

Religion and Animals Course Syllabus

Comparative Religion CR10 (PW2), Tufts University
Fall 2004, Dr. Paul Waldau

Course Description and Goals. In this course we examine how religious traditions have affected various cultures' views and treatment of the earth's other living beings. These topics are related in this course to the traditional study of religion and religious ethics, as well as to the direction and focus of contemporary religious traditions and work being done in various life sciences regarding the realities of nonhuman animals.

The course is designed to prompt both extensive discussion among students *and* self-reflection in each student, with a particular focus on how each of us and other humans arrive at our view of “animals.” Some humans contend that some nonhuman living beings should be brought within our moral circle. Others contend that it is only human beings who deserve the fullest protections of our moral community. The course repeatedly examines these discussions through asking questions such as the following—(1) What is the extent of our ethical and communal abilities?, (2) What is the relation of these sensibilities to religious sensibilities generally?, (3) What are the principles by which inclusion within or exclusion from the moral circle has been determined in the past?, and (4) What does a discussion of these interrelationships imply about humans’ ethical abilities and the principles that undergird traditional religious and ethical discourse?

In answering these questions, we will address the great breadth of human religious and moral sensibilities, the importance of religious experience and ethical thinking in human lives, and various features of religious traditions and cultures around the world.

The course is organized around three basic categories that are the source of the most basic challenges in the field of religion and animals.

1. The empirical realities of nonhuman animals—our knowledge of what other animals’ lives are like, especially in comparison to our own, comes not only from the realm we call “science” (and in particular the modern biological sciences), but also from religion, traditions of “common sense,” features of language, and, of course, our family and friends. We’ll examine the ways in which specific information about the daily lives of other animals has been accumulated within religious traditions, and how religious traditions are open to, or repudiate, our ability to “see for ourselves” what other animals’ lives are like.

2. Our images of nonhuman animals—there are important limits on our knowing other animals' realities. This stems from the fact that other animals are elusive or remote from us, use some senses we do not have, and communicate with one another in fundamentally different ways than we communicate with each other. One consequence of the fundamental limitations in our abilities to know other animals is that human views of other animals are *always* “constructed” in some way. We’ll discuss the ways in which religious traditions have been primary shapers and transmitters of constructed views of nonhuman animals. We’ll also consider the role of symbolism and myth employing images of other animals in some way.

3. Human possibilities with other animals—this is the ethical realm so central to human existence. These problems are considered in light of various complicating factors, such as the complexity within religious traditions and the extraordinary diversity within the category “animals.”

Working with these categories will require that **we touch on classic problems in the study of religion—who and what constitute integral parts or features of religious traditions?** For example, in our discussion of symbolism we will focus on the relation of symbols and myths mentioning other living beings to the biological beings whose images are used. Doing so will raise the issue of the nature and breadth of religious claims. Consider, for example, what might be the nature of statements mentioning a particular animal (say, a dolphin) which are found in some religion’s scriptures or in an oral story. We’ll examine a number of foundational scriptures, stories, myths, and other accounts, as well as art (which we’ll call “iconographic traditions”), to see what they “say” about a religion’s view of the animals mentioned. We will thus ask simple, obvious questions like, “If a kind of animal, or even an individual, is mentioned in a tradition’s scripture, does this claim tell us anything about the biological animal(s) mentioned?”, “Do such references affect, help, or hinder us when trying to understand other animals?”, and “If we take such references to be about the animals mentioned, do we affect the *religious* function of the communication in which we find the references?”

Another principal goal of the course is to engage the great variety of human religious sensibilities about “animals.” We accomplish this by way of engaging the principal South Asian traditions (Hinduism and Buddhism), the three Semitic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and several indigenous traditions (examples from North American Amerindian and Australian aboriginal traditions).

The relevance of religious traditions to contemporary life is also examined in this way—we look at the ability of religious traditions to engage increasingly available information about nonhuman animals that is observation-based (this comes mostly, though hardly exclusively, from various sciences).

By the end of the course, the student will see a set of complex problems encountered when extending ethical sensibilities beyond the human sphere. We'll constantly return to these questions: "How have religious traditions seen other animals?"; "To what extent have religious traditions included or excluded nonhuman animals from humans' moral sensibilities?"; "In what ways have contemporary secular views of other animals been affected by religious views?"; and, "What are the factors dominating the many different answers to the these questions?"

