

College of Charleston
Department of Religious Studies
Fall 2011

RELS 298.001: SPECIAL TOPICS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES—ANIMALS AND RELIGION: ANIMAL SOULS, ANIMAL KARMA, ANIMAL MORALITY?

Instructor: Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4A Glebe St., Room 102 (office of Dr. Margaret Cormack)

Office Hours: MWF 11:10 am to 12:30 pm

Email: levasseurjt@cofc.edu (I typically respond to emails within 24 hours except on weekends)

Lectures: MWF, 1:00-1:50 pm, ECTR 219

Credits: 3 Semester Hours (fulfills core requirement for Religion Minor)

Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.

Course Description and Instructional Format: This course is designed to introduce College of Charleston students to how religions have conceived of, used, taught about, and interacted with non-human animals via ethics, rituals, myths, sacred texts/narratives, and diet. The course operates under an evolutionary epistemology, tracing the development of animals and human-animal interactions from the dawn of *Homo sapiens* through the current extinction crisis with religion providing a point of entry into understanding these interactions. The course is therefore comparative in addressing religion and animals from both historical and cultural perspectives. Lastly, the course is structured as a seminar; this means students are **expected** to have completed all readings and are expected to come ready to participate in discussions about religion and animals.

Course Goals and Objectives: Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to the nascent study of religion and animals, including exposure to leading theorists and researchers.
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about how a variety of world religions, past and present, have conceived of animal others and utilized them in religious rituals, myths, and other practices.
3. To gain an appreciation for the complex, myriad, and at times contentious ways in which religions have viewed and interacted with animals, and how these views are changing (or not) given the rise of ethology.
4. To help students encounter religious traditions outside of those in which they were raised/are most familiar with.

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of religion, and more so, the study of religion and animals.
2. To facilitate the development of analytical writing skills.
3. To read historical, mythical, scientific, and theological texts critically.
4. To develop comfort in working with small groups and participating in class discussions.

Required Texts: Available at the CofC and University bookstores (and most likely used copies on-line):

- 1) *Animal Grace: Entering a Spiritual Relationship with our Fellow Creatures*. Mary Lou Randour, 2000, New World Library
- 2) *The Animals Came Dancing: Native American Sacred Ecology and Animal Kinship*. Howard Harrod, 2000, The University of Arizona Press
- 3) *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*. Eds. Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton, 2006, Columbia University Press

A number of readings are to be found on OAKS under the course tab. From there, click on the “content” tab and this will bring up .pdfs of assorted readings, all of which are required.

You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for the day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand and when these readings will be discussed.

Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

1) *Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class, you will be counted as absent for that day. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. It is your responsibility to be present and to be to class on time. Only excused absences render the above moot. After 3 unexcused absence of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After 5 unexcused absences (i.e. your 6th unexcused absence), you will receive a WA and be dropped from the course. It is your responsibility to receive a documented absence from the College—the College emails me an email saying an absence is either “documented” or “undocumented.” Undocumented absences count as an unexcused absence. Please observe the totality of this attendance policy.

2) *Common Courtesy:* As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones, personal computers, and other electronic devices must be turned off during the whole class period. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (i.e. whispering, reading a newspaper, surfing the web, texting messages, etc.) to leave the class. Repeat violations of these rules will result in dismissal from the class. *Each time* a person is caught texting messages during class or engaging in activities on their computer that are not related to the immediate class lecture (such as checking Facebook or sending email), **they will be required to write a 10 page research paper of the professor’s choosing.** Failure to complete this paper will result in an incomplete grade for the course.

3) *Honor Code:* On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor

code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating.

4) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cds/index.htm>

5) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

6) *Assignments*: Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

1. Class participation—This includes attendance and how often and how well you contribute to class discussions, small group discussions, and weekly on-line discussions. 20% of grade, 5% of which will be decided by other students in your discussion group via confidential evaluations turned in to the professor.
2. Reading Analysis—You will be required to write a 500 word “reflection” for five pre-selected readings. This writing will contain two components:
 - a. Critical and Factual Analysis (10 points each)—each review will begin by addressing four interrelated items:
 - i. What is the key argument/point of the reading
 - ii. What evidence is used in making this argument
 - iii. Why does the argument and data matter to the author?
 - iv. What other authors/readings is this reading related to/with whom is it in dialogue?

