

Course Syllabus
Animals: Religion and Ethics
(RELI S-1013, CRN 32394)
Harvard Summer School 2014
Dr. Paul Waldau

Course Description—Students trace the history and shape of the emerging academic field of “religion and animals” and its relation to the fields of ethics and animal studies. Students also examine various social, public policy, conceptual, and environmental implications of the intersection of these three fields. Class sessions are discussion-based, and students undertake group work, significant writing, and an individual presentation to the whole group in Week 5.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Meetings Twice Per Week—the course goes forward at the scheduled time in two ways. Some students will attend in person on the Harvard campus with Dr. Waldau, and other, distance-based students will attend in real time through web conferencing.

Before each session, all students will have (1) done assigned reading and (2) responded to two focus questions at a designated website.

The twice-per-week synchronous sessions of the course will feature discussion of assigned reading materials and posts at the Discussion Board. Toward the end of the course, these synchronous sessions will be the vehicle by which each student does a presentation to the entire group.

These synchronous meetings will be supplemented with weekly one-on-one meetings between instructor and each student to assess how the student is progressing and address any problems that have arisen. These weekly one-on-one meetings will be internet-based or phone-based, and relatively short (ideally 10-15 minutes each, although this may expand or contract depending on size of class).

Learning Objectives—When this course is completed, each student will be able to:

- think critically about the newly emerged field of “religion and animals” and its relation to ethics and the broader study of living beings outside our own species that goes under names like “Animal Studies,” “Anthrozoology” and “Human-Animal Studies.”
- 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 the disciplines mentioned above;
- present an outline to the class summarizing views regarding nonhuman animals in a particular religious tradition; and,
- describe why the study of the human-nonhuman intersection as it is found in a range of different religious traditions and cultures creates interesting challenges and possibilities for the broader study of religion, ethics, and the human-nonhuman intersection.

Introductory Comments on Key Concepts

- In order to see the range of topics covered in the field of religion and animals, one needs to notice and take seriously at least three different features of contemporary religious life that impact the field. First, one needs to notice and take seriously on-the-ground realities of actual believers and their local communities. Second, one needs to see the complexity of

each religious community's historical, cultural and religious heritage. Third, one needs to see different forms of institutional rhetoric and theological reflection that foster forms of connection and compassion that reach across the species line in certain instances *even as* other forms of institutional rhetoric, communal reflection, and individual action are exclusionist, anti-diversity, inflexible, and demeaning of many nonhuman animals (such contradictions are, it turns out, just as common in many non-religious viewpoints).

- If one engages such features, one will also be able to evaluate (i) the many ways in which secular communities are deeply impacted by religiously-originated views of other-than-human animals, (ii) how difficult it is to understand a religious tradition without understanding these “religion and animals” features and those discussed in the field “religion and ecology”; and (iii) why theoretical frameworks are important but can, when underdetermined by on-the-ground facts, mislead and even distort how scholars present a religious tradition.
- There are significant overlaps between, on the one hand, the now emerged field of religion and animals and, on the other hand, the long-established field of ethics. Similarly, there are further overlaps with the new and already intensely interdisciplinary field of Animal Studies. We study these overlaps so that each student is better able to see the wide range of topics pursued in the field of religion and animals.

Course Policies

There is **information about policies used in this course in the document** “Course Policies and Participation Guidelines” (a copy is posted at the course website). Please review this document carefully. We will talk about these guidelines in one of our early course sessions and then in later sessions as needed.

Meetings in person or via telephone with Course Director: An important feature of this course is a series of 1-on-1 discussions with the instructor.

Further, because I want students to learn and to receive the good grades they deserve, I ask that if you encounter any difficulties or develop concerns about how you are doing in this course, feel free to schedule an additional appointment.

Readings and Course Materials

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 an identical 2009 paperback version is available.
- Waldau, Paul 2013. *Animal Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press

Additional Course Materials will be assigned—these will be available for downloading in .pdf format at the course website.

Grading

There are three components to your grade.

25% Participation in synchronous class sessions and Weekly Discussion Boards

25% Student presentation in Week 5

50% Final Exam

Schedule

Week 1 (June 23-27). Introduction to Basic Issues—we address (i) the field of “religion and animals” and (ii) how this field is related to the academic discipline called “ethics” and the larger megafield of Animal Studies.

