Animal Agency: Language, Politics, Culture

Abstracts Program

May 12th

9-9.30 Registration and coffee

9.30-10 Opening: Eva Meijer (Philosophy, University of Amsterdam)

Nina van Leerzaal Bijzondere Collecties, Oude Turfmarkt 129

10-11 Keynote

Human Languages and Nonhuman Agency

Elisa Aaltola

Definitions of animal agency, including the inner states of other animals, are usually grounded on human languages, and particularly propositional representations. The inevitable question that emerges is whether such languages can ever grasp let alone reliably communicate what it is like to be a nonhuman creature, which again places potential limitations for our understanding of animal agency. The talk explores this difficulty by making a distinction between two understandings of “language” – representational language on the one hand, and Wittgensteinian “language as doing” on the other. Resting partly on the philosophy of Henri Bergson, it will be argued that representational language – even if often necessary – tends to detach us from comprehending the subjectivity of others, and that other, more subtle, intricate forms of language, founded on “doing” and “acting” rather than “naming”, may form a better route to nonhuman agency.

11-13 Session 1: Animal Subjectivity

Nina van Leerzaal Bijzondere Collecties

Non-human moral reflection: New evidence for a sentimentalist ethics?

Simone Pollo (Dipartimento di Filosofia, Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy)

The concept of moral agency is deeply intertwined with that of moral reflection. Being a moral agent means to be able to reflectively consider one’s own moral thoughts and actions, that is to critically look at them, to approve or blame them and eventually to transform them. Different accounts of moral psychology treat in different ways the concept of reflection, depending on what are regarded to be the key features of the moral mind and the drives of actions. Nonetheless, any account of moral agency and psychology must take into account the issue of reflection. A
sentimentalist and fully naturalistic account of moral psychology must face a specific issue about the nature of moral reflection and its functioning. According to such an account human morality - just like any other trait of human life - has its roots into the process and history of biological evolution. Among the others implications of this view, there is the idea that the capacities underlying moral psychology and behavior are not exclusively human, but they are likely to be shared in different degrees and forms by other living beings, especially those phylogenetically close to *Homo sapiens*. As a matter of fact, in the last decades behavioral biology and cognitive ethology have shown the complexity and richness of non human sociality also with regard to the so called proto-moral behaviors. Non human primates, in particular, have been subjected to in depth research and primatologists such as F. de Waal have picked in their behaviors the “building blocks” of morality. Among these building blocks there are features such as empathy, consolation, reciprocity and so on. In general, these researches bridging non-human proto-morality and human morality seem to strongly confirm a sentimentalist account of ethics. Nonetheless, also into this view reflection seems to be something exclusively human. Furthermore it seems that non-human protomorality must be labelled “proto” exactly because of lack of reflection in non-humans.

However, in order to be genuinely naturalistic a sentimentalist account should regard also reflection as a feature somehow shared with the non-human species that are capable of behaviors similar to human morality. Aim of the paper will be to show how also human moral reflection can positively be naturalized also by tracing its analogous in non-human minds and behaviors. In particular, it will be shown how data about the social reinforcements of some behaviors found in non human species can give hints about the roots of human reflection and its core mechanisms. Highlighting these mechanism will give new empirical evidence to the idea that moral reflection - in a very Humean fashion - must not be conceived as an individualistic and solitary process, but as a process of social mirroring of the moral agent.

“But why?” Implicit questions of suicide on the non-human outside

Ilios Willemars

Through a close reading of a five minute sequence taken from Werner Herzog’s 2007 documentary film *Encounters at the End of the World*, this essay highlights a penguins subject-position as it is constructed throughout a questioning narrative. Following Judith Halberstam (2008), I argue that analyzing penguin subjectivity in film might be a way of rethinking and critiquing such binaries as normal/deranged, heterosexual/homosexual, loving partner/prostitute and deranged animal/suicidal human.

The essay focuses on frames of a penguin in film producing and sustaining a separation between the animal and the human. One of the more daring and speculative claims that is put forward here, is that the penguin in question is denied the possibility of committing suicide because the act of killing oneself purposefully, is supposed to be exclusively human.

This analysis focuses on a penguin that leaves it’s colony and walks, in the words of the director, “towards certain death”, prompting him to ask the question “But why?”. Preceding this “But why?”, Herzog poses a variety of different questions to a marine ecologist. The audience enters into a conversation between a filmmaker and a penguin-expert that will lead it through such diverse themes as penguin-gayness, penguin-prostitution, penguin-thievery, penguin-insanity, and penguin-death.

