

College of Charleston Department of Philosophy
Visiting Speaker Series

Personhood, Ethics, & Animal Cognition

Gary Varner
Professor of Philosophy
Texas A & M University



This talk introduces various conceptions of personhood, including the idea that a person is one who has a biographical sense of self and a robust, conscious sense of his or her own past and future. It examines recent empirical research related to deciding the question of which non-human animals, if any, qualify as persons or at least near-persons. The talk concludes by exploring possible implications of these ideas for various human uses of animals, including for food.

Professor Varner is Head of the Philosophy Department at Texas A&M University and specializes in environmental and animal ethics, utilitarianism, and environmental law.

According to Peter Singer (of Princeton University's Center for Human Values) Varner's recent book is "The most serious discussion I have yet seen of whether any nonhuman animals can be considered 'persons' . . . There is, to my knowledge, no other book that goes into these issues anywhere near as deeply, in the context of assessing their significance for the normative issues of the wrongness of taking life, or other issues relating to ethical decision-making regarding our treatment of animals and some humans."

Thursday, March 14, 3:15-4:45
CofC Library, Rm. 227

Reception to follow at the Philosophy office, 14 Glebe Street