Reading: (1) *A Communion of Subjects* “Prologue” by Thomas Berry, “Heritage of the Volume” by Mary Evelyn Tucker, and “Introduction” by Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton; (2) *Animal Studies*, Introduction, Chapter 1 (“Opening Doors”) and Chapter 2 (“Through Open Doors: The Challenges of History, Culture and Education”)

Focus Questions

- What does it mean to study nonhuman animals?
- What kinds of work already done by the human community fit comfortably within this field (however we name it)?
- 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?
- Which academic disciplines focus on which animals, and in which ways?
- What is the meaning of “interdisciplinary”?
- 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.”

Week 2 (June 30-July 4). A Closer Look at Religion

Reading: (1 and 2) *A Communion of Subjects*, two essays on the Jain tradition (Chapple’s “Inherent Value with Nostalgia: Animals the Jaina Tradition” and Wiley’s “Five-Sensed Animals in Jainism”)

(3-5) Excerpts (three different .pdf files in Module 2) (Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2) from Joseph Epes-Brown 1997. *Animals of the Soul: Sacred Animals of the Oglala Sioux*, Revised edition. Rockport, Mass.: Element.

(6) “The Ecology of Magic” (Chapter 1 in David Abram’s 1966 *The Spell of the Sensuous*—there is a .pdf file in Module 2)

Focus Questions

- In what ways do the views of animals held by the Jain tradition and the indigenous peoples mentioned in the assigned readings differ from the views that prevail in your own local community?
- Are the views of other animals that prevail in our own western culture any of the following: (i) typical, or (ii) better than other cultures’ views in some way, or (iii) 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 and other early twenty-first century industrialized societies?
- Which other cultures had, prior to your arrival on campus, impressed you regarding their views of other animals?

Week 3 (July 7-11). Christianity and Other Animals

Reading: (1-3) *A Communion of Subjects* essays on Christian tradition: (i) McDaniel’s “Practicing the Presence of God: A Christian Approach to Animals”; (ii) Steiner’s “Descartes,

Christianity, and Contemporary Speciesism” ; and (iii) Kienzle’s “Moth and Wolf: Imaging Medieval Heresy with Insects and Animals”;

(4) Deloria, Vine, Jr., 1969, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Chapter 5 regarding Christianity (.pdf file in Module 3); and,

(5) White, Lynn, Jr., 1967. “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”, *Science*, 155, 1203-1207 (.pdf file in Module 3)

Focus Questions

- In what ways are nonhuman animals seen by different segments of the Christian tradition? (the Wikipedia article “List of Christian Denominations” indicates, based on a 2011 report from The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, that there are more than 41,000 denominations).
- Are there different subtraditions within Christianity on the animal issue?
- Are there any fundamental features of the Christian tradition that 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?

Week 4 (July 14-18). Where does the field of “Animals and Religion” fit into the Animal Studies firmament?

Reading: (1) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 3 (“Science, Politics and Other Animals”)

(2) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 4 (“Early Twenty-First Animal Studies: Three Cutting Edges”)

(3) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 7 (“Comparative Studies: Legal Systems, Religions, and Cultures”)

(4) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 13 (“The Future of Animal Studies”)

Focus Questions to be agreed upon in prior sessions.

Week 5 (July 21-25). Student Presentations.

In previous weeks, each student will choose a religious tradition on which she/he will present during this week.

Week 6 (Jul 28-Aug 1). Which Future Will be Chosen? Connecting Religious Lifeways with Other-than-Human Animals. We use the Course Objectives listed above to look backward and forward, asking about both the past we have inherited *and* future directions and possibilities as we choose our own immediate and more distant futures and thereby impact future generations of both humans and nonhumans alike.

Reading: (1) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 5 (“Animals in the Creative Arts”)

(2) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 8 (“Animals and Modern Social Realities”)

(3) *Animal Studies*, Chapter 10 (“Telling the Larger Story”)

(4) Draft of Waldau 2015 *The Animal Invitation* (forthcoming), Chapter 5 (“Religion and Other Animals”)

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 (Aug 4-8). Final Exam on August 5