

## **Humanimality: “Animal” (Dis)Figurations and the Shaping of Human Institutions**

It was as a comment on *human* nature that the concept of ‘animality’ was devised.

--Keith Thomas, Man and the Natural World

I do not myself know what animals dream of.

--Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams

No animal confirms man, either positively or negatively.

--John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”

“Why look at animals?” John Berger asked twenty-five years ago. Whether as instruments of agricultural production; sources of food, clothing, and other raw materials; subjects of scientific inquiry and medical experimentation; or as objects of veneration, terror, or affection, non-human animals have long been central to the development and self-understanding of human culture ... yet until recently cultural historians have little studied the place of “the animal” in human experience. This course aims to engage recent conversations among historians, artists, writers, philosophers, scientists, anthropologists, legal scholars, and others that have rephrased Berger’s question to ask not simply why but how and from what vantage we can look at the history of animals within the history of human culture.

Drawing from a variety of idiomatic representations of animals—religious, philosophical, literary, legal, biomedical, visual—we will explore how the animal, as both fact and figure, has functioned in the conceptualization, construction, and practice of (mostly western) human institutions. Among those institutions, inevitably, will be our own, the academy that has organized the disciplines through which the animal is seen, understood, and deployed. For to look at animals is necessarily both to employ and to exceed each of the disciplinary perspectives that define modern intellectual culture, forcing us at once to adopt ever-shifting interdisciplinary positions and to interrogate the propriety of disciplinarity per se as an instrument for understanding both ourselves and our ‘others.’

Each section is organized around a figuration of the animal through which a key element of “the human” can be considered as an historical, philosophical, and social construct. A ‘focalizing’ or orienting text (or cluster of texts), drawn from literature, philosophy, myth, or some other imaginative domain, will provide the initiating touchstone for each section’s topic; orbiting these focalizing texts will be works drawn from relevant spheres of cultural expression that provide alternative, and usually conflicting, perspectives on the featured topic.

Requirements: •Occasional 1-2 pp. position papers.

- At midterm, students will be assigned three short essays (1, 2, & 3 pp.) on questions extrapolated from studied readings and topics.
- A longer, final paper (10-12 pp.) written in the form of a response to arguments made by Coetzee’s character, Elizabeth Costello, in his lecture-novella The Lives of Animals, as per the essays appended to The Lives of Animals by various scholars, researchers, and writers. The essay may, as per these published models, take any of numerous forms, but must display both wide-ranging familiarity with the course’s core materials and a coherent line of argumentation.

## Course Topics

(Readings cited here are representative & may be altered slightly.)

### ***Scapegoat ... Constructing the Sacred***

Old and New Testaments: selections  
Kafka, "Leopards in the Temple"  
Demme, The Silence of the Lambs  
Bataille, Theory of Religion (selections)  
Mauss, "Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function"  
Girard, "The Sacrificial Crisis"

### ***Beast ... Constructing Value***

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics (selections)  
Kant, Lecture on Ethics (selections)  
Singer, "All Animals Are Equal"  
Francis, "Some Animals are More Equal than Others"  
Derrida, "Eating Well"  
Monette, "Puck"

### ***Creature ... Constructing the Aesthetic***

Flaubert, "A Simple Heart"  
Cortázar, "Axolotl"  
Berger, "Why Look at Animals?"  
Marc, "How Does a Horse See the World?"  
Morris, The Biology of Art, ch.1

### ***Specimen ... Constructing Knowledge***

Wells, The Island of Doctor Moreau  
Rollin, "US Laws Relevant to Animals Research"  
Haraway, "FemaleMan© Meets OncoMouse™"  
Cohen, "The Case for Using Animals in Research"

### ***Brute ... Constructing Identity***

Montaigne, "An Apology for Raymond Sebond"  
Descartes, Letter to Henry Moore  
Darwin, The Descent of Man (selections)  
Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?"  
Dennet, "Animal Consciousness"  
Searle, "Animal Minds"

### ***Pet ... Constructing the Family***

Mann, "Tobias Mindernick"  
Kessler, "How to Touch a Bleeding Dog"  
Noonan, Babe  
Disney, Old Yeller  
Cixous, "Shared at Dawn"  
Shell, "The Family Pet"

### ***Meat ... Constructing Pleasure***

Dahl, "Pig"  
Bacon, "Figure with Meat"  
Coe, Industrial Strength Meat  
The American Meat Institute, "The Story of Meat"  
Diamond, "Eating Meat and Eating People"  
George, "The Moral Relevance of Being an Omnivore"

### ***Vermin ... Constructing Community***

Wyatt, "Whoso List to Hunt"  
Dillard, "The Deer at Providencia"  
Faulkner, "The Bear"  
Bassani, The Heron  
Deleuze & Guattari, "Becoming-Animal"

### ***Game ... Constructing the Wild***

Salter, Bambi  
London, Call of the Wild  
Thomas, "Maintaining the Boundaries"  
Shepard, "Wildness and Wilderness"

### ***Carcass ... Constructing Rights***

Coetzee, The Lives of Animals  
Horkheimer & Adorno, "Man and Animal"  
Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights"  
Fudge, "Knowing Animals and the Law"  
Francione, Animals, Property, and the Law, chs. 1-3  
Regan, The Animal Rights Debate (selections)