



## Animals and Religion

REL 19-344; ENV 49-344; FST 04-344  
Anthropocene Cluster  
Spring 2015

Instructor: Dr. Laura Hobgood, KEW 105, x1669  
Class meets: MW 11:00-12:15; KEW 115  
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Office Hours: Thursdays 1:00-3:00

### Course Description:

What does it mean to be human? We are animals just like the other animals who inhabit this planet. But who are we in relationship to all these other animals? And who are “they” in relationship to “us”? Whose bodies count and whose bodies do not count? Who has a soul? Who has inherent value? Religions have tried to answer these questions, among many others, for generations. Religions have both reinforced ideas of human superiority over other-than-human animals and called into question ideas of human dominion and exceptionalism. But one thing is increasingly clear – that to an extent never imagined in the history of the human species, we human animals are using other-than-human animals for our own ends without considering their lives, their bodies and their interests. This human influence on the entire planet suggests a new era in Earth’s history – the Anthropocene.

For example, consider food. Humans have eaten other animals and been eaten by them. But now many of us are eating them via a process that is unimaginably cruel, some would argue; and we are eating them in sheer numbers (at least some groups of humans are) that are unsustainable (to say the least). It could be argued that in the last few generations the human relationship to other-than-human animals has changed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Why/how do we justify or rationalize all this? We make tools (they make tools). We have culture (they have culture). We think (they think). We feel (they feel). We communicate (they communicate). We have a soul, maybe, (do they have a soul?). Setting up this final wall of separation (‘the soul’), religion might be the only category left to elevate humans above all other species. How? Why? Should it? Why are these we/they categorizations so problematic to begin with! Do we need to drop this binary ball (why are the we/they categories even in this paragraph)?

These are difficult questions and they might challenge all of us to enter places that are not comfortable. We will examine the nature of ourselves and the others with whom we live. And, through the lens of religion, ecofeminist theories and environmental studies, we will ask why. We will also be practicing an ecofeminist methodology throughout the course, calling into question all dualisms, otherings, hierarchies.

This course will trace the history of this emerging field - critical animal studies - as well as its relation to other academic disciplines and to the Anthropocene. We will also look at ethical, political, feminist, environmental, and philosophical intersections with the question of religion and animals. By the end of the course students should be able to think critically about the implications of “religion and animals”; explain the connections between “real” animals and religion, including the status of real animals in the world in the early twenty-first century; consider the significance of thinking about animals in a religious and ethical context.

This course is comparative in nature as well – so we examine several religious traditions or groups of traditions: Buddhism/Jainism, Christianity, Indigenous traditions, Islam, the scientific-industrial complex, and animal rights activism. We will also have several opportunities to engage real animals and look at current issues of real animals through this experiential lens.

## Questions for the Anthropocene

- How do scholars, policy-makers and activists define the Anthropocene?
- How and why are humans changing the Earth's systems?
- How are changes in the Earth's systems affecting humans and other living beings?
- How are humans responding to these changes?
- How does thinking about the Anthropocene call into question what it means to be human?

## Readings:

Al-Safa, *The Animals Lawsuit Against Humanity*.

Kalof, Linda and Amy Fitzgerald, eds. *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*.

Haraway, Donna. *When Species Meet*. selections

Hobgood, Laura. *The Friends We Keep: Unleashing Christianity's Compassion for Animals*

Quammen, David. *Monster of God*.

Various articles and essays from other sources, as listed in the syllabus

## Course Requirements:

**Participation and Attendance (20%):** Read, come to class, join the discussion, voice your opinion, think and speak up! If you miss more than two class meetings, it will be reflected in your grade (1/3 grade deduction for each additional absence). There are various ways to participate even though the class is large. I'll pass an attendance sheet around until I know all of your names. Also, each day after class I'll note those who seemed engaged (involved, interested, thinking about, raising questions, helping explain, getting in discussions with others) the topic for that day and who contributed to our overall understanding of it.

