

Course Syllabus Religion and Animals Harvard Summer School 2009

Course Description—Students trace the history and shape of this emerging academic field and its relation to various other academic disciplines and sciences. In addition, students examine a range of social, public policy, conceptual, environmental, ethical and philosophical implications of the field's emergence. Classes are conducted in the manner of a tutorial, and students will undertake both group work and a number of individualized writing projects.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Learning Objectives—Students should be able to:

- think critically about different senses of “religion and animals”;
- identify the definition of “religion and animals” that they will use in their own work;
- explain why critical thinking and basic factual information are so important to the study of religion and animals; and,
- describe why the study of animals across different religious traditions and cultures creates interesting problems and possibilities.

Course Policies

Note carefully—two documents given to students on their first day will contain important information about policies used in this course. The first is “Paul Waldau’s Course Policies” and the second is “Participation Guidelines.” Please read these carefully. We will talk about them on the first day and then in class from time to time as needed.

Time and Location—to be announced.

Course Director: Paul Waldau, Director, Center for Animals and Public Policy
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Office Hours and Meetings with Course Director: Office hours are usually immediately after class on Monday and Thursday. Because I want students to learn and to receive the good grades they deserve, please, if you have any difficulties in or concerns about how you are doing in this course, feel free to schedule an in-person or phone appointment at other times as well.

Readings and Course Materials

Assigned readings are listed below for each session.

Required Books

- Waldau, Paul, and Kimberley C. Patton, eds. *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Please note that a paperback version is scheduled to be available in Spring 2009.
- Waldau, Paul. *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. For those who cannot afford this book, I'll provide .pdf versions of the assigned chapters.

Additional Course Materials will be assigned—these will be available for downloading in .pdf format at religionandanimals.org. These will include draft chapters from *The Animal Invitation*

(forthcoming 2009 from Columbia University Press)—.pdf versions of the assigned chapters will be made available at no cost.

Recommended Readings will be the subject of a handout distributed in the first session.

Grading

There are two components to your grade in this class—70% of your course grade will be based on assignments, and 30% will be based on participation.

GRADE COMPONENT BASED ON ASSIGNMENTS = 70% of your grade. The breakdown of this 70% is as follows:

30% Midterm paper

40% Final paper (THERE IS NO FINAL EXAM)

GRADE COMPONENT BASED ON PARTICIPATION = 30% of your grade. Students will be provided a document entitled “Participation Guidelines” that explains both specifics and generalities about good participation and why it is so important in this particular course.

Schedule

Week 1

Session One—Introduction and Basic Issues

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects* Prologue “Loneliness and Presence” (5-10); Introduction (11-23); Patton essay “Caught with Ourselves in the Net of Life and Time” (27-39); and Waldau essay “Seeing the Terrain We Walk” (40-61)

Focus Questions

- What does it mean to study nonhuman animals?
- What’s in a name? We’ll consider these options: “animals and religion,” “religion and animals,” “religion and other animals,” “human-animal studies,” “anthrozoology,” “sociozoology,” “animal humanities,” and “animal studies.”
- What kinds of work already done by the human community fit comfortably within this field (however we name it)?
- What is the meaning of “interdisciplinary”?

Session Two—Personal, Social and Cultural Backdrops—Contemporary Ferment on the “Animals” Issue

Reading: Handout #1 “Personal Archeologies” (.pdf available); *The Animal Invitation* Chapters One and Two (.pdf versions available)

Focus Questions

- What is happening now in various societies around the world regarding the relationship of humans to other animals?
- What kinds of animals are the focal points?
- Are trends discernible?

Week 2

Session Three—Some basic philosophical problems: the complexities of studying religion, the difficulties of approaching other animals

Reading: Handout #2 “Religion and Other Animals” (.pdf available); Chapters Three (religion) and Five (importance of realities of other animals) from *The Animal Invitation* (.pdf copies available)

In this session, we will do an in-class writing exercise that is meant to be exploratory—the assignment will center on the question of which religious traditions have, in your opinion, displayed a particular interest in animals. Our discussion will center on this exercise.

Related Focus Question

- Which academic disciplines focus on which animals, and in which ways?

Session Four— Buddhism 1

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects* essays by Harris, Vargas and Mortensen

Focus Questions

- In what ways have nonhuman animals played a role in the Buddhist tradition?
- Are there different subtraditions within Buddhism on the animal issue?
- Are there any fundamental features of the Buddhist tradition which in your opinion do either of the following: (a) foreclose consideration of the animals outside the human species; *or* (b) require that Buddhists notice and take seriously some or all living beings outside the human species?

Week 3

Session Five— Buddhism 2

Reading: Chapters 6 and 7 from *The Specter of Speciesism*

Focus Questions

- Why are different versions of the story of Buddhism and other animals told?
- In what other ways might this story be told?