I wonder in what ways this practice of asking questions hails a certain penguin subject-position into being. Departing from Derrida’s (1987) thinking on the questioning form, I ask how posing questions about this penguin implicates it in a specific type of non-human deviancy that still depends on all too human conceptions of the normal. As such, the essay promotes the view that
asking questions is not only a way of being open and receptive towards this penguin, but also functions in order to affirm its 'deviant' mode of being in and departing from this world.

A lion as whatever singularity: ethics of radical inclusion

Andrzej Grzybowksi

The theoretical problem which I propose to tackle is based on the assumption that we have not (as of yet) produced a sufficiently developed philosophy of inclusion, although the ontological and ethical status of community, its frames and boundaries, are presently widely discussed.

Regardless of differences between various ethical approaches, their capacity for inclusion is inevitably contingent on human-constructed ontological differentiations. Therefore, an individual who names and singles out “the Other”, simultaneously defines their ethical right. It was classically believed that ethics comes into play late in the intellectual process of cognition, that it is applied to a neutral world of epistemological or ontological distinctions. As a result ethics served as a set of rules and concepts that organize human action, and did not intervene with the process of cognition. It is my belief however that cognition is in and of itself ethical, since its distinctions demarcate the perimeters of being recognised as an ethical subject. Even if motivated by a most generous vision of ethics, no ontological statement remains innocent, it always entails violence intrinsic to defining.

The paper would focus on Giorgio Agamben’s radically inclusive concept of the “coming community”, contrasting it with Budiansky’s rephrasing of Wittgenstein: “If a lion could talk, we probably could understand him. He just wouldn’t be a lion any more; or rather, his mind would no longer be a lion’s mind”.

Before we begin to devise inclusive, non-violent and egalitarian models of being together, it is imperative that we re-examine the concept of subjectivity (human and animal), predicates like gender or species, as well as the notion of the (im)possibility of communication. In order to create a truly inclusive ethics one must rethink its ontological implications. I would like to submit that a good place to start might be the re-evaluation of the human-animal distinction.

Introducing the subject into biology; A reconsideration of animal subjectivity through Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology

Lucia Zaietta

Merleau-Ponty’s aim is to analyse the emergence of the human being starting from nature and within nature, discovering a continuity that admits differences, swerves and dehiscence. In this perspective, animals are subjects capable of a bodily-vital perception, embodied subjects open to the world. Every animal has a history made of interactions with the environment. The notion of corporeity is central. First of all animals and human beings share a corporeity that constitutes their openness to a world-milieu and it is properly in the name of this continuity that Merleau-Ponty has been able to find a lateral – and non opposite – relationship between these two living beings.
My paper starts from a preliminary investigation on the notion of subject throughout the reformulated definitions of behaviour and body: behaviour as a style, as the natural norm of the organism and body as an experienced and perceptive corporeity, as the seat of the openness of the organism that is *etre-au-monde*. The Organismic Theory by Kurt Goldstein, Viktor Von Weizsächer and Georges Canguilhem has deeply influenced Merleau-Ponty’s approach: the organism is a totality and an original expression of an existence. Subjectivity is not a cognitive “I Think”, but an “I Can”. Then, it is necessary to proceed with an investigation on the notion of environment that is interpreted, following von Uexkull, as a network, a web made by the interaction between the animal and the lived space. The theoretical aim is clear: overcoming the anthropocentric prejudice, for which animal species live in the same action modality of human beings. Starting from this concrete relationship between the organism and the environment, it will be possible to trace a pre-culture in the animal world in the name of a primordial symbolism inner in the body itself and finally an ontological intersubjectivity.

13.15-15.15 City Animal Phenomenology

Wertheimpark

Bringing phenomenology to bear on the ethics of urban wildlife

Diane Michelfelder (Philosophy, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN. USA)

The question of what our ethical responsibilities are toward urban wildlife has been the subject of ongoing philosophical debate (see for example Donaldson and Kymlika 2008; Luther 2013). While the perspectives on this question in this debate differ, a common element among them is their focus on looking at urban wildlife as inhabitants of a particular kind of space: namely the urban area (Palmer 2003). Luther (2013) This is of course not at all surprising, as what comes most immediately to mind in thinking about the “urban” is it being a particular type of spatial area or location. With this as the focus, the forms of temporality peculiar to urban life—for example, its rhythms of acceleration (as found for example in the idea of “rush hour”) and de-acceleration—tend to get downplayed or forgotten.

