some use of animals is morally permissible or not, or any other moral topic), then either there
are *reasons* that justify that judgment or not. If there are no reasons supporting that judgment, then it is arbitrary and should not be accepted. If there *are* reasons, however, then those reasons are what justify the judgment, not the fact that some authority says so, and we should be able to identify and evaluate those reasons directly.

In sum, “Because I said so!” is not a good reason to believe something, unless whatever is said is supported by reasons. Nevertheless, there are many religiously-motivated animal advocacy organizations and thinkers and the suggested readings and web pages reference them.

**Introduction to Animal Ethics**

Finally, we will read the prefaces and introductions to our main texts. They are all interesting; Singer’s is especially important to the historic development of the animal movement. We can use Regan’s “cat case” and its variants as a unifying theme for inquiry. We will try to determine which broad view below is supported by the best moral reasons:

A. Any (or almost any) use of animals is morally permissible; there are no moral obligations to animals.

B. Seriously harming animals (e.g., causing them pain and suffering, killing them, etc.) is morally permissible provided they are housed in comfortable cages.

C. Seriously harming animals is permissible provided they are housed in comfortable cages, treated gently and killed painlessly.

D. Seriously harming animals is typically morally wrong, *even if* they are housed in comfortable cages, treated gently and killed painlessly.

**Discussion Questions**

1. For many ethical issues, a good place to start is to reflect
on “common views” about the issues. Suppose you surveyed a range of people about the moral questions that these Chapters open with. What are some of the most common answers that would be given? What *reasons* would you often hear in favor of these answers? Are these reasons generally good reasons or not? Why?

2. Based on the readings about logic and arguments, explain (i) what an argument is, (ii) what makes arguments good or bad (e.g., explain the concepts of validity and soundness), and (iii) what one does to try to show that an argument is sound or unsound (e.g., explain the concept of a counterexample). If you have any other questions about what arguments are and how to identify and evaluate them, ask them here. We will be practicing identifying and evaluating arguments throughout the course.

3. Complete the moral theory building exercises above. What does your moral theory (or theories) look like? According to your theory(s), what is it about wrong actions that seem to *make* them wrong, and what is it about morally permissible / obligatory / good actions that *make* them like that? What follows from your theory (or theories) for how human beings should be treated? What follows for animals (and *which* animals)?

4. Which moral theory (or theories) that Rachels and Regan discuss seem best, i.e., most likely to identify the (approximate) truth about the nature of morally permissible and obligatory actions? Which seems worst, i.e., false? Why?

5. What observations do you have about the Prefaces, Introductions, and Prologs to each of the books on animal ethics? What strikes you as interesting, provocative, controversial and otherwise worthy of comment and reflection?

Of course, always feel free to raise any other questions, observations, criticisms and any other responses to the Chapter’s readings and issues.