

Gary L. Comstock, Ph.D.

Alumni Distinguished Undergraduate Professor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, North Carolina State University
458 Withers Hall, Raleigh, NC 27695 • 919-515-6173 • gcomstock@ncsu.edu

Bio

Gary L. Comstock has built two nationally recognized research programs: one in **critical-thinking pedagogy** and one in **animal ethics** and the philosophy of animal minds. Both are driven by the conviction that rigorous, fair-minded reasoning can transform how we treat the vulnerable.

Comstock first gained national visibility at Iowa State University in the 1990s as co-creator of the International Bioethics Institutes, which convened 5-day summer seminars assisting 500 life scientists in integrating ethics into their courses. He received continuous NSF funding totaling nearly a million dollars for that 10-year effort, documented in his book *Life Science Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Springer, 2010).

Critical-Thinking Pillar. Over the past decade, Comstock has emerged as one of the nation's leading innovators in critical-thinking pedagogy and empirical assessment of reasoning skills. At NC State, he designed and scaled interdisciplinary courses in ethics and argumentation, led faculty-development seminars, and spearheaded multi-campus collaborations. He is, with Daniel Grün, the creator of the Critical Reasoning and Inference Test (CRIT), the first freely available standardized instrument measuring growth in reasoning skills central to intellectual virtues. He currently directs the **ICDC** (Integrating Civil Discourse into the Curriculum) initiative, a **\$4 million FIPSE-funded** led by NC State and Notre Dame, and is a national voice in evidence-based character education.

Animal Ethics Pillar. Comstock is especially interested in animal minds and the moral relevance of what is known—and not yet known—about nonhuman brains and behavior. His theoretical contribution of “far-persons”—a philosophically precise category for domesticated animals between near-persons and the merely sentient—has appeared in volumes from Palgrave Macmillan (2017) and Springer (2020). He co-edited *The Moral Rights of Animals* (Lexington, 2017) and co-authored *Chimpanzee Rights: The Philosophers' Brief* (Routledge, 2019) with Kristin Andrews, Jeff Sebo, and eleven others. His current book project, “Far-Persons: On the Argument for Animal Rights from Overlapping Species,” extends this framework.

In the last five years, Comstock has co-authored a series of **amicus curiae** briefs for the Nonhuman Rights Project with Peter Singer and others: in support of Happy the elephant (2021, 2022); for orangutan personhood before the Chilean Court of Appeals (2022); on behalf of five elephants before the Colorado Supreme Court (2024); and for chimpanzees at the DeYoung Family Zoo (2026). His essay “The Shrimp Hypothesis” won **Best Paper** at the 2022 LSE Conference on Interspecies Welfare Comparisons; a related commentary appeared in *Animal Sentience* (2022). His essay “Imagining Other Species' Pains” won **Best Oral Presentation** at the 3rd International Electronic Conference on Animals (2025) and was presented at the University of Vienna (2024). He also presented “When Was the First Conscious Animal Born?” at the 31st Science of Consciousness Conference (2025).

Professional Experience

Alumni Distinguished Undergraduate Professor, NC State University, 2002–
Assistant/Associate/Professor, Iowa State University, 1982–2002

Specialization

Ethics • Animal Ethics • Philosophy of Animal Minds • Character Education • Critical Thinking

Honors and Awards (selected)

- Best Oral Presentation, International Conference on Animals — 2025
- Best Paper, “The Shrimp Hypothesis,” Conference on Interspecies Welfare Comparisons, LSE — 2022
- Board of Governors Award, CHASS Nominee, NC State University — 2023
- Online Ethics Prize, Honorable Mention, PEA Soup — 2017
- ASC Fellow, National Humanities Center — 2007–09

Education

Ph.D., Religion and Literature — University of Chicago, 1983

M.A., Religious Studies — University of Chicago, 1977

B.A., Religious Studies and English Literature — Wheaton College, 1976

Publications (summarized)

2 sole-authored books • 2 co-authored books • 2 co-edited books • 6 edited books • 37+ peer-reviewed articles • 33+ book chapters • 13 reprinted articles

Grants

Director or co-director of 20+ grants totaling over **\$5 million** (NSF, USDA, European Commission, National Humanities Center, FIPSE).

Selected Publications

Animal Ethics

- *Chimpanzee Rights: The Philosophers’ Brief*. Andrews, Comstock, Singer, Sebo, et al. Routledge, 2019.
- *The Moral Rights of Animals*. Engel and Comstock, eds. Lexington, 2017.
- Amicus curiae briefs for the Nonhuman Rights Project (2021–2026) with Peter Singer, Adam Lerner, and others—on behalf of Happy, orangutans (Chile), five elephants (Colorado), and chimpanzees (DeYoung).
- “The Shrimp Hypothesis.” **Best Paper**, LSE Conference on Interspecies Welfare Comparisons, 2022; “Pain in Pleocyemata?” *Animal Sentience* 32(13), 2022.
- “Imagining Other Species’ Pains.” **Best Oral Presentation**, 3rd International Electronic Conference on Animals, 2025; Univ. of Vienna, 2024.

Critical Thinking

- Comstock and Grün. “Assessing Critical Thinking ... The CRIT.” Under review, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*.
- “Teaching Critical Thinking at Scale.” Forthcoming, Springer.
- Sjogren, Comstock, and Goller. “Connecting Ethical Reasoning to Global Challenges.” *Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education*, 2023.

Earlier Key Works

- *Research Ethics: A Philosophical Guide*. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- *Life Science Ethics*, 2nd ed. Springer, 2010.
- “Ethics and Genetically Modified Foods.” *Food Policy* 27 (2002). Reprinted 12 times.
- “You Should Not Have Let Your Baby Die.” *New York Times*, 2017. PEA Soup Ethics Prize, Honorable Mention.