The aim of this paper is to retrieve time as a starting point for thinking about what to do to treat urban deer, geese, raccoons, coyotes, and possibly even urban bears, in a moral manner. It does so by looking the phenomenological experience of urban wildlife and analyzing some of the temporal characteristics of this experience. For Irene Klaver (2008), the very being of the wild animal other, whether or not that other is found in actual wilderness or not, can be discovered in the rhythm of its appearing and disappearing; or, to put it in more temporal terms, in being here one moment (with respect to phenomenological experience) but not the next. With respect to urban wildlife, however, such an event of appearing can also be an occasion for lingering and loitering, an occasion that opens up a “while” of co-experience. I argue that it is in this “while” that a key source of our responsibilities to urban wildlife is to be found. These can be seen as relational responsibilities of hospitality; in which urban wildlife can become more than “denizens” (Donaldson and Kymlika 2008) without becoming others dependent upon us.

Individuality and identity issues concerning animals are not evenly balanced with human needs in urban and social design questions and usually serve only to reduce animal “pollution” (sound, excretion etc.) within our urban spaces or to create passageways around our social/economical structures. I am interested in the possibility to culturally analyze and define animal (individual) preferences for choosing specific urban habitats in creating concepts for new shared social environments. This culturally based understanding of thought patterns might help to find new ways of communicating with animals, not from our own, but from their perspective. I am especially interested in wild (onset by an individual) animal agents that have wandered into urban surroundings and have successfully adapted (within one generation of followers) to these new surroundings. Is this taking of optimal grip on existing affordances a way of seeking admittance to our culture in public spheres: could affect and emotion (Lauren Berlant) lead the way for belonging ahead of the modes of rational or deliberative thought -these attach strangers to each other and shape the terms of the state-civil society relation: could the concept of strangers here also include animals?

Iterative research (cognitive sciences, arts, philosophy) could prove apt ground for interdisciplinary collaboration to describe and define philosophical questions based on social/emotional cognitive processing systems from various angles. An adaptive digital information transmission as a means to visualize such models of perception found (http://lustlab.net) could help envision a true holistic urban social cohesion for all living creatures.

http://hyperallergic.com/264272/imagining-the-inner-lives-of-animals/
Wild animals in Cities: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQMI4CIMqkQ
Affect and Emotion: http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/2016/02/05/raven-zijn-de-apen-van-de-lucht-1584894
Good Vibrations (LUST.Lab): https://vimeo.com/23796825

KEY WORDS: Animal individuality and identity, adaptive digital information transmission, affect and emotion, politics, embodiment, interdisciplinary debate and iterative research, models of perception

Phenomenological Biosemiotics, or what it is like to be this Dog

Yogi Hale Hendlin (Dept. of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco)

The importance of “this” dog, rather than “a” dog is the same distinction we make between generalizing “that” person and “people” simpliciter. A good portion of the confusion arising around animal philosophy is that we overgeneralize for categories of species; that is, we stereotype. While some animals or groups of members of a species tend to engage in stereotypic behavior, the actual range of coping skills and improvisation shows that these are not rogue
animals deviating from a mean, but rather that different animals of a same species—depending on environment, habitat, conspecifics, interspecifics, and so on—can behave to highly divergent logics from other members of that species. Context and particularity matter in regarding our nonhuman neighbors, and glossing them as members of species categories is akin to turning them into tokens of a type—the exact objectification and thingification that animal rights and ethics labors to avoid.

Despite the great advances in animal philosophy and ethics, the phenomenological and biosemiotic contributions to this field have gone undervalued. Ted Toadvine suggests that “sense would be more accurately attributed to the meeting point of world and life. All life carries with it an evaluative projecting into the world. [...] Life values and chooses; it throws a world up before itself and is therefore already intentionally engaged rather than merely causally connected” (2003, 273). Getting back to how animals create meaning and interpret the world to be meaningful (noticing this rather than that, ascribing special semiotic importance to that smell while showing no interest in another) entails relational attention, intimacy, and relationship building (as much as scientific understanding and curiosity) with the animal before us.

I argue that just as nature and other nonhuman life is essential to human flourishing, so too is it for domesticated and wild animals, and that reducing the complexity and life of the ecosystems they inhabit (e.g., dogs and cats pent up their whole lives in apartment buildings, birds in cages of whatever size), we are disabling them. A reduced ecology for an animal reduces their semiotic vocabulary of scent, taste, touch, vibration. Thus part of the task of getting back to the animal, here, this one, involves opening opportunities for their semiotic flourishing through allowing them to inhabit their preferred ecological areas.

