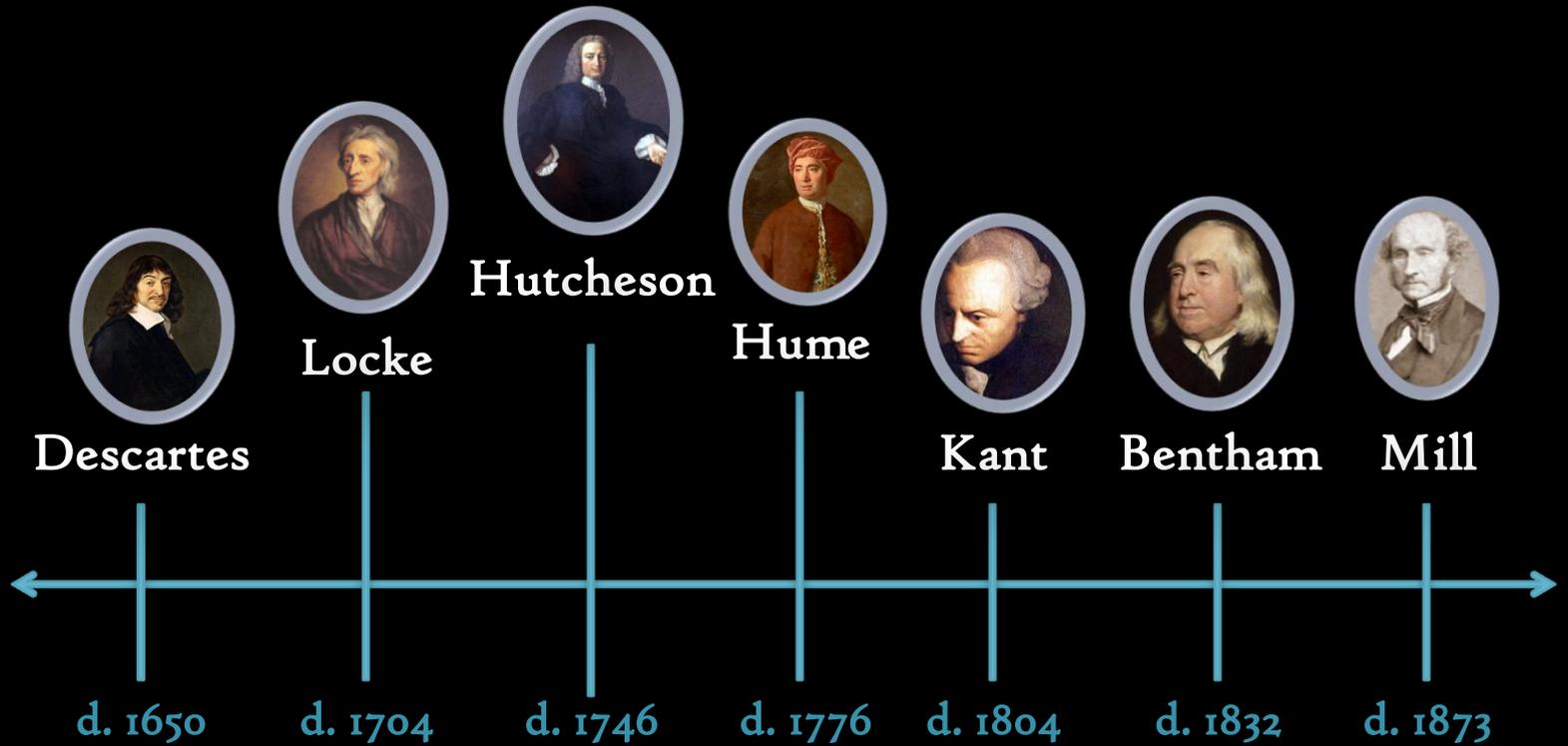




• *Animals in Modern Philosophy*

Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)

Laura Guidry-Grimes



Timeline

Some Big Ideas in Modern Philosophy

- Enlightenment
 - Distinguished from the superstition, irrationality of the Dark Ages
 - Elevation of reason as a human faculty and as a basis for moral and political equality
- Naturalism
 - The idea that all the objects in the world are natural and can be studied through empirical/scientific methods
 - E.g., David Hume
- Natural law
 - Moral, political, or legal principles that are derived from human nature or reason, rather than artificial social structures

Background Concerns and Motivations

- Understanding, mastering, and conquering nature
 - Our duty as humans
- Need to know what makes human special—i.e., “not animal”
 - And need to perfect human features, human projects

Problems in Constructing an Animal Ethic

- Cognitive
 - Lack of understanding → no agency → so no rights?
- Motivational
 - What motivations did animals have (e.g., to avoid pain), and were they motivations of the “proper” sort?
- Relational
 - How do we understand the relationship between superior entities and inferior entities?

Indirect Duties to Animals

- Duties to non-humans derived from our duties to humans
- Cruelty towards animals “undermined the virtues connected with successful discharge of our duties to self, God, and neighbor” (Garrett 69)
- Potential problems
 - Relies on hard distinction between us and them
 - Does not always capture our actual moral motivations
 - ...What else?

Direct Duties to Animals

- Similar to inferiors in domestic economy?
 - E.g., slaves, children, and domesticated animals all on the same level?
 - Duties of stewardship, protection?
- Christian-utilitarian views: God wants minimal pain in the world?
- “we have no right to interfere with the pleasures or needs of animals if they do not conflict in a significant way with our own needs” (Garrett 73)

With great power
comes great
responsibility.



René Descartes



- 1596-1650
- Viewed non-humans as mere automata
 - Minority opinion, but emphasizes human dominance
- Non-humans incapable of voluntary movements, reason, perhaps all mental activity
 - “It’s just as a watch’s movement of a watch is produced solely the strength of its spring and the configuration of its wheels” (I.16)



David Hume



- 1711-1776
- Emphasizes similarities between humans and non-humans
 - Complex reasoning
 - Emotions
 - Sympathy
 - Intricate sociality
- Some important differences between us and them
 - Humans capable of property ownership, so considerations of justice only apply to us.
 - Moral agency

David Hume

- Moral philosophy based on virtues
 - E.g., virtues of benevolence, compassion
 - Can have reciprocal relationships between humans and animals based on trust, loyalty, and kindness
- “we should be bound, by the laws of humanity, to give gentle usage to these creatures” (qtd. in Garrett 71)

Hume on Sympathy



Discussion Groups

- Split into two big groups! Use arguments common in modern philosophy.
 - Team 1: By only invoking indirect duties, justify non-cruel treatment of animals.
 - Team 2: You get to invoke direct duties. What might justify these obligations? What do you find most compelling?

Additional References

- Penelhum, Terence R. “Hume’s Moral Psychology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*. 2nd ed. Ed. David Fate Norton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 238-269.
- Pitson, Antony E. “Sympathy and Other Selves.” *Hume Studies* 22.2 (Nov 1996): 255-272.

• Questions? Comments?