Ideas about certitude in human knowledge and about alleged differences in faculties between human and animal estate share a key historical pivot: Descartes’s Discourse on Method. What does the question of species have to do with the history of skepticism -- and why? This lecture considers the underattended terms of debate between Montaigne and Descartes on the claims of animals, in order to show how Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream places species-defined limits on human authority instead of celebrating it.

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