Required Reading

The required readings will be posted at Blackboard. To get to this site, go to <http://blackboard.tufts.edu>. These postings include both "primary" materials (that is, writings by believers) and "secondary" materials (materials about religious belief and practices). Since the readings for each section are short, you will be expected to have read them carefully and to be prepared to discuss them.

Students must also read the daily email news digest of the Endangered Species Coalition known as "Greenlines." This is a free service and can be subscribed to at <http://www.stopextinction.org>. This service will provide us with current material by which to assess the relevance of what we are studying to today's world and its problems.

Course readings will be supplemented by PowerPoint presentations of various art, music and dance traditions. An extensive bibliography will also be available at Blackboard.

Books on Reserve

Chapple, Christopher Key 1993. *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press

Linzey, Andrew 1994. *Animal Theology*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press

Waldau, Paul 2001. *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals*, New York: Oxford University Press

There are also volumes on Buddhism and ecology, Hinduism and ecology, Islam and ecology, Judaism and ecology, Christianity and ecology

NOTE: Additional reserved reading will be added

Special Requirements and Grading

(1) **Course Paper** (20 pages, double-spaced, 12 point font).

Each student will meet (via email or in person) with the instructor to agree upon a **topic by Wednesday of Week 9 (November 3)**.

A **simple outline** of 4-6 preliminary points for this paper will be due **Wednesday of Week 10 (November 10)** (should be sent by email to paul.waldau@tufts.edu).

A more **detailed outline** will be due (should be sent by email to paul.waldau@tufts.edu) **Monday of Week 12 (November 22)**.

Samples of short and long outlines will be posted at Blackboard.

The final draft of the Course Paper will be due at a time and place to be agreed upon by the instructor and class. It should be sent by email to paul.waldau@tufts.edu.

This paper counts as 40% of the course grade.

(2) **Midterm in Week 8** (Monday, October 25)

The format is short answer, in-class, closed book; students will pick 5 questions to answer out of 8-10 questions.

This midterm counts as 20% of the course grade.

(3) **In-class Quizzes.** There will be a two unannounced **in-class quizzes on the readings** (this includes both the assigned readings posted at Blackboard and the Greenlines entries described above). Sample questions will be discussed ahead of time. These quizzes are designed solely to keep students reading, and are general in nature (in other words, you need only know that general thrust of the readings assigned for the day on which the quiz is given).

These quizzes count as 10% of the course grade.

(4) **Four Reflection Papers**

These reflection papers count as 20% of the grade. These papers are meant to be short—ideally, two pages typed, double spaced, 12 point font. I prefer that you send these to me electronically so that I can return them to you via email with my comments embedded in a copy of your paper.

First Reflection Paper (due Week Three – Monday, September 20)—do an “archeology” on your own views of “animals.”

Second Reflection Paper (due Week Four, Wednesday, September 29)—“What are *your* communities?”

Note: In order to get the maximum score on this reflection paper, it *must be free of typos and major punctuation errors*. If there are such errors, the maximum possible on this paper will be 3 out of 5.

Third Reflection Paper (due Week Nine, Wednesday, November 3), “Engaging Nonhuman Individuals.” This paper is, in essence, a short report on your visit to a **place where you can see an individual of one of the following species:** gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans, bonobos, any one of the whale or dolphin species, seals, elephants, or wolves. For reasons of safety, convenience and ecology, **this off-campus visit should be done in conjunction with *one other* student.** Your two-page paper should consider three things: (1) the impression you had of this kind of animal before the visit, with some reflection on how that impression was obtained; (2) the circumstances of the visit (location, conditions); (3) any changed impression of this kind of animal after the visit.

Fourth Reflection Paper (due Week Eleven – Monday, November 15—Report on a **visit to a religious place and/or ceremony of some kind.** This can be done alone, or in conjunction with another student. Upon completion of this visit, your paper will consider the number and kinds of reference to nonhuman beings made at the place or during the religious ceremony, and then attempt to speculate why there are so many, so few, etc. references at/in this particular place or ceremony.

(5) Class Participation

You should come to each class with at least one question about the assigned reading because questions are important learning tools for everyone. For this reason, questions are thus encouraged at all times in this course. Some of the sessions are designated as longer class-wide discussions. Pre-assigned questions will be the initial focus of these discussions (individual students will often be assigned ahead of time to discuss particular readings as well). Additional questions and comments are not only welcome—they are expected.