**Reading Reflections (28%):** At various points in the semester I will ask you to write a two page reflection on the reading for that day. The papers should focus on these questions: What issue(s) does the reading raise for you? Do you agree or disagree with the author's perspective? Why or why not? Readings marked by \* in the syllabus (seven total – 4% each).

**Current Issue Group Presentation (15% total):** In groups of 5-6 you will examine a current issue in the animals-religion-ethics arena and present the complexities of the issue to the class. You can use a variety of sources, including sources on the internet (though you must confirm information if you are claiming it as fact – I will explain this more fully) since this is such a timely issue and often published information is out-of-date. But four peer-reviewed sources must also be included. The group will turn in an outline and a bibliography. Topics are: Animals in Scientific and Biomedical Research; Animals as Food; Animals in Sport; Animals in Central Texas (in this place).

**Real Animals Interaction (10%):** While animals function as symbols and sign in religious traditions, one of the main issues we'll address this semester is "real" animals in religions. With that in mind, you are required to incorporate at least one real animal interaction, along with a reflection paper, during the semester. The reflection paper should thoughtfully connect (or address why it is not feasible to connect) that encounter with something we have discussed in the class or read about. The paper should be 3-4 pages long. (\*\*For students who are participating in the Anthropocene Cluster this component can fulfill your Community-Engagement requirement, but you need to work with the instructor to determine the number of hours and the location/community partner for this aspect; see \* by possible partners below.) Here are some options for the "real animals interaction" and we can discuss more as the semester moves along (events/opportunities might arise so we will add to the list):

- Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter (both close to campus)\*
- Austin Zoo and Animal Sanctuary
- Visit the animal research labs at Southwestern

- Visit St. Francis Wolf Sanctuary, Montgomery, Texas
- Spend time observing animals who live on campus (lots of wildlife here on campus) or in the surrounding area
- ROCK – Ride on Center for Kids\*

**Research Paper (27%):** Each student will pursue a research topic throughout the course, resulting in a 7-8 page paper. The topic will focus on one animal and examine this animal through a religious and (if possible) cross-cultural lens. Students need to use at least four peer-reviewed sources (books or articles) along with visual/media and internet sources. Students should also include reference to written and visual sacred texts. (Dr. Hobgood will give an example of this early in the semester.)

Components of the project will be due at different points in the semester and a writing rubric will be posted on moodle:

- Topic and initial bibliography (4%)
- Annotated bibliography and outline (4%)
- Flash Presentation (4%)
- Final paper due at the exam time (15%)

The last several class periods will be presentations of your research. These “flash presentations” (6 minutes total for the presentation) should include the visual imagery students have accumulated as part of their research.

## **General Information:**

### **Religious Studies**

“Religious Studies” refers to the academic study about religion and differs from religious instruction received in a particular faith community. The academic study of religion involves a critical examination of beliefs, practices, narratives, traditions, communities, artifacts and other phenomena associated with religious systems. As an academic discipline, religious studies prepares students to better understand, compare, interpret, and analyze the diverse array of human expression known as “religious.” A guiding assumption in religious studies is that religion can and should be subjected to the types of critical analyses that are applied to other areas of the human social world. Religious studies is an inherently interdisciplinary field that utilizes the critical theories and tools from many other academic fields, such as: philosophy, art, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, language studies, literature, politics, economics, cultural studies, gender studies and ethnic studies. Scholars and students of religious studies avoid privileging or promoting the perspectives of a particular community of believers or practitioners. At Southwestern, the faculty of the Religious Studies Department attends to the interplay of religious, social, political and economic systems. We challenge students to analyze the connections between religious systems and other systems of power in order to prepare students to critically and creatively promote economic justice, social equality and ecological integrity.

**Late Assignments & Plagiarism:** Assignments turned in late will receive a ½ grade deduction per day. This is in fairness to those who completed assignments at the scheduled time. Students should be aware of all aspects of the **Honor System** as presented in the Student Handbook. I encourage you to read the section on plagiarism carefully.

