

# Course Syllabus

Course Title: Animals and Human Civilization

Instructor: Boria Sax, Ph.D.

Institution: State University of Illinois at Springfield

When Offered: Spring and Fall Semesters since January 2007

## Objectives:

- 1) To help students understand, and reflect on, and analyze philosophical, social, ethical, religious, psychological, and political issues pertaining to animals.
- 2) To help students explore ways in which animals have provided essential metaphors which have been used to divide human beings along such lines as those of tribe, religion, race, gender, class, and ethnicity.
- 3) To help students articulate pursue their own goals, as these pertain to animals, whether this is primarily as educators, parents, nature-lovers, business professionals, pet owners, health care providers, or in some other capacity.

## Course Summary:

This course examines social, religious, and philosophical perspectives on animals of from pre-Biblical times to the present, especially the ways in which animals have provided essential metaphors for social divisions along lines of tribe, gender, class, race, and other categories. It will look, for example, at the social and political consequences of developments that have helped redefine relations between people and animals such as the Theory of Evolution and, most recently, the development of artificial intelligence.

## Type and Grading of Learning Activities:

Instruction for the entire course will be online. The heart of this course, like most online courses, is the class discussion board. Questions in the weekly discussions will be posed by the Instructor. A student should log in at least four times in a week and post at least one substantial message, which should consist of about ten complete sentences or more, per week in the board assigned to his or her group. The substantial message should be marked in the subject line with the symbol “!”

In addition to the substantial messages, a student is expected to two post critical messages as well, which may be as short as a single sentence. Students should use these messages to respond to, agree with, or critique the other messages of students in the class. The cogency and appropriateness of these academic contributions to the discussion board, measured by the criteria in the previous paragraph, will be reflected in the students' grades.

An ideal discussion posting will have the following qualities:

- It will be written grammatically in standard English;

- It will be clear, coherent and well-organized;
- It will have a main theme or idea;
- It will reflect the student's own experience;
- It will be pertinent to the ongoing discussions;
- It will show knowledge of the course material;
- It will show reflection on the course material;
- It will provide impetus to further discussion.

While every single message need not satisfy all of these requirements, the substantial messages are expected to.

On the discussion boards, personal attacks, ethnic slurs, and pornography are strictly forbidden. The topics we discuss may arouse strong feelings in some people, and passionate debates are fine, but students most not allow the issues to become personal. The instructor will let you know informally from time to time if a message of yours is particularly good or if there are things you should work on. Discussion messages for every week will be graded.

A special discussion forum, open to all students in the course, will be set aside for socializing and related activities, where students are welcome to tell jokes, relieve tension and express their enthusiasms or fears. These will not be reflected in the grades and may be relatively informal, and they may use conversational language and colloquialisms. While they are not required, students will probably not only enjoy the course more but also do better in it if they spend some time in socializing or networking as well as strictly academic matters.

In addition to the discussion messages, a term paper will be assigned. This should be at least 1,300 words or about nine pages of text long, plus documentation. Documentation may be in the MLA style, the APA style or the Chicago style, but the format must be consistent. Papers should adhere strictly to the assignments and should clearly demonstrate reading and reflection on the assignments for the course. Papers will be judged according to a range of criteria including appropriateness of the material, argument, organization, originality, grammar, documentation, clarity, and research. Plagiarism is very strictly forbidden.

Grades will be determined roughly as follows:

Discussion Messages:	60%
Term paper	25%
Other Assignments	15%

Required Texts:

Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*. Trans. F. E. Sutcliffe. New York: Penguin, 1998. Alternative translations are acceptable and many are available online, one of which may be found at <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=65812259>

Anonymous, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Trans. N. K. Sanders. New York: Penguin Classics, 1972.

The Holy Bible. Any respected translation is acceptable, including the The Jerusalem Bible and the RSV translation, which may be found online at <http://holy-bible-online.com/>.

Sax, Boria. *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats and the Holocaust*. New York: Continuum, 2000.