The purpose of this extensive discussion and questioning is to encourage each student to articulate her or his views and thinking on the

subjects discussed. Notice during our discussions how questions possess a power well beyond their answers—each of us benefits not only from asking our own questions, but also from hearing the questions asked by others. We learn new vocabularies, concepts, and styles of thinking by listening carefully to others' questions.

Asking questions and listening carefully are skills which can be acquired and enhanced, especially when this is done widely and in a respectful and sensitive manner.

Class participation through attendance and participation in discussions is a part of the course grade (10%).

Email “Meetings” with Course Instructor

Each student will also be in conversation with instructor via email. Each student will send the instructor an email within the first week of the course. This will begin a course-long dialogue. The purpose of such virtual “meetings” is threefold: first, to encourage as much participation in the class as possible; second, to discuss the student's ideas about a final paper for the course; and third, to discuss the assignments on which the Reflection Papers are based.

Students can also schedule in-person meetings.

NOTE regarding POSSIBILITY OF CLASS PUBLICATION:

If enough students are interested, we may try to publish student papers and reports along with similar writing by students in previous years' courses. A publication could take many different forms—a journal, publication at a website, book format, or some other medium.

Class Schedule

Introduction—The Basic Issues

Week 1 – Wednesday, September 8 (Session 1)

Identifying the course's core themes and goals (see listing above), and clarifying terminology. We'll also review the course requirements and do personal introductions. We'll end by working on the issue of what we'll call “personal archaeologies.”

Reading: Read the Syllabus carefully.

Part I
Assessing How Religious Traditions
Have Viewed the Animals around Us

Week Two – Monday, September 13 (Session 2)

Buddhism—the case of the *Jātaka* tales

Reading: At Blackboard (in the section “Assignments”)

Reading #1, “Engaging the *Jātakas*”

Reading #2, “Buddhism and Animals Rights”—from *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, ed. by Damien Keown, The Curzon Critical Studies in Buddhism Series, Richmond, Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2000, pages 81-112

Wednesday September 15 (Session 3)

Other Buddhist materials—elephant stories from the Dhammapada and other central Buddhist scriptures

Reading: At Blackboard

Reading #3, “The Dhammapada—Engaging Some Elephant References”

Reading #4, Selections from Chapters 6 and 7 from *The Specter of Speciesism*

Week Three – Monday, September 20 (Session 4)

A first attempt to become self-conscious about what scholars call “method”—we will do this by using students’ views of how they learned about nonhuman animals

Reading: At Blackboard

Reading #5, “The Challenges of Method and Archeology”

Reading #6, “Ferment on the Animal Issue”

Your first Reflection Paper is due today—the assignment is, Do an “archeology” on your own views of “animals.”

Wednesday, September 22 (Session 5)

Hinduism

Reading: At Blackboard

Reading #7, “Hinduism and Animals”

Week Four – Monday, September 27 (Session 6)

Judaism, sacrifice, and the Hebrew sense of interconnectedness of all life.

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #8, A. Gross, “A New Discourse’s Reflections on Animal Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible”

Reading #9, *Specter of Speciesism* passages on sacrifice

Reading #10, “Judaism, Sacrifice, and the Hebrew Sense of the Interconnectedness of All Life”

Wednesday, September 29 (Session 7)

The Christian tradition—the treatment issue and developments in early Christianity (Augustine and the Greek debate about the abilities of nonhuman animals)

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #11, portions of *Specter of Speciesism*

Reading #12, portions of Waldau piece on C.S. Lewis published in *2003 State of the Animals*

Second Reflection Paper due today—“What are your communities?”

Note: In order to get the maximum score on this reflection paper, it *must be free of typos and major punctuation errors*. If there are such errors, the maximum possible on this paper will be 3 out of 5.