**Religious Observances/Holy Days:** Inform the instructor if you will be missing a class in order to fulfill a religious obligation or observe a holy day. These absences are excused.

**Students with Disabilities:** Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should register with the Center for Academic Success, located in the Cullen Building. Professors must be notified that documentation is on file no later than the end of the second week of class for the accommodation to be honored.

**Computers in the Classroom:** In recent years the alluring availability of wireless internet access makes it increasingly difficult for us to keep our attention focused during class. For this reason, no laptops, PDAs or cell phones are allowed to be

on your desk or in your hands during class unless you have permission from the instructor. Please put your cell phones on silent and store your computer while we are here engaged in our interesting intellectual enterprise.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1

Jan. 12 - **Introductions, Syllabus, Why Study Animals and Religion?**

Jan. 14 - **Thinking with and about dogs**

Reading: Hobgood, "Journey to the Afterlife" (handout)

### Week 2

Jan. 19 – MLK Day, no class

Jan. 21 - **Animal Studies – what is this discipline anyway?**

Readings: Berger, "Why Look at Animals" (TAR, [\*Reading Review 1\*](#))

**Questions:** What does it mean to study "other-than-human animals"? Why is the language so difficult? Why does Berger find it so compelling? What different methodologies do we need to consider?

### Week 3

Jan. 26 - **Pre-historic Religious Ponderings – a look at caves**

Readings: Dodd, "Here the Animal" (*Southwest Review* - m)

Jan. 28 - **Mediterranean Religious and Philosophical Foundations**

Readings: Aristotle, Plutarch, Genesis (TAR and handout); Sax, "Animals as Tradition" (TAR)

**Questions:** What are the implications of these classic texts by Aristotle, Plutarch, and the Biblical writers? What does Sax mean when he claims that animals are tradition?

### Week 4

Feb. 2 – **Visit Williamson County Regional Animal Shelter**

\*\*wear clothing appropriate for walking around the shelter

Feb. 4 - **Mediterranean Religious and Philosophical Foundations**

Reading: Klawans, "Sacrifice in Ancient Israel"; "Job"; DeWitt, "Behemoths and Batrachians"

**Questions:** What are some of the different ways that Israelites conceived of the relationship between God-humans-animals?

*Topic and Initial Outline & Bibliography Due for final paper; sign up for group presentations/research*

### Week 5

Feb. 9 – **Christianity and Animals - Animals in Christian History**

Readings: Selections from the Bible; Hob-O, *The Friends We Keep*, Intro, Chapter 1 (m)

**Questions:** What was the status of animals in the Mediterranean world when Christianity emerged? What impact did Christianity have on the status of animals, if any? What are some of the various ways Christianity thought about animals?

Feb. 11 – **Christianity and Animals**

Readings: Selections from Christian Theologians and Hagiographies (Aquinas, Francis, Martin de Porres) Steiner, "Descartes, Christianity, and Contemporary Speciesism"

**Questions:** How does the place of animals in Christianity change over the course of the tradition's two thousand year history? What is Descartes' principle stand? How does this connect to Christianity?

### Week 6

Feb. 16 – No class, attend Ebola Panel in ballrooms

*Ebola Panel 12:00-1:00, ballrooms*

Feb. 18 – **Christianity and Animals - Animals in Christian History & in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christianity**

Readings: \**The Friends We Keep*, Chapters 3-5 ([\*Reading Review 2\*](#))

**Questions:** Is there a 'space' for animals in Christianity? What do you think about the role of animal blessings? Can Christian theology be opened up to other-than-humans?