Sax, Boria. "Sacred and Symbolic Animals in the Age of Change." To be published in vol. 6 of *A Cultural History of Animals*. Oxford: Berg Press, 2006. A copy will be made available to students on the course web site.

Sunstein, Cass R. & Martha C. Nussbaum, eds. *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004.

Thomas, Keith. *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.

#### A Few Suggested Additional Readings:

Armstrong, Susan J. and Richard G. Botzler, eds. *The Animal Ethics Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Budiansky, Stephen. *If a Lion Could Talk: Animal Intelligence and the Evolution of Consciousness*. New York: Free Press, 1998.

Dennett, Daniel C. *Consciousness Explained*. San Francisco: Back Bay Books, 1992.

Franklin, Adrian. *Animals & Modern Cultures: A Sociology of Human-Animal Relations in Modernity*. London: Sage, 1999.

Grandin, Temple and Catherine Johnson. *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior*. New York: Harvest, 2006.

Melson, Gail F. *Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.

Montaigne, Michael De. "Apology for Raymond Sebond." In *The Complete Essays*. Trans. M. A. Screech. New York: Penguin Classics, 1988: p. 489-683.

Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures In The Victorian Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987.

Sax, Boria. *The Mythical Zoo: an ABC \_ of Animals in Myth, Legend, Literature and Art*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002.

Shepard, Paul. *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*. Washington, D. C.: Shearwater, 1996.

Singer, Peter. *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 2001.

## Schedule

### **Part I: What is an Animal? Philosophical Foundations of Our Traditions**

*In this initial part of the course, students will first introduce themselves, reflect on their relationships with animals, and finally set their personal goals for the course. They will then look at two of the early texts, which provide a foundation for much of subsequent culture \_ The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Holy Bible \_ and consider how these have influenced attitudes towards animals, especially in Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions..*

#### Week One (Jan. 16 – 21): Introductions and Goals

*For Discussion:* First of all, please introduce yourself to the class. Say a little about your background, interests, and education, and then tell about your reasons for taking this course. Remember that for this, or any introduction, there is no set formula. What information might help people to relate to you? In addition to the basic introduction, say a bit about your experience with, and interest in animals. Finally, please set personal goals for this course. Please think a bit before writing, and it is not enough to say something like, "I want to pass" or "...to get a good grade." How would understanding animals in human civilization help you either personally or professionally? What would you like to know or accomplish.

#### Week Two (Jan. 21-28): *Epic of Gilgamesh* (beginning, p. 7-82)

*For Discussion:* Our interest in the first half of the Epic of Gilgamesh is mostly on Enkidu, the wild man, who "ate grass with the gazelle and jostled with wild beasts at water-holes." He is an earlier version of the Biblical Adam, and his initiation into human society is presented as something like the expulsion from Paradise. What do you think his story tells us about the ideas of the ancient Mesopotamians about human beings and animals? About men and women? What themes in the story do you find especially contemporary?

#### Week Three (Jan. 29 - Feb. 4): *Epic of Gilgamesh* (conclusion, p. 83 -118)

*For Discussion:* The Mesopotamians relied heavily on an intricate system of irrigation, which was vulnerable to disruption, so they were very aware

of ecological matters. When Enkidu and Gilgamesh cut down the cedar forests of Lebanon and kill the guardian Humbaba, their land is punished with plague and drought. Climatologists now know that a terrible drought in Mesopotamia led to a social breakdown and destroyed the mighty Akkadian Empire. Compare this with more recent crises such as the Dust Bowl or global warming.

Week Four (Feb. 5 – 11): Bible, Genesis 1-4:16 (Both versions of the story of Adam and Eve)

*For Discussion:* There are two different creation myths in the Bible. The first has often been criticized for making earth and the animals subordinate to humanity. The second is often criticized for making the woman an afterthought, created out of Adam's rib. Do you think these criticisms are based on accurate interpretations? If so, do you think these features are truly negative? What wisdom can you find in the stories? How do you think they continue to influence us today?