Week Five – Monday, October 4 (Session 8)

Note: this session will be at Goddard Chapel

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #13 regarding “blessing of the animals” ceremonies

Wednesday, October 6 (Session 9)

The dominant view in Western religious traditions—Medieval, Christian Reformation, and trends in post-17th century theology

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #14, “Christians and Other Animals”

**Week Six – Monday, October 11 (Substitute Session on October 12)
No Class—Columbus Day**

Tuesday, October 12—Substitute Session (Session 10)

Late Twentieth Century Christianity—the tensions occasioned by increases in environmental awareness, critical readings of seminal biblical passages, and developments in the secular use of nonhuman animals

Reading: At Blackboard,
Reading #15, “The Predicament of Modern Christianity”

Wednesday, October 13 (Session 11)

Islamic traditions and the use of nonhuman animals

Reading: At Blackboard,
Reading #16, “Islam and Other Animals”

Week Seven – Monday, October 18 (Session 12)

Islam and the dominion/stewardship issue

Reading: At Blackboard,
Reading #16B, “Islam and Other Animals: The Issue of Stewardship”

Wednesday, October 20 (Session 13)

Judaism and the issue of subtraditions

Reading: At Blackboard,
Reading #17, “A Complicating Factor—The Issue of Subtraditions”

Week Eight – Monday, October 25 (Session 14)—Midterm Exam

The format will be 8-10 questions, of which you choose 5. These questions will be based on the readings to date and the class discussions. Examples of questions will be given in class ahead of time.

Wednesday, October 27 (Session 15)

Review of Midterm

Note: In one week you will have to have decided the topic of your course paper. In two weeks, you’ll be submitting a brief outline of 4-6 points for this paper.

Week Nine – Monday, November 1 (Session 16)

A contrast: two indigenous religious traditions

Reading: At Blackboard,
Reading #18, “A Door to Indigenous Traditions”

Third Reflection Paper due today—the topic is “Engaging Nonhuman Individuals” (see important requirements above for this reflection paper)

Wednesday, November 3 (Session 17)

Session to discuss the topics of your papers, visits to faith communities and various animals, and class themes generally—**Note** that a simple outline of 4-6 basic points regarding your course paper will be due next week (November 10).

Part II—Examining Symbols and Contemporary Views in order to Raise *Our* Self-consciousness about Method and Assumptions

Week Ten – Monday, November 8 (Session 18)

Introduction—the crucial importance of symbolism, and its great variety

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #19, “The Importance of Animal Symbols”

Reading #20, “Through and Beyond Symbols—Constructed Images of the Animal as Meaningful Other”

Wednesday, November 10 (Session 19)

What is “knowledge” of other animals? We’ll compare indigenous ways of knowing with modern sciences’ claims. We’ll look at various dimensions of symbolism, taxonomies, and factual claims about biological realities outside the human species.

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #21, “Through the Door to ‘Knowing’—Indigenous Religions’ ‘Knowing’ of Other Animals versus ‘Knowledge’ in Modern Sciences”

Note: A simple outline of 4-6 basic points regarding your course paper will be due this day.

Week Eleven – Monday, November 15 (Session 20)

A special problem – present attitudes toward NH

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #22, “Re-Assessing Our Heritage” (note also the Chart which is Reading #22B, and the recommended reading which is #22C)

Fourth Reflection Paper is due today—Report on a visit to a religious place and/or ceremony of some kind (see important requirements above for this paper).

Wednesday, November 17

Open session

Week Twelve – Monday, Nov 22 (Session 21)

We won't have class because I'll be at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting presiding over the Animals and Religion Consultation sessions.

A **detailed outline** of your course paper is due by email today.

Wednesday, November 24—NO CLASS PER UNIVERSITY SCHEDULE

Week Thirteen – Monday, November 29 (Session 22)

Student discussion of visits recorded in reflection papers

Wednesday, December 1 (Session 23)

Basic challenges—the religious, economic, cultural, intellectual, political, social, and ecological challenges. We'll also examine whether contemporary *secular* and *public* discourse in areas such as economics, science, and law reflects views that were religious in origin, and whether these avowedly secular arenas remain resistant to correction by new information.

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #23, "Religious, Economic, Cultural, Intellectual, Political, Social, and Ecological Challenges"

Week Fourteen – Monday, December 6 (Session 24)

Revisiting what it means for *us* to consider any tradition's views of other animals—we'll revisit some indigenous traditions with an eye to their ways of "knowing" other animals versus the ways of "knowing" other animals in today's sciences

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #21 (again), "Through the Door to 'Knowing'—Indigenous Religions' 'Knowing' of Other Animals versus 'Knowledge' in Modern Sciences"

Wednesday, December 8 (Session 25)

Conclusions—The Past, the Present, and the Future: What will "religion and animals" look like in the year 2100?

Reading: At Blackboard,

Reading #24, "Concluding Remarks on the Future in Relation to the Past—What Will 'Religion and Animals' Look Like in the Year 2100?"

Classes End December 10