The dairy industry is based on its lively commodities: dairy cattle. There would not be a dairy industry (as we know it) without cows, bulls, heifers and calves being lively living organisms. Those nonhuman animals make the dairy industry work. They co-shape the market economy on the basis of being both living organisms and mammals. While being part of the market economy, the market economy is simultaneously part of them. Being cognizant of breeding and artificial insemination, stable constructions and milking systems, or the consequences of infertility and lameness, cattle have to function in order for the market to work. My research addresses dairy cows as ‘lively commodities’, and engages with commodity-stabilisation processes that “make” dairy cows for the market to work, both at a practical, on-site level and at a discursive level. By looking at actors, activities and places involved, the study addresses cows and bulls as actors, too, asking how cows and bulls can possibly act as agents, influencing commodity-stabilisation processes on the basis of being living organisms. Or, is there no limit to the controllability of living organisms? My talk will engage with the (commodity) life of cows and bulls in the context of commodity-stabilisation processes, addressing animal agency by referring to liveliness as life-line. I apply a multi-sited, multi-species ethnographic approach in my study which engages with the entanglement of market economy and human-animal relations. Preliminary results will be presented on the basis of empirical data gathered in a dairying region in Southern Germany.

How to make a wild animal

Mihnea Tanasescu

Conservation in Europe is increasingly about creating/recreating species, as well as places. Indeed, the two often go together, as in rewilding initiatives that aim at creating places via the introduction of created animals. This contribution focuses on the description and subsequent analysis of two projects aiming to create ‘wild’ animals: the back-breeding of the Aurochs and the reintroduction of the back-from-the-brink Wisent (European Bison). The TaurOs foundation is currently trying to recreate the Aurochs and has recently released a small herd of proto-Aurochs in the Danube Delta, in the hope that both the landscape and the animals will become wilder. The Wisent, once almost extinct, now numbers 5000 recognized individuals (that is, genetically pure, a concept I also treat at length), 29 of which now roam the Southern Carpathians. I first describe these projects and their ongoing implementation. Then, I show how in these cases wildness is built from scientific narcissism, the mitigation of conflict, the education of humans and non-humans, the restructuring of land-use patterns, local politics and nationalism, as well as the autonomous actions (will?) of the animals involved. This discussion is useful in further reflecting on the meaning of wild nature, autonomy,
hybridization, and the role of human/non-human partnerships in contemporary theory and practice.

**Cows: a brief history of life together**

*María Fernanda de Torres Álvarez* (Ethnology, Université Paul Valéry, UMR Art-Dev.)

Cows, as animals, are frequently invisible in social science. Reduced to a productive profit, this kind of population are treated in a socratic ideal type, where an individual represents the totality of the species (universal), hence in a pre-darwinian perspective. Uruguay has more than 400 years of ranching and more cows than humans till now (four cows per person) and only recognize population change in terms of developing European races, reproductive capacity and meat production capacity (kgs.). In order to bring historicity and singularity to cow (and bull) I will propose to follow life’s line of this population by the transformation of their bodies from colonial time till present. We chose to follow Hereford race, because their population represents more than 70% of the total during XX century and represented the modernization of livestock population. To do this, we analyse: pictures of the first prize in national exposition for all the XX and XXI century; technical discussion in specialized reviews; and paintings in national archive from XIX to XXI. Finally, I cross my historical narrative of the bovins life’s line with a plastic narrative, made by an artist, in order to show a sensible register of their becoming and to essay the same kind of exercise of imagining made by ranchers. We find thirteen different concepts of cows, each one related with a condition of possibility of emergence of a different professional profile and future rural landscapes. This recompilation of cows allows us not only to rewrite bovine’s history in Uruguay, but also to rewrite our history in togetherness with animals.

**PARALLEL OPTION 2:**

**Morphing anthropos**

Universiteitstheater UT 101, Nieuwe Doelenstraat 16

*How to actually avoid “anthropomorphism”*

*Frauke Albersmeier*

Concerns about “anthropomorphism” appear to be of a methodological nature and plague cognitive ethology (cf. Bekoff & Allen 1997) as well as the emerging field of animal studies, broadly construed. The term “anthropomorphism” is usually applied to criticize the attribution of human properties to non-humans (cf., e.g., Mameli & Bortolotti 2006). In response to such criticism, there have been attempts to qualify “critical” or “heuristic” versions of anthropomorphism as valid methodological tools (Burghardt 2004; de Waal 1999). Furthermore, some have turned the tables on anti-anthropomorphists by coming up with labels like “anthropodenial” or “anthropectomy” for the failure to recognize putative “human” traits in non-humans (de Waal 1999; Andrews & Huss 2014). It has been argued that the charge of anthropomorphism should in fact be seen as a “pre-empirical obstacle” that only reaffirms a bias against animals in the selection of scientific hypotheses (Andrews 2009, 52).
In this talk, I want to take this line of responses further and argue that both, critics and defenders of “anthropomorphic” attributions, share one mistaken premise about human exclusiveness. Any minimally meaningful reading of “anthropomorphism” involves the commitment to classify — at least tentatively — some traits as human-specific. Rather than being restricted to criticizing particular attributions of traits to particular animals (“situational anthropomorphism”, cf. Fisher 1995, 6), use of the term “anthropomorphism” always presupposes that the trait in question is at least typically human. This idea needs to be clarified and recognized as a highly audacious empirical hypothesis. Even when a particular cross-species attribution of some trait is identified as incorrect, labelling this misattribution “anthropomorphic” is almost certainly unwarranted.

