Sympathetic Creatures: Animals, Ethics, and Politics
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Sample syllabus

Course description
Bees have long been a popular figure in political thought: from Aristotle to Mandeville and beyond, philosophers have long compared human beings to bees on the grounds that both are social creatures. If man was Aristotle’s political animal, bees were quasi-political: they associated with one another and communicated, but they did not seek to persuade. Bees did not possess logos, or reasoned speech, the quality that has long held to differentiate humanity from all other species. But what if it were the case that humanity did not possess a monopoly on logos? How would that challenge humankind’s understanding of itself - and its understanding of our fellow animals?

As awareness of, and interest in, environmental issues grows, many scholars have come to focus on one specific issue: the status of the non-human animal. What are animals’ intellectual capacities? What are their emotional capacities? How might their feelings overlap or diverge with ‘human emotions’? Do any other species have a notion of justice? What is the ethical standing of non-humans? What, if anything, do human beings owe to other species? Does our duty depend on whether other species do employ something like logic, persuasion, or judgment?

In some ways, these are not new questions: in ancient and medieval philosophy, animals were often invoked as a foil for man, on the one hand, and plants, minerals, and inert materials on the other. The aim of this course is to examine previous treatments of ‘the animal question’ and consider the possible consequences for political subjectivity in the twenty-first century. The first two-thirds of the semester will be taken up with examining the role of animals in the history of political thought, focusing on primary materials. The final third will be devoted to contemporary questions in political theory that ‘the animal question’ have provoked or speaks to in a new way.

This class is intended as an intensive introduction to environmental political thought via close examination of one of its biggest questions. Students will be exposed to a wide variety of concerns, views, and traditions. The course is open to students from all disciplines. Suggested reading is appended to the syllabus for those interested.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 | Introduction
I. Ancients and Animals

Week 2 | Animals as Subject of Inquiry
Aristotle, selections from *De Anima*, *History of Animals*, and *Politics*

Week 3 | Diet
Plutarch, *Of the Eating of Flesh.*
Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food.*

II. Early Modern Animals

Week 4 | Man and Bee
Review Aristotle, *Politics*

Week 5 | The Moral Status of Animals: Three Theories
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, part V
Kant, “Duties Toward Animals and Spirits,” in *Lectures on Ethics*
Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chapter XVII.6, esp. note 122

Week 6 | Animals and Empire

III. Modern Creatures

Week 7 | Emotions and Anthropomorphism

Week 8 | Hunting

**Week 9 | Sympathizing with Animals**

**IV. Contemporary Questions**

**Week 10 | Meat and Misogyny**

**Week 11 | Animals and Liberal Subjectivity**

**Week 12 | Animal Rights or Animal Welfare?**

**Week 13 | Best Friends**
Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, selections.

**Week 14 | Citizen Pig?**

**Week 15 | Justice**

Required texts
J.M. Coetzee, et. al., The Lives of Animals (978-0691070896)
Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees and Other Writings (978-0872203747)
Martha Nussbaum and Cass Sunstein, eds., Rights For Animals? Law and Policy (978-0195305104)
All other readings will be available via the course site or distributed in class.

Suggested reading

Classics
Mary Midgley, Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature.

Introductions to animal studies
Alexander Cochrane, An Introduction to Animals and Political Theory.
Margo DeMello, Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies.
Erica Fudge, Animal.
Andrew Linzey and Paul Barry Clarke, eds., Animal Rights: A Historical Anthology.
Joan Schaffner, An Introduction to Animals and the Law.

History of animals
Sarah Amato, Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture.
Virginia Anderson, Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America.
Miguel de Asua and Roger French, A New World of Animals: Early Modern Europeans on the Creatures of Iberian America.
Steve Baker and Carol Adams, Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation.
Bruce Thomas Boehrner, Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature.
Matt Cartmill, A View to A Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History.
Martha Few and Zeb Tortorici, eds., Centering Animals in Latin American History.
Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern Europe.*
Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture.*
Erica Fudge, ed. *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and Other Wonderful Creatures.*
Elizabeth Hanson, *Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos.*
Linda Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History.*
Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin Danahay, *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture.*
Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo.*
Thomas Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy.*
Matthew Senior, ed., *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Enlightenment.*
Yi-Fu Tuan, *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets.*
Nathaniel Wolloch, *Subjugated Animals: Animals And Anthropocentrism in Early Modern European Culture.*

**Philosophy and politics of animals**

Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal.*
Stanley Cavell, et. al., *Philosophy and Animal Life.*
Elizabeth Cherry, *Culture and Activism: Animal Rights in France and the United States.*
Raymond Corbey and Annette Lanjouw, eds., *The Politics of Species: Reshaping our Relationships with Other Animals.*

Colin Dayan, *With Dogs at the Edge of Life.*


Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volumes I and II.*


Gary L. Francione, *Eat Like You Care: An Examination of the Morality of Eating Animals.*


Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto.*


Jean Kazez, *Animalkind: What We Owe to Animals.*

Dominique Lestel, *Eat This Book: A Carnivore’s Manifesto.*

Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us about Politics.*


Lyle Munro, *Compassionate Beasts: The Quest for Animal Rights.*


Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrial Slaughter and the Politics of Sight.*


Jessica Pierce, *Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets.*


Gary Steiner, *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism.*

Cynthia Willett, *Interspecies Ethics.*
Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory.*

**Journals of interest**

*Animal Law Review*
*Animal Studies Journal*
*Animalia*
*Antennae*
*Anthrozoös*
*Between the Species*
*Contemporary Political Theory*
*Environmental Politics*
*Humanimalia*
*Journal of Animal Ethics*
*Journal for Critical Animal Studies*
*Journal of the History of Ideas*
*Journal of Political Philosophy*
*Political Theory*
*Politics and Animals*
*Relations: Beyond Anthropocentrism*
*Society & Animals*
*Sloth: A Journal of Emerging Voices in Human-Animal Studies*
*Trace - Finnish Journal for Human-Animal Studies*

*The Eighteenth Century* 52.1 (2011), Special Issue: Animal, All Too Animal.
*Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 33.4 (2010), Special Issue: Animals in the Eighteenth Century.