

The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Presents:

Analogy, Anthropomorphism, and Moral Imagination

By

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Contemporary animal rights advocates have found success with a campaign called “Why love one and eat the other?” which—below this slogan—shows two images: a dog and a pig. The campaign is rhetorically compelling because of its simplistic use of analogical reasoning. To what extent is it logically compelling, and how far does reasoning of this sort take us? The dominant responses to these questions have been skeptical in nature.

This paper (1) addresses three reasons why arguments from analogy concerning nonhuman animals are commonly maligned, and (2) offers a constructive approach in response to the following concerns. First, analogical arguments about animal ethics are often considered offensive. Second, there is a loose consensus among philosophers that—despite having heuristic value—analogical arguments are logically unsound and invalid, even in the natural sciences. Third, analogies from human to animal cognition are commonly assumed to promote anthropomorphism.

Analogical reasoning is uniquely important to discussions of animals and this is a burden that must be embraced. I detail how analogical arguments about animal minds and ethics should be understood logically and epistemically. This leads me to a discussion of the role of imagination in ethics. I critique the common view that analogical reasoning is less rigorous than normative ethical theories, and that it can—at best—be used to nurture moral sensitivities. While I agree that even weak analogies can serve important functions, I am interested in criteria for strong human/animal analogies in the fields of ethics and animal cognition.

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

2:30 - 4:00 PM

Cullimore Lecture Hall #1