Scholars who employ concepts of “human” behavior in their description of non-human animals often foresee the charge of anthropomorphism. I will argue that in order to overcome this “pre-empirical obstacle”, they must not adopt the very notion of anthropomorphism in their anticipatory defenses, but rather avoid all talk of “critical” or “heuristic anthropomorphism” and of “anthropectomy” or “anthropodenial”.


One Health for One Life: Beyond anthropocentrism in public health

Karen Dalke (University of Wisconsin Green Bay, USA), Joachim Nieuwland (Leiden University, NL), Harry Wels (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, NL)

Public health encompasses an anthropocentric approach to collective health policy. There are several ways in which this anthropocentrism could be criticized. First of all, empirically, humans are inextricably part of ecological processes and multispecies communities. A narrowly understood public health would be insufficiently attuned to environmental determinants of health, even if the aim were to protect human health interests primarily. This is reflected in ecological public health approaches, among others, the One Health initiative. Furthermore, based on ethical reasoning, the scope of moral consideration could be argued to include non-human nature. Such arguments could be further developed to the effect that, for example, non-human animals should be regarded legitimate recipients of justice, and subsequently, of health policy.
These challenges to an anthropocentric public health might support the idea of thinking about public health in terms of collective multispecies health. This would entail an acknowledgment that health is created and shared within multispecies communities. It will furthermore question the extent to which an ecological public health should be able to medicalize non-human nature. For example, framing natural processes in terms of ecosystems services renders them instrumental to human health interests. Similarly, animals living in the wild might be conceptualized in terms of their threat to human health, or companion animals in terms of their beneficial effects on human health. There is a need to think about the question of distributing risks and benefits, but also to go beyond conceptualizing the health of non-human animals in relation to human interests. A multispecies approach to health needs to address the health interests of different species, also when these are independent from human health. Recognizing the health interests of non-human animals, as well as articulating them in an unbiased manner, present novel challenges to health policy and conceptions of public health. Animals should not only be on the receiving end, but also acknowledged as active agents in relation to human beings and health policy. The latter point will be illustrated by research done on wild mustangs in the United States and fencing policies in Zimbabwe.

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OMHP C 2.23 Oudemanhuispoort 4-6

9.00-10.00 Keynote 2:

Animal Agency as Artistic Authorship

Jessica Ullrich

Traditional aesthetic thought places non-human animals in nature and not in culture. Non-human animals are generally considered to be artless beings without any urge or capacity to create aesthetic objects. To the contrary, the ability and the need to produce art is perceived as one of the last thresholds of humanity. Nevertheless in the last decades more and more contemporary artists involve living non-human animals in artistic productions. By doing so they declare some non-human animals to be co-authors of artworks and trust in their creative agency. But is it legitimate to take animal contributions to installations, sculptures, videos, or paintings seriously? Can non-human animals be aesthetic actors in their own right? The talk focuses on interspecies artworks that only come into existence with the help of non-human animals. While it seems clear that the participating non-human animals display some form of agency, it is debatable if they can be called artists.

10.00-10.30 Coffee break

10.30-12.30 Session 3: Words, images, objects

OMHP C 2.23

An Animal Endowed with Reason? Grandfather Crocodile on Humans

Angela Roothaan

From its early days in ancient Greece, western philosophies and sciences have defined themselves as the activity of humans – animals endowed with reason. In a self-congratulatory mode, the western tradition has often seen itself as the overcoming of primitive magical worldviews that define humans and non-human animals rather as relatives, who can even meet as subjects in the spirit realm. The western idea of a rational animal placed humans apart, as if they could rise above their natural environment, and reconstruct the world to their own needs and likings.