These *must be* organized and concise. Use relevant quotes to show you captured the main points as needed, but do not give 300 words of quotes.

- b. Personal Analysis and Reflection (10 points each)—the second half of the entry will include your own analysis and reflection on the article. What thoughts were triggered as you read? What feelings and emotions? What questions were you left with after reading the article? What did you learn that was helpful/challenging, and why? How did the article help you understand either religion, or religion and animals, better? How did/does the article fit into the course goals and objectives? How does this wrestle with the list of questions that are guiding the course? This should be written in the first person.

Each student is to bring a hard copy of this reflection to class for the day a reading was assigned. 30% of grade.

3. Exams—there will be two take home exams that are open notes, open reading. One will be given out in class on Friday, September 30th and will be due Monday, October 3rd, and the other will be given on Friday, December 2nd and will be due the day of the Final Exam. These exams will consist of definitions, short answer

questions/summary questions, comparative questions, and critical analysis essay questions. 25% each, for 50% of grade

4. Extra Credit—There will be options for extra credit as the semester develops. Most likely these will include attending guest lectures that relate to course objectives and goals; watching movies that relate to course objectives and goals; writing book reviews (worth 1.5 points); visiting a place where animals are displayed, such as a zoo, the aquarium, etc. and writing an evaluative report of this experience; or volunteering at an animal shelter or undertaking a lifestyle change in regards to your own interactions with animals and writing about this experience (depending on the experience, worth 2 points). Please see me for specific details on requirements for each of these possible options. Each student may earn a total of 3 possible extra credit points that are added onto their final grade. The final day to turn in extra credit work is the last day of class.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+: 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)

Course Schedule

***the book *Communion of Subjects* appears as COS**

***readings that are not required are noted with “recommended,” meaning read these recommended pieces only if you are interested in digging a little deeper**

Fri, 8/26: Beginnings OAKS: selections from Charles Darwin’s “On the Origin of Species;” selections from Ursula Goodenough’s *Sacred Depths of Nature* (read Intro, chp 1, and Chp 5, skip Chp2 unless interested); web-link on decline of ecosystems

Mon, 8/29: Religion OAKS: chapter 1, “Religion,” by Bauman, et al; chapter 1, “What is Biocultural Diversity?” by Luisa Maffi; “Six Myths of Interdisciplinarity” by Ted Toadvine (recommended)

Wed, 8/31: Animals and Religion OAKS: chapter 9, “Animals and Religion,” by Dave Aftandilian;; COS—1) Heritage of Volume by Tucker (recommended); 2) Prologue by Berry (recommended); 3) Traditional Views of Animals by Patton (required)

Fri, 9/2: Deep Past of *Homo sapiens* OAKS: chapter 3, “Intensification and Agriculture,” by Kirkpatrick Sale **SUMMARY 1 due at beginning of class**

Mon, 9/5: More Religion OAKS: Encyclopedia entries on “Sacrifice,” and “Animals”...recommended: “Religious Communities” and “Priesthood”

Wed, 9/7: Ancient Egypt OAKS: Chapter 12, “Animals in Egyptian Religion,” by Emily Teeter

Fri, 9/9: Medieval China OAKS: “Preface” and Chapter 1 from book *Monkey*; Chapter 2, “Spirits, Sex, and Wealth: Fox Lore...” by Xiaofei Kang

Mon, 9/12: Hinduism COS—Lance Nelson’s chapter from section on Hinduism; OAKS: Encyclopedia entries on “Dharma” and “Karma”

Wed, 9/14: Hinduism, pt. 2 OAKS: “Holy Cow!” by Frank Korom **SUMMARY 2 due at the beginning of class**

Fri, 9/16: Buddhism COS—Ian Harris’s chapter from section on Buddhism; OAKS: Buddhist scripture on rebirth; web-link: Jataka tales (skim a few selections to get a flavor)

