

ANIMAL DIGNITY AND THE LAW

Call for papers – Antwerp (Belgium), 8-9 October 2021 (new date)

Animals have always played a central role in the life of humans, though a practical-utilitarian and anthropocentric perspective has long been dominant. This practical-utilitarian and anthropocentric perspective has started to fray, beginning with the ethical utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, getting traction in the 19th century and culminating now in calls for a greater place for animal interests in human decision making (abandoning anthropocentrism) and even to give animals legal rights.

One approach to this desire for a better position for animals is the search for a concept of *Animal Dignity*, resembling the human dignity which permeates human rights law. However, it is clear that human dignity cannot be exactly the same as animal dignity. Non-human animals may resemble humans – human animals – in a myriad of ways, but humans still are the only animals able to recognize ethical and legal duties and obligations.

Introducing the concept of animal dignity therefore raises many questions, the first of which is: what is animal dignity? What ethical and legal foundations can be found for animal dignity, and how should positive law change to accommodate animal dignity? Should animals get legal rights? What relations exist between animal and human dignity? Could humans appeal to their animal dignity against other animals, e.g. to legitimise the consumption of meat and animal products? If humans do not have animal dignity, how can this be explained, as humans are obviously animals too?

The Animal & Law Chair at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) organises an international congress on the topic of animal dignity, in Antwerp on 8-9 October 2021. Keynote speakers are Hania Kassoul (University of Poitiers; on “The issue of animal dignity: French examination”) and Visa Kurki (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies/University of Helsinki; on “What is Animal Dignity, Anyway?”).

We invite all interested researchers to send an abstract on a topic concerning animal dignity of no more than 400 words to johan.vandevoorde@uantwerpen.be before 20 June 2020. Presentations are in principle in English, but may also be done in French conditional on an English-language summary to be given to the participants.