As this reconstructive mode seems to meet its limits, while environmental and social crises give us warning signs, philosophical anthropologists (if I may call them thus) like Bruno Latour, Eduardo Kohn, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro research the possibilities for the western humans to enter in negotiation with the survivors of the peoples who opposed modernization and tried to stay with the worldview in which humans and animals can speak about their common spiritual and material concerns.
In my paper I will presuppose the work of these thinkers, but, wanting to preclude the dangers of rationalizing the relations between humans and non-human animals once again, I will give the word directly, by way of an experiment in putting myself in the position of one of our genealogical ancestors, to ‘grandfather’ crocodile. I will try to word how crocodile would look at the human animal, and the latter’s pretension to be above the other animals because of its faculty of reason. Of central concern in crocodile’s speech will be the different modes of being human that are open to us and the consequences of choosing reason as what defines us.

**Us, Animals; the Case of Elizabeth Costello**

**Evgenia Mylonaki** (Open University of Greece)

In Jonathan Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, the fictional character of the Australian novelist Elizabeth Costello gives two lectures at the University. The first is entitled "The Philosophers and the Animals" and the second is entitled "The Poets and the Animals."

Elizabeth Costello’s lectures were originally taken by Peter Singer to concern the issue of how we humans treat animals, or else the issue of animal rights. In opposition to this reading, Cora Diamond reads the two lectures as a study of a peculiar sort of wound; the wound of the knowledge of horrors inflicted to the body of life; the sort of knowledge which confronts what Diamond calls “the difficulty of reality”.

In the first part of this paper I argue that the question that Coetzee poses for us – the question we should be thinking of – is this: What is revealed when we think of the issue of the way humans treat animals, together with the peculiar vulnerability to woundedness that human consciousness is subject to? In the second part of this paper I attempt to sketch a first answer: What is thus revealed, I suggest, is the imperative and the difficulty to formulate and inhabit – both as knowers and as agents - the perspective of *Us, Animals*.

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**Animal Poetry and Empathy**

**Tirza Brüggemann** (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

The relation between empathy and novels seems more obvious and has been more widely studied than the relation between empathy and poems. In a novel, the development of a character and an unfolding plot pave the way for the reader to easily empathize with a character. This process is often described as dependent on the mental abilities of the reader. For instance, Lisa Zunshine in *Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel* (2006) describes the novel as a ‘cognitive experiment’ that teaches us to read the minds of others. This view on what novels accomplish has become familiar to us: novels can show us what it is like to be someone else.

When the others are animals, the idea that we can see their world by reading novels seems untenable. Exactly because of the readers’ wish to read the mind of protagonists, animals in novels are often anthropomorphized. In this paper I argue that what novels can do for humans, poems can do for animals. Following researchers who understand empathy not solely as a form of mind reading and emphasize the role of the body when reading poems, I argue that

1) Poems constitute a recognition of other points of view that is best to be seen as a bodily experience rather than as a mental one.
2) Therefore, poems are an appropriate genre to experience the lives of animals.

To substantiate this view I turn to two animal poems: ‘The Jaguar’ by Ted Hughes and ‘Spermaceti’ by Les Murray.

Tirza Brüggemann (1975) completed her Masters degree in Philosophy in 2000. In 2013 she finished her Bachelors degree in English with a thesis on the animal poetry of Elizabeth Bishop. In 2015 she received a PhD grant from The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) for her project Flashes of Understanding. Animal Poetry and Empathy. She combines her PhD research with teaching Philosophy and English at a high school in Amsterdam.

Inanimate Animal Representations in Daily Life

Hallie Abelman

Hallie Abelman is a student at the Sandberg Institute bridging practices of art and anthropology through her interest in human-animal studies. She will present a multimedia, performative lecture about inanimate animal representations, with particular focus on the commodification of the animal in our everyday lives, from the home to the supermarket to the ways we teach our children about animals. Beginning with an explanation of her research methods, she will share how she has come to actively engage with inanimate animal objects and create dialogues around this topic. She will also share her experimental contributions to the rapidly-growing visual and performance art culture involving the nonhuman and the ways we create what it means to be human by way of ‘the animal’.

People live amongst all sorts of inanimate animal objects in their homes and these often become engendered with stories and imbued with energy. In her research she asks which of these objects belong in the bathroom, and which belong on the mantle? What is their role in our lives: to teach, to remember, to console, to embellish our identity, expel loneliness? With regards to the animal studies dialogue, she is not only concerned with which animals are “killable”, but rather and, more specifically, which animal objects are collectable.

In John Berger’s Why Look at Animals, he talks about “the animals of the mind”, which are less easily dispersed than physical animals. He’s not only commenting on our mental folder entitled ‘animals’, but really the “sayings, dreams, games, stories, superstitions, and the language that recall them”. We spend so much time making live animals invisible by means of mousetraps, bug spray, and slaughterhouses, yet at the same time we are surrounded by these inanimate replicas that signify some sort of longing for a pleasurable and passive animal experience.