Session Six—Christianity (first of three sessions)

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects* essays by Kienzle, Steiner and McDaniel

Focus Questions

- Do these essays frame “Christianity and animals” in the same way?
- How do the versions of “Christianity” and of “animals” assumed by these authors in the assigned essays differ from one another?

Week 4

Session Seven—Christianity: Another Take

Reading: Chapters 8 and 9 from *The Specter of Speciesism*

Focus Questions

- In what ways have nonhuman animals played a role in the Christian tradition?
- Are there different subtraditions within Christianity on the animal issue?
- Are there any fundamental features of the Christian tradition which in your opinion do either of the following: (a) foreclose consideration of the animals outside the human species; *or* (b) require that Christians notice and take seriously some or all living beings outside the human species?

Session Eight—Christianity and its Jewish, Roman and Local Heritages

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects* articles by Klawans, Patton on sacrifice, McDonough, and Lawrence

Note 1: Midterm paper is due next week—we will have discussed in class the topic, length, format, and possible approaches. Here again is the topic: “Compare some aspect of Christianity and Buddhism on the issue of humans’ relationship to nonhuman animals generally.”

Note 2: We will discuss **student presentations scheduled for Session Eleven.**

Week 5

Session Nine—Islam

Reading: Foltz, Richard 2006, opening chapter of *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, Oxford: Oneworld Pub. (available in .pdf version); *A Communion of Subjects* essays by Foltz, Kassam and Asani.

Focus Questions

- In what ways are nonhuman animals seen by the Islamic tradition?
- Are there different subtraditions within Islam on the animal issue?
- Are there any fundamental features of the Islamic/Muslim tradition which in your opinion do either of the following: (a) foreclose consideration of the animals outside the human species; *or* (b) require that Muslims notice and take seriously some or all living beings outside the human species?

Session Ten—Indigenous Traditions 1

Reading: Opening chapter of Brown, Joseph Epes 1997 (revised edition). *Animals of the Soul: Sacred Animals of the Oglala Sioux*, Rockport, Mass.: Element (available in .pdf version); *A Communion of Subjects* essays by Opoku, McIntosh, Sterckx and Grim; Handout #3 on indigenous traditions and the fascinating problems they raise.

We will also discuss the **final paper**, which is each student's creation of a definition and description of "religion and animals." These should exceed 3000 but not 6000 words.

Focus Questions

- In what ways do the views of animals held by the indigenous peoples mentioned in the assigned readings differ from the views that prevail in our society?
- Are the views of other animals that prevail in our own culture typical or somehow representative of humans' views of other animals?
- How different are other cultures' views of nonhuman animals from the views of these beings that now prevail in the United States?

Week 6

Session Eleven—Indigenous Traditions 2

We open the door further to cultures other than our own. We'll try to see their "social construction" of animal issues. We'll do two in-class exercises—at the beginning of this session, we'll do a written exercise regarding which other cultures had, prior to your arrival on campus, impressed you regarding their views of other animals.

The second in-class exercise will be student presentations (topic, length and format issues will be discussed earlier in the week)

Reading: Chapters on indigenous traditions from *The Animal Invitation*

Focus Question

- How would you describe for others the relationship of the indigenous people you researched to the nonhuman beings in and near your people's communities?

Session Twelve—The Religion and Ecology Movement

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects* essays by Tucker, Rockefeller, Goodall and Waldau on environmental justice

Focus Questions

- What, if any, is(are) the relationship(s) of environmental concerns to the concerns of religious traditions for compassion for other living beings?

- What approaches might a single religious believer take to the study of other animals and topics that go under headings like “ecology,” “endangered species,” and “animals’ social realities”?

Week 7

Session Thirteen—Animals “in and of themselves”

Reading: Chapters 4 and 5 from *The Specter of Speciesism; A Communion of Subjects* essays by Hauser and Bekoff; *The Animal Invitation* Chapters Five and Six (.pdf available)

Focus Questions

- Is it possible to have a view of other animals that is primarily, even purely, objective?
- What are the best methods for noticing and taking other animals seriously?
- What can we make of wide-ranging discussions that have taken place in the last decades concerning “animals’ minds” and “animals’ emotions”?
- Of the religious traditions we have looked at, which methods have been used by adherents of those traditions? (We’ll also consider a range of problems of “entering” the minds of humans from other cultures.)
- What is the role of narrative, story or myth (in the respectful sense that this term is used by comparative religion scholars) in the views of animals held by peoples in, respectively, small scale societies and modern industrialized societies?

Session Fourteen—Contemporary Problems and the Field of “Religion and Animals”

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects* essays by Singer, Rollin, Shapiro, Fraser, Fox, Valen, Wise; Handout #4 (various materials on contemporary religious traditions’ current positions on various issues)

Focus Questions

- What issues arising from the intersection of human and nonhuman lives do you deem religious traditions capable of addressing in any manner?
- Can religious traditions lead in this area, or are they destined to follow other segments of human culture in our species’ engagement with the more-than-human world?

Week 8

Final Paper due