Mon, 9/19: Animals and Religion in South and East Asia OAKS: selections from the book *Soul of the Tiger*

Wed, 9/21 South Asian religions, continued COS: Chris Chapple’s chapter from section on Jainism; OAKS—Chris Chapple on concept of “ahimsa,” pgs. 9-26

Fri, 9/23 Buddhism, part 2 OAKS: section on “Lay Practice,” and Encyclopedia entry on “Merit”

Mon, 9/26 No reading—enjoy your weekend! Go outside and interact with some animal species somewhere somehow

Wed, 9/28 Ecological Anthropology OAKS: Chapter 5, “The abominable Pig,” by Marvin Harris

Fri, 9/30 Diet, Purity/Impurity, and early Judaism OAKS: Chapter 4, “Deciphering a Meal,” by Mary Douglas; Encyclopedia entry on “Kashrut”

Mon, 10/3 **MID-TERM** (take home test, given on Friday, due at the beginning of class on Monday)

Wed, 10/5 Judaism, pt. 2 OAKS: selections from book “The Year of Living Biblically”

Fri, 10/7 Christianity OAKS: selection from C.S. Lewis, guest lecture

Mon, 10/10 Christianity, pt 2 OAKS: Chapter 10, “Holy Dogs and Asses...” by Laura Hobgood-Oster; web-link on OAKS to stories about St. Francis

Wed, 10/12 Christianity, pt 3 OAKS: “Behemoth and Batrachians in the Eye of God...” by Calvin Dewitt

Fri, 10/14 Environmental Ethics OAKS: selections from *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold **SUMMARY 3 due at the beginning of class**

FALL BREAK

Wed, 10/19 Animal Grace come to class having read Randour, pgs. xv to 74

Fri, 10/21 Animal Grace, pt. 2 OAKS: “Evolving Environmentalism...” by Lisa Sideris

Mon, 10/24 Animal Grace, pt. 3 pgs. 75-116

Wed, 10/26 Modern conceptions of Animals OAKS: Chapter 2, “Exclusion and the Concept of Speciesism,” by Paul Waldau

Fri, 10/28 Modern relations with Animals OAKS: selections from book *Kinship with Animals*

Mon, 10/31 Conceptions of Animals, pt. 2 OAKS: selections from Descartes; “Language, Power, and the Social Construction of Animals” by Arran Stibbe, **SUMMARY 4 due at the beginning of class**

Wed, 11/2 Animal Grace, redux pgs. 117-151

Fri, 11/4 Cognitive Ethology COS: chapter by Marc Bekoff from section on Animals as Subjects

Mon, 11/7 Animals and Ethics COS: chapter by Carol Adams from section on Animals and Social Justice

Wed, 11/9 Indigenous conceptions of Animals COS: chapter by John Grim from section on Animals in Ritual

Fri, 11/11 Indigenous, pt. 2 *Animals Came Dancing*, pgs. xv-18

Mon, 11/14 Epistemologies OAKS: section from *A Language Older Than Words* by Derrick Jensen; chapter 4 from Kirkpatrick Sale’s *Conquest of Paradise*; **SUMMARY 5 due at the beginning of class**

Wed, 11/16 Indigenous, pt. 3 pgs. 45-74

Fri, 11/18 Indigenous, pt. 4 pgs. 75-104

No Class week of November 20th through 27th: finish *Animals Came Dancing*; OAKS: begin selections from *The Moral Lives of Animals*

Wed, 11/30 Ethology and Animal Lives OAKS: finish selections from *Moral Lives*

Fri, 12/2 Domination OAKS: “The Animal Question” by Jim Mason; **receive take home FINAL EXAM**

Mon, 12/5 Who Are We? Who Are Animals? OAKS: web link to “Are We in Anthrodenial?” by Frans De Waal; web link to “Six Uniquely Human Traits Now Found in Animals” by Kate Douglas

Final Exam: Conclusion Friday, December 9th, 12pm-3pm
OAKS: “Introduction” by David Abram; selections from *A Language Older Than Words* by Derrick Jensen; turn in final exam and evaluations of other members in your discussion group