

## Religion and Animals

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**Institution**—Tufts University (main campus in Medford), private liberal arts college

**Course level and type**—undergraduate/lecture

**Hours of Instruction**—39 hours, 3hrs/week over a 16 week period (with one-week break and other holidays)

**Enrolment and year last taught**—18 students/2003

**Pedagogical Reflections**—students participated vigorously, in part because either one or both of the major subjects are of deep interest to them. While there are other courses in the curriculum where “religion” can be discussed, there are few, if any, other places in the curriculum that students can talk broadly and personally about “animals.” The course includes much inquiry into students’ own backgrounds, which were diverse (students from both the sciences and arts enrolled—this edition of the course did not include any religion majors, although it is clear that a number of religion majors are interested in the subject matter). Students were pushed to address their own notions of “religion” and of “animals” to develop their ability to see *others’ views* of each subject.

The reading materials were composed (with one exception) of materials that I wrote, as I don’t believe any available and affordable texts in print provide adequate materials for a wide-ranging discussion. Some of the materials included chapters from my *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (Oxford University Press, 2001). The forthcoming *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics* should more than adequate materials for the course (projected to be out in 2004 from Oxford University Press—this book will be the published version of the papers delivered at the May 20-23, 1999, conference entitled “Religion and Animals” at the Harvard-Yenching Institute).

The class discussions, based on the readings and on PowerPoint presentations (used in about half the sessions) were lively. They were often keyed to students’ interest in other university courses and current events.

Putting the students into a circle when discussions took place proved to be important. **The key element?** Students having a chance to integrate their own understanding as an element in the discussions and as a vehicle for comprehending why there is so much diversity on both topics. To this end, there were two assignments in which students had to go off-campus to visit (1) a large nonhuman animal of some kind (which teaches them some very basic things about present realities), and (2) a place of worship of some kind, and then report (two-page paper) on their pre-visit impressions, their impressions during the visit, and any post-visit impressions.

## **Religion and Animals**

### **Course Syllabus**

Comparative Religion CR10 (PW2), Tufts University  
Fall 2003, 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.

**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**. For example, our discussion of symbolism will focus on the relation of symbols and myths to the underlying natural phenomena. 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 an animal is mentioned in a tradition's scripture, does this claim tell us anything about biological animal 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 the emergence of observation-based information about nonhuman animals.

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://crs.ase.tufts.edu>

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

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 October 29, and a simple outline of 4-6 preliminary points for this paper will be due November 5 (Wednesday, Week 10). A more detailed outline will be due in Week 12 (November 17). The final draft will be due at a time and place to be agreed upon by the instructor and class.

**This course paper counts as 40% of the course grade.**

(2) **Midterm in Week 8** (Wednesday, October 22) (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) There will be a few **in-class quizzes on the readings**. Sample questions will be discussed ahead of time.

**These count as 10% of the course grade.**

(4) Two **off-campus visits** by each student during the course as follows.

a. One will be to a **place where the student 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. **These visits *must* be done in conjunction with *one other* student.**

Upon completion of these visits, **each student will write a two-page paper** (typed, double spaced, 12 point font) that considers three things: (1) the impression the students 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:

b. A **second visit** will be to a **religious ceremony of some kind.** This can be done alone, or in conjunction with another student.

Upon completion of these visits, each student will write a **second two-page paper** (typed, double spaced, 12 point font) that considers two things: (1) the number and kinds of reference to nonhuman beings made during the religious ceremony; and (2) the student's speculation regarding the impression held by the ceremony's attendees of the kind of animal the student visited.

To the extent possible, we will schedule these papers for part of class discussions during Weeks 11 and 12.

**These two short papers count as 20% of the grade.**

#### **NOTE regarding POSSIBILITY OF CLASS PUBLICATION:**

If enough students are interested, we will try to publish student papers and reports—we may do this with a journal, in book form, or at a website.

#### **(5) Class Participation and Meetings with Course Instructor**

Note this simple point—by framing specific questions the student will advance his or her ability to inquire into this complex subject matter. So to stimulate participation, **class participation through attendance and participation in discussions is a part of the course grade (10%).**

Each student will also be in conversation with instructor via email. The purpose of such virtual “meetings” is threefold: first, to discuss the final paper for the course; second, to discuss the off-campus visits and related in-class presentations during Week 11; and third, to encourage as much participation in the class as possible.

