

Animals in Philosophy, Politics, Law, and Ethics Speaker Series

Pre-circulated paper: e-mail address below for access

The Courage to Hear? Animal Advocacy, Foucault and Parrhēsia

Friday
February 12
4:00-5:30 p.m.

Everyone
Welcome!



Queen's
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A common tactic utilised by animal advocates involves the display of graphic footage or imagery (such as video footage from a slaughterhouse or factory farm) which depicts to its audience the “truth” of human violence towards animals. However the utility of these political tactics remains uncertain. Visibility of animal suffering does not necessarily lead to practice change; and to an extent, at least when it comes to images of animal suffering, many people just “do not want to know.” In this paper I want to explore Foucault’s final lectures at the Collège de France, which feature a close analysis of “speaking freely” or parrhēsia. Here I am particularly attracted by the image Foucault depicts of an act which constructs the agent as a truth telling subject who seeks to interrupt an order of knowledge. But, as Foucault describes, this truth telling can only occur in a particular context, including one where the listener is ready to hear to truth: “parrhēsia is the courage of truth in the person who speaks ... but it is also the interlocutor’s courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears” (2012, 13). As such, parrhēsia depends on sites of politics which establish a relation between truth teller and listener, such as in education (the relation between the teacher and student) and within political movements (such as in the development of “revolutionary discourse”). In this context, I will finally speculate on the correspondence between Foucault’s understanding of parrhesistic truth-telling, and the role of intellectuals in social movements, in particular as described by Antonio Gramsci.

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