

Religion and Animals

REL 19-303-01 Fall 2001

Dr. Laura Hobgood-Oster
T Th 2:30-3:45
FAC 107

Office Hours T 10:00-10:50
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OVERVIEW

We, human beings, are animals. Just as dogs, eagles, apes, frogs and chickens are animals, so are we. But various worldviews through which we have understood ourselves and those with whom we are in relationship emphasize our difference from “other animals.” Dominant forms of orthodox Christianity claim that only humans have a soul (and, sometimes, only men). Some forms of Buddhism place humans at the apex of the transmigration of souls—closest to nirvana and buddha nature. The same can be said of varieties of Islam, Confucianism, Judaism and Hinduism. Simultaneously, all of these recognized religious traditions have resources that value all animals – not only the human ones.

This course will examine “religion” as a way to look at the world, as a way to understand who we (human animals) are as part of this vast system of relationships. Several religious perspectives will be central: Native American traditions, Buddhism and Christianity. Other, less traditional religious perspectives that are incredibly influential systems in our culture will also be examined: animal rights activism and the religion of market capitalism. We will look at the myths, rituals, ethics and doctrines of these cultural systems as they relate to other than human animals. As we do so, we will attempt to understand ourselves more fully – to define who we are as human animals in a world inhabited by so many other animals.

READINGS and DISCUSSION GUIDE

Course Packet (available in the SU Bookstore)

Howard Harrod, *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology and Animal Kinship* (U of Arizona Press: 2000)

Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (Avon: 1991)

Stephen Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (Oxford UP: 1998)

Paul Waldau, *Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (Oxford UP: 2001); this book is forthcoming

As you go through the readings, ask questions and make connections. Some questions that will be central to our discussion in class are:

- What stories/myths/legends/sacred texts of this religious tradition include other than human animals?
- How are animals understood in relationship to human animals?
- What ethical principles guide the relationships between human animals and other animals?
- Are there any rituals that include other than human animals? How central are these? Do they occur frequently or infrequently?
- What do the cosmogonies (creation stories) suggest about other than human animals?

COURSE COMPONENTS and EVALUATION

Participation and Attendance (20%)

The course will function as a seminar. Therefore your contributions to discussion, your engagement with the readings and other resources both outside of the classroom and in the classroom is requisite.

Reflection/Response Papers (30%)

There will be 3 reflection/response papers (10% each) over the course of the semester. The topics/dates are noted in the course outline.

Observation/Analysis (10%)

During the semester you will be required to attend either a Powwow or a Blessing of the Animals (in association with the Feast of St. Francis). Dates for these are listed below and other information will be provided to help facilitate this component. We can also organize groups of people in the class to attend events (I really encourage this). Following the event you will write a 2-page analysis paper describing the rituals, beliefs and myths that addressed (or didn't address) other than human animals.

Group Dramatic Presentations (10%)

We will divide into three groups – Native American traditions, Christianity, Buddhism. At different points during the semester, each group will, through a dramatic performance, present some sacred myths from that tradition. These myths must, in some way, reflect the tradition's understanding of the place of other than human animals in the religious worldview. Each group will research the tradition, select myths/legends/scriptural accounts to present and turn in a bibliography with their presentation.

Community-based Learning (10%)

Over the course of the semester each student is required to spend 5 hours in community based learning and to write a one-page reflection on this experience. The community-based learning will be connected to the Georgetown Animal Shelter. More specific information (about contact people, etc...) will be provided. As a group we will go to the shelter during class early in the semester. Relationships outside of the "human only" realm are, obviously, integral to understanding the worldviews we will engage in this course.

Final Paper (20%)

A final paper that synthesizes, reflects upon and critically analyzes the readings, discussions and experiences of the course will be due on Wednesday of final exam week. A detailed paper assignment will be distributed before the Thanksgiving break. Plan on a paper that is 6-8 pages in length.

Note: Though we will strive to maintain the schedule listed on the syllabus, there may be occasional modifications. You will be notified of any changes in class and via email.

Late Assignments & Plagiarism: Assignments which are 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.

Communication Issues: No cell phones should be turned on in class; if, for some reason, an urgent situation requires that your phone be activated, make sure it is on some silent mode. I check my email consistently, but rarely after 6:00 p.m.

Students with Disabilities: Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should register with the Office of Academic Services, located in Mood-Bridwell room 311. 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.

DISCUSSION TOPICS and COURSE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, August 28 – Introduction and Overview of Syllabus/Requirements

Animals in 21st century dominant “globalized” cultures

Visual Presentations, Stories, Cartoons, “Stuffed Animals,” Wildlife

Thursday, August 30 – Religion and Other Animals: Definitions, Foundations for Discussion

Reading: Paul Waldau, “Religion and Other Animals: Ancient Themes, Contemporary Challenges” (CP)

Alice Walker, “Am I Blue?” (CP)

Tuesday, September 4 – Animals Rights Activism as Religion?

