Topics in Farm Animal Stress, Behavior and Animal Welfare  
-- Animal Rights Philosophy and Animal Welfare Perspectives  
ANSC 5318  
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Background

The field of environmental physiology including studies of animal behavior, stress physiology and animal welfare is a diverse topic area. To work in this area requires a multi-disciplinary education and research program. Graduate students typically work in fields including, at least, animal behavior, neuroscience, immunology, endocrinology, psychology, philosophy, and statistics. Most students work in at least 2 of these fields, but to work in this area some knowledge of all areas is required.

Universities around the USA (and the world) have a few students at selected institutions that study this diverse field. Having a critical mass of students at one institution is not likely. However, a critical mass of students is found when one considers multiple institutions. This course format allows students from distant locations or even from different universities to participate.

Course Format

The course will have a combined topics/seminar/readings format. The instructor will select a reading list that may include but are not limited to books, review articles or original research papers. The readings will include both classic literature in a given field in conjunction with current materials.

Students will meet on line on a regular basis. The meeting time may vary with semester, but it will generally be two hours per week when the class is in session. Students will be on-line during 12, 2-hour sessions and they will participate in the topic to be discussed that week. Students will write a summary of each reading assignment and they will answer specific questions about each book or reading assignment. They will build this summary list over time. Students will also have a final exam to write. The emphasis on the exam is on critical thinking and integration of materials.
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Learning Outcomes
Students are expected to immerse themselves in the topics of animal rights philosophy and animal welfare science. Students are expected to understand:

- Philosophical arguments for animal rights and welfare
- Animal welfare issues and the science of animal welfare

Assessment of Learning Outcomes
Students will have their understanding of animal rights philosophy and animal welfare science assessed by the following means:

- Thoughtful book reports for each reading
- Answering questions in essay form to demonstrate understanding
- Participation in on-line discussions
- Assessment of knowledge by essay exams

Animal Rights/Welfare Topics & Reading List

This reading list is intended to bring the reader up to speed on the history, philosophy and current politics of the animal rights movement in the USA and its start in Europe. The books are listed in a suggested order of reading, but this order is not required. Upon completing this list of readings, you will see the breadth of criticisms leveled on animal production and processing.

One of the most interesting considerations after reading all of the below books is that people can find ways to criticize the animal industries from within their sphere of comfort. If you are a utilitarian or rights-based philosopher, or if you are politically inclined to the left or right wing, you will find people who argue that the animal industries have problems from within your philosophical or political comfort zone. Criticism of animal agriculture cuts across political and socio-economic lines.


This book is a classic and you may have read it in school years ago. It is well worth reading again. It outlines the state of the meat packing industry at the turn of the last century. It appeals to human emotion when animals are killed.

The story’s main character is Jergis Rudkus, an Lithuanian immigrant. He gets a series of jobs in Chicago’s Packintown. You see prejudice, horrible working conditions, inhumane treatment of animals, and unsanitary conditions. Today’s plants are much improved in sanitation. The working conditions are better in many ways. The manner in
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which animals are stunned and bled is similar today although today’s plants are much more efficient.

This book is best read shortly before you tour a modern meat packing plant. You will see some similarities and some differences between what Sinclair describes and what you will see today.


This book has a quote on the cover of the latest version that I believe is correct among activists. “A most important book that will change the way many of us look at animals – and, ultimately at ourselves.” – Chicago Tribune. This will be a very important book for today and in the near future.

Singer is a modern-day philosopher who for many years was at Murdock University in Melbourne, Australia. He moved to a faculty position at Princeton (NJ) where he remains an activist and philosopher.

Singer outlines his utilitarian view of animal ‘rights’ that he has made famous. His view is most famous for making his case (in one example) as follows. Say a retarded human is less intelligent than a normal chimp. On which species would you rather conduct research? Singer argues from a moral point of view that the normal chimp has more ‘value’ than the retarded human and thus you should chose the retarded human. If you chose the retarded human and this seems wrong to you, then of course you would not use the chimp. And the chimp is like a pig and a dog and a rat and so on. Therefore, you should not do research on any animal, especially vertebrates.

Singer takes on farm animals and other animal uses. He advocates being an ethical vegetarian and he uses pictures that are meant to inspire vegetarianism. His views are not totally agreed-upon by philosophers, but they are widely held by activists.

This book will get you started with some history, philosophy and apparent logic. It will set the framework for other readings.

3. Animal Machines – Ruth Harrison

Ruth Harrison wrote this industry-changing book in 1964 as “an expose of ‘factory farming’ and its danger to the public”. It documented confinement conditions in the UK and called for a change in production practices. This is the modern-day start of the animal welfare movement in Europe that moved to the USA.

This book is required reading for understanding of the modern-day history of the animal rights activist movement. It chronicles the life of Henry Spira as he moves from being a merchant marine to a union activist to meeting Singer in NYC and to his beginning in the animal rights movement. It also gives a history of Henry’s interactions with companies like McDonald’s. It outlines the effective strategy used by Henry to force change by pressuring the retail industry. The objective of the book is to offer a formula for other activists to be as successful as Henry was (and he certainly was successful). Henry believed that the most suffering in the world was among the billions of farmed animals (more so than research or testing).

Some things that are not spelled out in the book are the relationship between Henry Spira and PETA and Henry’s failures to impact agriculture directly. Henry set up a group called Animal Rights International. This group developed strategies, raised money and conducted (and conducts) campaigns. They were not working with PETA (in my view) because Henry did not like PETA’s acceptance of violence by the Animal Liberation Front. Thus, Henry suppressed PETA. When Henry died in 1998, it freed PETA to be more active and indeed to use his techniques.

Henry made some attempts to impact animal agriculture directly. He pressured agribusiness, had some minor successes, but generally did not cause change. His strategy was to move to the retail end of the production chain where he would be more effective.


Just in case you thought animal rights was a liberal left issue, Scully writes an animal welfare/rights perspective from the far right. He was an active member of the Bush Administration as a senior speech writer for President George W. Bush.

Scully takes a predominantly Biblical view of how animals should be treated. He suggests animal suffer in a number of human-dominated situations including on commercial farms. He suggests there is something ‘horribly wrong’ with human dominion over animals. He is particularly hard on the commercial swine industry. He reports conversations with a NC corporate hog farm (now owned by Smithfield) in an unflattering light.

This book made a moderately big splash when it was first released. It has not gotten much legs lately. However, it represents a very different point of view but with the same conclusions as Singer and Regan. Scully’s web page has links to groups like Farm Sanctuary which works closely with PETA on farm animal issues.

This book is written as an investigative reporter look at the modern-day meat packing industry. It emulated ‘The Jungle’ but with a modern and journalistic approach. It has not had the impact of ‘The Jungle’.

This book is full of exaggerations, sensationalism and sideline issues such as food safety and environmental pollution. It paints an entirely negative image of situations that are described. The sub-title is an abstract of the book’s contents.

Eisnitz’s book has been touted as required reading by animal rights organizations. It is often quoted in documents and campaigns to inhibit or regulate the meat packing industries.


This 2011 book was prepared by scientists and philosophers with the aim of outlining current animal welfare issues in animal agriculture. It was dedicated to Dr. Stan Curtis, an early leader of science-based animal welfare science. It includes related topics of sustainability, ecology, genetics and biotechnology.

**Possible discussion points while reading the above:**
- Consider philosophical themes concerning the mind/body relationship
- Discuss the ethical basis of interaction between humans and animals
- Understand animal rights philosophy and ethical arguments
- Understand the views of non-scientists and scientists
- Understand the history of the movement
- Discuss humane treatment and use of animals