Week Five (Feb. 12-18): Bible, Genesis 4 (The Story of Cain and Abel), Leviticus 11 (Clean and Unclean Animals); Genesis 6:5-9:29 (The Story of Noah and the Flood)

*For Discussion:* The conflict between Cain and Abel may go back to a rivalry between agriculturalists and herders. Why do you think that Yahweh preferred the sacrifice of Abel? The idea of "clean" and "unclean" animals was probably adopted from the religion of Zoroaster. Generally speaking, the clean animals are domesticated and herbivorous. How do you think the distinction is still with us today? What does the New Covenant after the Flood suggest about relations between human beings and animals?

## **Part II: Animals and Race, Gender, Tribe, Class, Profession, and Ethnicity**

*In this middle part of the course, students will consider attitudes towards animals in the modern period, particularly in so far as these mirror our relationships with groups of people, divided on the basis of such criteria as tribe, ethnicity, race, gender, and nation. Particular emphasis will be placed on the influence of industrialization and of the Theory of Evolution on relationships between animals and human beings.*

Week Six (Feb. 19 – 25): Descartes, *Discourse on Method*

*For Discussion:* Descartes postulates radically dualist view of spirit and matter, according to which only human beings have souls, while animals are only intricate machines. He denied that animals have any ability to reason, though there is some debate as to whether he thought they could feel sensations. In spite of these ideas, Descartes kept a dog and treated it well, but some of his followers later did not hesitate to cut up living dogs and other animals in experiments, believing that the creatures could not

feel pain. Though almost nobody accepts the claims of Descartes in their most radical form, his ideas continue to be very controversial today. The followers of Noah Chomsky, for example, who believe that only human beings possess an innate understanding of grammar, could be called "neo-Cartesians." Do you agree that the ability to reason gives human beings a special status in relation to other creatures? Animals and machines have long been closely associated in the human imagination. It has been common in war and in other varieties of conflict to depict enemies not as automatons or machines, which is what Descartes believed animals to be. Do you think this imagery will change with the development of artificial intelligence? How might changes in technology affect our relations to animals?

Week: Seven (Feb. 26 – March 4): Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, part I & II (p. 13-50, 92-142)

*For Discussion:* In his chapter on "Inferior Humans," Thomas gives many vivid examples of ways in which animal imagery has been used to degrade groups of people, from the Irish to the American Indians. Compare the use of animal imagery in his book with an example of such use today. How, and to what extent, do you think the use of animal imagery has changed?

Week Eight (March 5 – 11): Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, part IV & VI (p. 143-190, 242-304)

*For Discussion:* Thomas argues at the conclusion of his book that it is precisely the subjugation of nature, often accompanied by the rhetoric of human dominance, that enabled people to cultivate a more sensitive regard for animals and the environment. His vision is essentially a tragic one, for he sees no way out of the choice between the conflicting claims of humanity and the natural world.

If there is a solution to the dilemma, it will probably be accomplished by rethinking the question: "What makes us human?" Can we relinquish the idea of human dominance without undermining the human solidarity, which has led, for example, to the ideal of universal human rights?

Week Nine (March 12 – 18): Semester Break, no Classes

No discussion contributions are expected during the Spring Break.

Week Ten (March 19 – 25): Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich*, p. 15-100

*For Discussion:* Perhaps the most central theme of this course is how people construct their identities using metaphors taken from the animal world. Animals are constantly used to embody our fears and aspirations. The Nazis tended to identify with large predators, while identifying most domesticated and herbivorous animals with their adversaries. This harked back to warrior elites, and reversed the traditional pattern of Judaism and

Christianity. Compare their use of animal symbolism with that of other groups of people, from the Epic of Gilgamesh to contemporary America.