There will also be **virtual office hours** at a time to be announced in class. Students can also schedule in-person meetings.

## Class Schedule

### Introduction—The Basic Issues

#### Week 1 – Wednesday, September 3 (Session 1)

Identifying the course's core themes and goals (see listing above). We'll also review the course requirements and do personal introductions. We'll end by working on the issue of "personal archaeologies."

**Reading:** Read the Syllabus—either once carefully or three times.

### Part I

#### Assessing How Religious Traditions Have Viewed the Animals around Us

#### Week Two – Monday, September 8 (Session 2)

Buddhism—the case of the *Jātaka* tales

**Reading:** At Blackboard

Assignments/Reading #1, "Engaging the *Jātakas*"

Assignments/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 10 (Session 3)

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

**Reading:** At Blackboard

Assignments/Reading #3, "The Dhammapada—Engaging Some Elephant References"

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

#### Week Three – Monday, September 15 (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

Assignments/Reading #5, "The Challenges of Method and Archeology"

Assignments/Reading #6, "Ferment on the Animal Issue"

**Wednesday, September 17 (Session 5)**

Hinduism

**Reading:** At Blackboard

Assignments/Reading #7, “Hinduism and Animals”

**Week Four – Monday, September 22 (Session 6)**

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

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

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

Assignments/Reading #9, *Specter of Speciesism* passages on sacrifice  
Assignments/Reading #10, “Judaism, Sacrifice, and the Hebrew Sense of the Interconnectedness of All Life”

**Wednesday, September 24 (Session 7)**

The Christian tradition—the treatment issue

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #11, portions of *Specter of Speciesism*, Ch. 9  
Assignments/Reading #12, portions of Waldau piece on C.S. Lewis published in *2003 State of the Animals*

**Week Five – Monday, September 29 (Session 8)**

Developments in Early Christianity—Augustine and the Greek debate about the abilities of nonhuman animals

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #13, portions of *Specter of Speciesism*, Ch. 8

**Wednesday, October 1 (Session 9)**

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

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #14, “Christians and Other Animals”

**Week Six – Monday, October 6 (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,

Assignments/Reading #15, “The Predicament of Modern Christianity”

**Wednesday, October 8** (Session 11)

Islamic traditions and the use of nonhuman animals

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #16, “Islam and Other Animals”

**Week Seven – Monday, October 13 – NO CLASS**

**Wednesday, October 15** (Session 12)

Islam and the dominion/stewardship issue

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #16, “Islam and Other Animals”

**Thursday, October 16**

**If we have a “make-up Monday schedule” on Thursday, October 16, we will review generally**

**Week Eight – Monday, October 20** (Session 13)

Judaism and the issue of subtraditions

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #17, “A Complicating Factor—The Issue of Subtraditions”

**Wednesday, October 22** 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.

**Week Nine – Monday, October 27** (Session 15)

A contrast: two indigenous religious traditions

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #18, “A Door to Indigenous Traditions”

**Wednesday, October 29** (Session 16)

Review of Midterm

**Week Ten – Monday, November 3** (Session 17)

Session at Goddard Chapel to discuss papers, visits to faith communities and various animals, and class themes generally



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

**Wednesday, November 5** (Session 18)

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

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #19, “The Importance of Animal Symbols”,  
and Reading #20, “Through and Beyond Symbols—Constructed Images of  
the Animal as Meaningful Other”

**Week Eleven – Monday, November 10** (Session 19)

What is “knowledge” of other animals? Comparing 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,

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

**Wednesday, Nov 12** (Session 20)

A special problem – present attitudes toward NH

**Reading:** At Blackboard,

Assignments/Reading #22, “Re-Assessing Our Heritage”

**Week Twelve – Monday, Nov 17** (Session 21)

Student Presentations

**Wednesday, November 19** (Session 22)

Student Presentations

**Week Thirteen – Monday, November 24 – NO CLASS**

**Wednesday, November 26 – NO CLASS**

**Week Fourteen – Monday, 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,

Assignments/Reading #23, “Religious, Economic, Cultural, Intellectual, Political, Social, and Ecological Challenges”

**Wednesday, December 3 (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,

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

**Week Fifteen – Monday, 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,

Assignments/Reading #24, “Concluding Remarks on the Future in Relation to the Past—What Will ‘Religion and Animals’ Look Like in the Year 2100?”