12.30-14.00 Excursion & lunch
Political Agency and Nonhuman Animals
Angie Pepper

The capacity for political agency is necessary for the accomplishment of political action. Non-political agents, though capable of ‘doing something’ are not able to perform distinctively political actions. Beyond picking out a discrete class of agents, the ascription of political agency has normative significance. In virtue of their capacity for political agency, political agents possess (or can possess) special rights, powers, and responsibilities, including rights to political participation, freedom of speech, and free association. It is widely assumed by political philosophers that only cognitively mature, neurologically typical humans are possessors of political agency. However, an important challenge to the prevailing view has emerged in recent attempts to elaborate a political dimension to nonhuman animal action and include them within the class of political agents.

In this paper, I consider what it means to be a political agent; to be a doer of political action. On the account of political agency I develop and defend, only beings with capacities to intend to effect social change, collectively imagine alternative futures, and act-in-concert with others, can properly be said to be political agents. The upshot of this view is that since most, if not all, nonhuman animals lack the requisite capacities for political agency they cannot perform political actions nor hold rights to political participation. I anticipate the objection that while my view stipulates capacities sufficient for political agency, they are not in fact necessary. In response, I argue that weakening the conditions for political agency to include nonhuman animals results in conceptual confusion and divests the concept of its normative value.

While this conclusion may strike defenders of animal rights as an unhappy one, I suggest that extending the concept of political agency is both an unhelpful distraction, and unnecessary to the project of securing justice for nonhuman animals.

Animal Voices: Re-considering representation, ethics, and practice in human-animal studies
Catherine Oliver

There are always ethical questions when working with Others, and there are complex politics surrounding ‘giving a voice’ to those who are not able to empower themselves. When working with animals, one of the most interesting relationships to explore is that of beneficence, and the relational impacts of research for the researcher and researched. Human—animal relationships do not currently consider the weighting of benefits to the researcher, versus the “recipients”. There are ethical implications when working on behalf of Others, and there are perhaps even more complex issues surrounding the speaking for others who we cannot listen to. The improbability of creating a space for animal voices will be addressed in this paper, as well our inability to understand them, and how we can, through ethically informed and considerate research, work to combat this.

The presence of a human voice for animals is inescapable, but the possibilities of this are varied. This paper will consider who has the right to speak on the behalf of non-humans, and how best animals
can be represented. This paper will explore the issues the human intermediary, drawing on feminist and postcolonial discourses, and consider how this can be practiced. This will begin by extending the principles of feminist research practice to non-humans, before theorising what a ‘vegan-feminist’ approach could be. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the extent to which it is possible for animals to be actors in social and political arenas dominated by the human, and theorising how we can co-exist within research and activism. This paper serves to address the moral position of the non-human, and to explore how we can address these often-uncomfortable topics that force us to foreground our human privilege in a speciesist world, redress the power relations, and minimise the exploitation of the researched.

**Nonhuman animals as property holders: A defence of a Lockean labour-mixing account**

**Josh Milburn** (School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen’s University Belfast)

Recent defences of nonhuman animals’ territorial rights – namely, those from John Hadley and Steve Cooke – have employed the concept of “property”, which has been justified on the basis of nonhuman animals’ strong interest in the use of their territories. This interest-based approach, familiar in animal ethics, is atypical in property theory. In this paper, I will defend the possibility of an alternative approach to nonhuman animal property. This is the Lockean account of labour-mixing as the basis of just property acquisition; the idea that beings come to own external items by freely choosing to mix their labour with them.

I will defend the Lockean account against objections, including Hadley’s worries about the person-centric nature of the account and the challenge – from Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka – that the extension of property rights does not offer enough protection to nonhuman animals. I will then offer several reasons we have for believing that the extension of Lockean property rights to nonhuman animals may actually be preferable to an interest-based account of property. Namely, Lockean property rights are more clearly property rights (which also allows them to overcome certain oddities in the interest-based account); they are able to offer greater protection to nonhuman animals’ property; they can offer property beyond territory; and they are somewhat simpler than interest rights. The last point has both advantages for the nonhuman animals in question and for those endorsing these rights.

I ultimately suggest that a Lockean account of nonhuman animal property should not be dismissed, even if it is not enough alone to offer nonhuman animals all that they are due. As a tool, however, it could be meaningfully applied as a part of a broader set of protections – perhaps even including an interest-based territory right – offered to nonhuman animals.