Reading: Peek et al, “Religion and ideological support for social movements: The case of animal rights,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (handout)

Jamison, Wenk and Parker, “Every Sparrow That Falls” (CP)

Reflection/Response Paper #1 Due (3 pages) – Response to Animal Rights Literature (distributed in class on Tues, Aug. 28)



Thursday, September 6 – The Religion of the Market and the Absent Referent

Reading: “The Religion of the Market” (handout)

Tuesday, September 11 – Animal Rights as Religion – a case study**

Reading: Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pp 1-94

**on one of these three days we will go to the Georgetown Animal Shelter

Media: PETA, “Their Future Is In Your Hands”

Thursday, September 13 – Animals Rights as Religion – a case study**

Reading: Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pages 95-184

**Sat-Sun, Sept. 15-16 – 9th Annual Four Winds Powwow, Killeen, Texas

Tuesday, September 18 – Animal Rights as Religion – a case study**

Reading: Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pages 185-250

Thursday, September 20 – Animals in Native American Religious Perspectives

Reading: Anna Peterson, “Person and Nature in Native American Worldviews” (CP)

Winona LaDuke, Buffalo Nations, Buffalo People” (CP)

Media: The “Disney-fication” and Appropriation of Native American Religions

Tuesday, September 25 – Animals in Native American Religious Perspectives

Reading: *Animals Came Dancing*, pages xvii-44

Thursday, September 27 – Animals in Native American Religious Perspectives
Reading: *Animals Came Dancing*, pages 45-104

Group Dramatic Presentation of Myths/Stories/Legends



Tuesday, October 2 – Animals in Native American Religious Perspectives
Reading: *Animals Came Dancing*, pages 105-138

Thursday, October 4 – Feast of St. Francis

****Thurs, Oct. 4 – Feast of St. Francis (various events in Austin area through Sun, Oct. 7)**



Tuesday, October 9 – Visions of Caliban

Reading: Goodall and Peterson, “I Acknowledge Mine” (CP)

Media: “Reason for Hope”



Thursday, October 11 – Science as Religion in the 20th-21st centuries

Animal experimentation, Humanism, Cosmologies, Rituals and Belief Systems

Media: “Chimps: So Like Us”

October 13-16 – Fall Break – No Classes

Thursday, October 18 – Animals in Buddhism

Reading: Chapple, “Animals and Environment in Buddhist Birth Stories” (CP)

Williams, “Animal Liberation, Death and the State” (CP)

****October 20-21 – Powwow – Richmond**

Tuesday, October 23 – Animals in Buddhism

Reading: Paul Waldau, *Specter of Speciesism* (selections)

Thursday, October 25 – Animals in Buddhism

Reading: Paul Waldau, *Specter of Speciesism* (selections)

Group Dramatic Presentation of Myths/Stories/Legends



Tuesday, October 30 – Animals in Buddhism

Reading: Chapple, “Nonviolence to Animals in Buddhism and Jainism” (handout)



Thursday, November 1 – Eating Ethically

Reading: Hamilton, “Eating Ethically: ‘Spiritual’ and ‘Quasi-religious’ Aspects of Vegetarianism” (CP)

Media: Factory Farming & “Chicken Run”



Reflection/Response Paper #2 Due (3 pages) – What do I eat and why do I eat it? Do I really think about what I eat? What does my eating say about my relationship to other beings? Am I what I eat – and if so, what am I? Does “religion” even enter my mind when I eat?



****Sat-Sun, Nov. 3-4 – Austin (AISD) Powwow**

Tuesday, November 6 – Animals in Christianity

Reading: Adams and Procter-Smith, “Taking Life or ‘Taking on Life’” (CP)

Chien-hui Li, “A Union of Christianity, Humanity & Philanthropy” (CP)

Thursday, November 8 – Animals in Christianity

Reading: *On God and Dogs*, ix-68, Introduction and Surveying the Options

Media: Animals as Saints in the Christian Tradition

****Sat, Nov. 11 – Legend of the White Buffalo Powwow, Houston, TX**

Tuesday, November 13 – Animals in Christianity

Reading: *On God and Dogs*, 69-108, Thinking about Pets



Group Dramatic Presentation of Myths/Stories/Legends



Thursday, November 15 – Animals and Ecofeminism

Reading: “Dismantling Oppression: An analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals” (CP)

Tuesday, November 20 – No Class (Dr. Hob-O at American Academy of Religion meeting)

November 21-25 – Thanksgiving Break

Tuesday, November 27 – Animals in Christianity

Reading: Complete *On God and Dogs*, 109-184, A Theology for the Dogs



Reflection/Response Paper #3 Due (2 pages) A critical analysis of Webb’s religious ideas presented in On God and Dogs



Thursday, November 29 – Animal Symbolism in Various Religious Traditions

Tuesday, December 4 – Our Experiences in Relationship with Animals: Presentations of Responses to Community-Based Learning

One-page reflection paper on community-based learning due

Thursday, December 6 – Animals, Religion and Ethics



Thursday, December 13 – noon – final papers due