Have you ever pondered the lives of non-human animals and wondered about their intelligence, cognition, and emotions? Have you ever asked yourself what it means to “love” animals, or “not love” them? What are the moral/ethical obligations, if any, we owe them? Where do our beliefs and ideas about the status of animals come from, culturally, historically, and philosophically? Over the centuries, what have some of the greatest minds had to say on the subject of whether or not non-human animals deserve our moral consideration? How have notions about the treatment of animals changed over time? For example, animal cruelty laws exist in every state, but animals are still, in the eyes of the law, considered property. What are the implications of that property status? What does it mean, for example, to “own” an animal? What rights and responsibilities accompany ownership? Who owns wild animals? What do terms like “animal welfare” and “animal rights” actually mean? Do you believe that animals should be free of human-inflicted suffering, or are there times when animal suffering is justified? Do you think non-human animals have a right to autonomy or happiness? If so, what might animal autonomy or happiness look like? Should animals we view as pets be given different treatment or status from animals used in medical research and entertainment, or farm animals consumed for food and clothing? How do non-meat-eaters and meat-eaters talk to each other?

We will pursue “the question of the animal”----that is, our relationships and interactions, and our uses and treatment of---- through a variety of readings across numerous disciplines, with a focus on “ethics.” We will engage with the works of various philosophers, ethicists, ethologists, scientists, lawyers, religious thinkers, fiction writers, poets, and essayists, as well as discuss three documentary films, Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill, Grizzly Man, and The Tiger Next Door, which will be available on library reserve. In addition to the readings, assignments are likely to include all or some of the following: regularly assigned response papers, essay quizzes, at least one substantial paper on a topic of your choice, a brief class presentation, and an exam. Your dedication to active and substantive participation in discussions, and careful preparation of the readings in advance of class are absolutely essential to the success of this class.

For more information about me, please visit http://www.iub.edu/~engweb/faculty/Alyce-Miller.html and http://mypage.iu.edu/~almiller/