15.30-15.45 Coffee break

**Why Animal Rights Theory Should Not Forget It Is Animal Rights Theory; Legal Subjectivity as a Blind Spot in Kymlicka and Donaldson**

**Nikolaas Deketelaere** (University of Leuven, Belgium)

In *Zoopolis* Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka present their political theory of animal rights, which includes attributing civil rights to domesticated animals. Their main argument supporting
this thesis is that domesticated animals are dependent on humans in their everyday life, and thus share a society with them. Therefore, they deserve to be recognised as an integral member of society, and consequently deserve civil rights.

I will question one of their presuppositions and thereby expose a blind spot of animal rights theory: that animals are subjects of law, or the idea that it is possible for them to possess rights. Traditionally, legal subjectivity entails the possibility to possess legal rights and duties. According to Kymlicka and Donaldson we can identify rights and duties that rest on domesticated animals. Therefore, we ought to recognise them as legal subjects. However, the New York Supreme Court recently ruled that in order to possess a duty one has to be able to reflect upon it, a capacity animals would lack. Nonetheless, the authors argue that this traditional conception of legal subjectivity, as grounded in reason, is inadequate because it does not cover the entire range of human diversity. Under this conception, children and persons with disabilities would not be considered legal subjects. An adequate conception of legal subjectivity would then also allow for it to be attributed to domesticated animals. However, as I will show, the traditional conception does cover the entire range of human diversity, as it is not grounded in the factual exercise of reason but the principle capacity to reflect rationally. The authors fail to recognise this distinction, made apparent by recent human rights conventions. The dimension of legal theory is surprisingly often overlooked in animal rights discourse, though, as this diagnosis shows, it is a pertinent problem, which should be addressed.

The possibilities for animal protection in liberal democracies

Janneke Vink (Leiden University, NL)

Although liberal democracies all around the world are praised for achieving near perfect equality between their citizens, one big inequality has managed to thrive in all of them: animal inequality. The deeply rooted idea that human animals have no moral obligations towards their nonhuman fellows is predominant in all current liberal democracies. Nonhuman animals have no political influence, nor legal standing. This can be easily explained: our democracies and legal systems developed during a time in which the notion of human superiority went mostly undisputed. This ultimately resulted in the general absence of nonhuman interests from both politics and law. Dissolving the institutionalized discrimination of nonhumans is an immense challenge. Are liberal democracies not ultimately unequipped for serious animal protection? Many great thinkers believe this to be the case. “Animals whom we have made our slaves we do not like to consider our equals,” Charles Darwin wrote. Indeed, speciesist bias of the electorate, representatives, and lawyers may pose a big problem. Additionally, institutional barriers and the popular liberal idea of moral pluralism may also block the path to change. However, the hydra of liberal democracy does not only have vices; it also contains some hidden treasures.

Liberal democracies have shown to be astonishingly flexible in adapting the political and legal institutions to radically changed ideas of equality and there is no reason to think that this will not happen this time. If we side with Karl Popper and perceive democracy as an almost scientific political model that continuously adapts itself to the latest (moral) knowledge, then there is every reason to be optimistic.

In my presentation, I will focus mainly on the possibilities of liberal democracies to include nonhuman animals in the political and legal system. I will propose some institutional changes that, although radical, also fit nicely with democratic and constitutional traditions. Some examples are: an animal ombudsman, constitutional duties for parliamentarians to also consider nonhuman interests,
a political advisory board on animal issues, a structural animal committee with veto power, legal subjectivity for all sentient animals, fundamental animal rights, and state-funded animal rights lawyers. I will also elaborate on the question of how to implement these institutional changes in a world in which all law-makers and policy-makers are Homo sapiens. I will propose one solution to this seemingly unsolvable problem: judicial activism. Powerful judges who find themselves occupying the moral high ground might be the key to uniting our traditional, well-functioning liberal democracies with the progressive goal of serious animal protection.

5. The constitutional right to freedom of expression, for example, can be of much use to the quest for improving the status of nonhuman animals. This is beautifully illustrated by the lawsuits that American animal advocates have filed in protest to the so-called ag-gag laws. In these laws, filming and publishing footage of animal abuse in the farm industry is criminalized. By invoking the freedom of speech, animal advocates managed to get these laws declared unconstitutional by American courts. Animal Legal Defense Fund, et al., v. State of Idaho, United States District Court for the district of Idaho, Case No. 1:14-cv-00104-BLW, August 3, 2015. Of course the freedom of speech is also very important for (provocative and shocking) public protest actions, such as those of PETA.

16.45 – 17 Closing speech: Clemens Driessen (Cultural Geography, Wageningen University)

18.00 Conference Dinner Instock

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