

Erin McKenna

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Presents:

Pets, People, and Pragmatism

Thursday, October 17th
Liberal Arts Building, Room 114
3:45 – 5:00 pm

Erin McKenna will examine human relationships with pets without assuming that such relations are either benign or unnatural and to be avoided. American pragmatism understands that humans and other animal beings have been interacting and transforming each other for thousands of years. There is nothing "unnatural" about the human domestication of other animal beings, though domestication does raise specific practical and ethical questions. A pragmatist account of our relationship with those animal beings commonly considered as pets does not prohibit the use of these beings in research, entertainment, competition, or work. It does, however, find abuse and neglect unethical. Since abuse can occur in any use of other animal beings, this pragmatist account takes up the abusive practices in research, entertainment, competition, and work without arguing that research, entertainment, competition, and work are inherently abusive. Some of the sources of abuse have been addressed by utilitarian and deontological accounts, but a pragmatist evolutionary perspective offers unique insights and results in some surprising conclusions: for instance, there may be an ethical obligation to let a horse race, a dog show, or a cat compete in agility.

For more information, please contact the Philosophy Department at 523-2648.