

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Review of
*Animals & Ethics 101: Thinking
Critically about Animal Rights*

Nathan Nobis
Open Philosophy Press, 2016
125 pp., ebook and softcover

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Suppose that you want to give your students a whirlwind tour of the issues in animal ethics. You don't just want to give them Singer and Regan: instead, you want them to get a broader sense of the implications of standard arguments. You want them to have some sense of how a serious regard for animal interests might change what we eat, what we wear, scientific practice, animals as companions and entertainment, and even how we protest. Suppose further, though, that your students are still a bit wet behind the ears, and they'll need as much help with the basics of philosophical thinking as with the material itself. What would you use?

Alternately, suppose that your local library or church runs adult education classes, and you have the opportunity to do an eight week series on animal ethics. You want to give people something to read that they are likely to understand, freeing up time during your meetings for deeper discussion of the ideas. And, of course, it would be great if the materials were free, so that your library or church didn't have to shell out anything to make the classes possible. Again, what would you use?

In both cases, Nobis's *Animals & Ethics 101* would be a great option. Essentially, the book is a miniature course, complete with learning outcomes, recommended readings, discussion questions, paper assignments, links to helpful resources, and several tips about how to understand the significance of what's being covered. ("While animal ethics [...] can be a heated topic, logic can help keep you cool. Find conclusions, ask for reasons, and demand a fair and impartial evaluation of those reasons" (80).) Additionally, it has the great virtue of being an "open access textbook," which means that you can find it online for free. (The paperback is just \$5.99 on Amazon.)

The book begins with true basics. What do we mean when we start talking about right and wrong? What are the differences between moral and legal rights? Are moral rights really what's at issue? How do philosophical arguments work, and what are the parts of a moral argument? The next chapter introduces some elementary issues about animal minds; the third tackles extensionist arguments

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for maintaining that animals have moral status. The fourth chapter covers the argument from marginal cases, as well as a few simple objections. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 explore the practical implications of animals deserving moral consideration, and there are familiar discussions of the ethics of eating animals, experimenting on them, and keeping them in captivity. The final chapter attempts to stave off worries about animal activists giving animal rights a bad name and introduces the debate between welfarists and abolitionists.

There's much to like in Nobis's book. It's accessible in a way that few introductory texts are: he's genuinely concerned to make sure that readers grasp the fundamentals, and because he has a keen appreciation for the ways that students tend to misunderstand philosophical arguments, he's able to head off all sorts of confusions before they get entrenched. (One great example: his discussion of moral methodology in Chapter 3 is designed to help the reader appreciate why we ought to take Singer- and Regan-style arguments seriously, even before they're offered.) It's also full of pedagogical resources, so even if you've never taught animal ethics before, you could pick this up and know exactly what to assign — both in terms of readings and written assignments. Finally, it's comprehensive enough to let the novice get a sense of the scope of animal ethics, but still refreshingly brief. The main text is only 100 pages, quite a bit of which is taken up by recommended resources, discussion questions, and the like. My guess is that if you were to remove all those teaching aids, you'd only have 30 or 40 pages of content.

That last point indicates that it's important to adjust expectations with respect to Nobis's book. It isn't — and isn't meant to be — a replacement for something like Angus Taylor's *Animals & Ethics* (Broadview, 2009), which summarizes most of the standard arguments in most of the standard readings on animal ethics, and provides brief introductions to the major moral frameworks that have been brought to bear on animals. When I said that Nobis's book is a miniature course, I meant it: the book is only designed to survey *some* of the core issues; it isn't meant to be a comprehensive survey. If you want to have your students (or fellow citizens, or fellow church

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goers) go deeper than that, you'd need to have them look at the primary texts.

It would, however, be a mistake to see that as a flaw. Different books are useful in different contexts, and there is no shortage of "standard" introductions to the problems raised by our use and abuse of animals. Nobis has put together a great resource for audiences with no philosophical background whatever, and his book is a welcome addition for that reason.