### Week 7

Feb. 23 – **Animals in Islam** – *The Animals Lawsuit Against Humanity*

Readings: first 1/2

Feb. 25 – **Animals in Islam** – *The Animals Lawsuit Against Humanity*

Readings: second 1/2

### Week 8

Mar. 2 - **Thinking about the Anthropocene** – what is it? (See questions above)

Readings: \**“Learning how to die in the Anthropocene” (Reading Review 3)*

[http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/learning-how-to-die-in-the-anthropocene/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/learning-how-to-die-in-the-anthropocene/?_r=0)

and *Monster of God*, Quammen, chapter 1

Mar. 4 – **Thinking about the Anthropocene** – *Monster of God*

Readings: Quammen, chapters 2-4

### Week 9

Mar. 9 – *Monster of God*

Readings: Quammen, chapters 5-6

Mar. 11 – *Monster of God*

Readings: \*Quammen, chapter 7-8 (*Reading Review 4*)

### Spring Break – March 13-22

### Week 10

Mar. 23 - *Group Presentations – Day 1*

*Animals as Food; Animals as Spectacle/Sport*

Readings: Adams, “The Sexual Politics of Meat” (TAR 19); Lori Gruen, “Empathy and Vegetarian Commitments” (m)

Mar. 25 – **Animals in Buddhism** - Sacred Texts and Backgrounds

Readings: Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant: Animals and the Buddhist Cosmos” (m); Chapple, “Animals and Environment in the Buddhist Birth Stories,” “Jataka Tales”

### Week 11

Mar. 30 - **Animals in Buddhism and Jainism**

Readings: Byrne, \**“Would a Buddhist Freeze a Cane Toad” (Reading Review 5)*; Chapple, “Inherent Value without Nostalgia”

**Questions:** What is the role of suffering for animals in Buddhism and Jainism? Do animals fare well in Buddhism overall? Why or why not? How does the ethic change over time and in different Buddhist and Jain cultures?

Apr. 1 - **Animals in Buddhism and Jainism** – “Frontiers of Peace”

*Annotated Bibliography and Outline due*

### Week 12

Apr. 6 - **Animals in Indigenous Traditions: Native North American Traditions**

Readings: LaDuke, \**“Buffalo Nations, Buffalo Peoples” (Reading Review 6)*; Aftandilian, “Animals Are People, Too: Ethical Lessons about Animals from Native American Sacred Stories”; Schreiber, “Our Wealth Sits on Our Table”; “Sacred Buffalo People” (film)

**Questions:** What does it mean to think of other animals as “people”? What are the major differences and/or similarities in various Native North American traditions’ views of other animals?

Apr. 8 – **Animals in Indigenous Traditions: Native North American Traditions**

Readings: Laugrant and Oosten, “Qupirruit: Insects and Worms in Inuit Traditions”; Nelson, *Make Prayers to the Raven*, selections; additional readings in class

**Week 13**

Apr. 13 – **Group Presentations: Animals in Scientific/Medical Experimentation; The Sixth Great Extinction**

Readings: Haraway, “Sharing Suffering” (WSM); “Cyborgs to Companion Species” (TAR); Franklin, “Dolly’s Body” (TAR); Evans et al, “Dogfighting: Symbolic Expression and Validation of Masculinity” (TAR)

Apr. 15 **Animal Rights, Animal Activism, Belief Systems**

Readings: Singer, Peter. “Preface and Chapter One,” from *Animal Liberation*; Mason & Finelli, “Brave New Farm” (TAR 18)

**Week 14**

Apr. 20 - **New Frontiers and Ideas – the Postmodern Animal and Ecofeminism**

Readings: Nussbaum, Martha C. “Beyond Compassion and Humanity”; Catherine MacKinnon, \*’’Of Mice and Men: A Fragment on Animal Rights’’ (*Reading Review 7*)

**Real Animals Interaction Paper Due**

Apr. 22 - **Environmental Justice, Ecofeminism and Thinking about “Real Animals”**

Readings: Waldau, “Pushing Environmental Justice to a Natural Limit” (COS); Grace Clement, “The Ethic of Care and the Problem of Wild Animals”

**Week 15**

Apr. 27 – Research Presentations (5 minutes – quick flash presentations)

Apr. 29 – Research Presentations (5 minutes – quick flash presentations)

**Week 16**

***Final Research Papers Due***