Week Eleven (March 26 - April 1): Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich*, p. 101-172

*For Discussion:* The Third Reich may be a warning to our society, but it is more difficult to draw useful lessons from the Nazi period than many people appreciate. The Nazis blurred the boundary between animals and human beings, and then extended practices such as industrial slaughter and slave labor to people. At the same time, they extended many protections previously reserved for human beings to animals. For some thinkers, the lesson here is that we should distinguish sharply between human beings and other animals in order to protect human rights, but others draw almost the opposite conclusion. They maintain that if people had not insisted so strongly on differentiating ourselves from other creatures in the first place, the inhumane practices would not have been developed. Both of these positions may be simplistic, but what lesson, if any, do you think may be drawn from the period of Nazi Germany with respect to treatment of animals?

### **Part III: Animals in the Twenty-First Century**

*In this concluding part of the course, students will look at some of the issues and controversies involving animals during the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries, and consider, among other things, the impact of animal rights, environmentalism, multiculturalism, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology. Students will review the personal goals they set at the beginning of the course, say if these are still valid, to what extent they have been accomplished, and what they would like to accomplish, with respect to the material of the course, in the months and years to come.*

Week Twelve (April 2 – 8): Sunstein et al, *Animal Rights*, p. 3- 92

*For Discussion:* When the animal rights movement, which had stagnated for decades, was revived in the seventies, it emphasized analogies between treatment of animals and practices such as slavery and genocide. Many human rights activists objected vehemently to such comparisons. Do you think they are appropriate? Briefly paraphrase the positions of Wise, Posner, and Singer, then give your response to them.

Week Thirteen (April 9 – 15): Sunstein et al, *Animal Rights*, p. 93-108, 162-174

*For Discussion:* Animal rights activists have usually argued that human rights and/or protections should be extended to animals, and have based their arguments on analogies between animals and human beings. The anthromorphism of their arguments has been criticized by human rights

activists, who fear it could undermine the very rights and protections that it seeks to extend. It is also criticized by environmental activists, who argue that making human beings the standard suggests disrespect for the distinctness and autonomy of animals. A lot depends in such arguments on how, and to what degree, other animals are distinguished from human beings. In the readings for this week, Diamond and Rachels try to draw this distinction in ways that are nuanced and complex. Briefly summarize the fundamental ways in which each of them makes this distinction, then say what you believe the basic difference is. What is the most important similarity between human beings and other creatures? What is the most important difference?

Week Fourteen (April 16 – 22): Sunstein et al, *Animal Rights*, p. 277-298

*For Discussion:* Animal rights activists tend to be concerned about animals as individuals, while environmentalists are concerned primarily about them as parts of ecosystems and representatives of species. In practice, animal rights activists and environmental activists can cooperate on many issues, but not always. On page 279 of your readings for this book, Elizabeth Anderson discusses some cases where they disagree such as the hunting of pigs that were introduced in Hawaii or of rabbits introduced in Australia. Martha Nussbaum attempts to combine elements of both animal rights and environmentalism in what she calls a "Capabilities" approach to ethics, derived ultimately from Aristotle. How might you balance the claims of the individual and the environment for animals? For human beings?

Week Fifteen: (April 30 – May 6): Sax, *Sacred and Symbolic Animals*

*For Discussion:* The modern period, which many say began in the seventeenth century with the writings of Descartes now appears to be drawing to a close, and we are faced with the daunting through exciting challenge of rethinking such fundamental concepts as the nature of knowledge and of human beings. The anthology *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, edited by Sunstein and Nussbaum, was only published a few years ago, yet it is already starting to seem dated. It does not, for example, go into the implications of new biological abilities such as cloning or genetic engineering, nor does it deal with the dramatic development of artificial intelligence. How, and to what degree, should these abilities be regulated? In this forum, please try to envision where new trends are likely to lead, in both intellectual and practical ways. Do not be afraid to use your imagination, even if the projections are very speculative. What are your hopes? Your fears?

Week Sixteen (May 7 – 13): What have we learned? Have our goals been accomplished? Where do we go from here?

*For Discussion:* Before posting in this forum, please revisit the goals you set at the beginning of the course in week one. Which do you feel you have

accomplished, and to what extent? Have you modified those goals? Have you any plans to pursue them further? And, if so, how? Which readings, if any, were of special interest to you?