

Course Syllabus
Religion and Animals (RELI S-1013, CRN 32394)
Harvard Summer School 2013
Dr. Paul Waldau
M-W 6:30-9:30PM
Sever Hall 104

Course Description—Students trace the history and shape of this emerging academic field and its relation to other academic disciplines. Students also examine social, public policy, conceptual, environmental, ethical, and philosophical implications of the field. Class sessions are discussion-based, and students undertake both group work and a number of individual writing projects.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Learning Objectives—When this course is completed, students should be able to:

- think critically about different senses of “religion and animals”;
- 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 religion and animals; and,
- present an outline to the class summarizing views regarding nonhuman animals in religious tradition
- describe why the study of animals across different religious traditions and cultures creates interesting problems and possibilities
- discuss the place of the field “religion and animals” in the larger enterprise of Animal Studies

Introductory Comments on Key Concepts

- 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 see the complexity of each religious community’s historical, cultural and religious heritage. Second, 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). Third, one needs to notice and take seriously on-the-ground realities of actual believers and their local communities.
- If one notices such features, one will also be able to notice (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.

Course Policies

Note carefully—two documents given to students on their first day will contain important information about policies used in this course. The first is “Paul Waldau’s Course Policies” and the second is “Participation Guidelines.” Please read these carefully. We will talk about them on the first day and then in class from time to time as needed.

Meeting with Course Director: During the summer, students can reach me most quickly through pwaldau@gmail.com. In an emergency, students may call my cell phone number, which will be given out on the first session.

Office Hours: While I will be available both immediately before and after class on Monday and Wednesday, office hours will be as scheduled by each student. Because I want students to learn and to receive the good grades they deserve, please, if you have any difficulties in or concerns about how you are doing in this course, feel free to schedule an in-person or phone 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 a paperback version is available (possibly at a discount at the website of Columbia University Press, www.cup.columbia.edu).
- Waldau, Paul 2013. *Animal Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Assigned readings are listed below for each session.

Additional Course Materials will be assigned—these will be available for downloading in .pdf format.

Grading

There are two components to your grade in this class

GRADE COMPONENT BASED ON ASSIGNMENTS = 80% of your grade. The breakdown of this 80% is as follows:

20% on student presentation in Week 6

60% Final Exam

GRADE COMPONENT BASED ON PARTICIPATION = 20% of your grade.

Students will be provided a document entitled “Participation Guidelines” that explains both specifics and generalities about good participation and why it is so important in this particular course.

Schedule

Week 1. Introduction to Basic Issues—the first session addresses the field of “religion and animals”, and the second session addresses how this field fits into 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; *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.”
- We’ll also discuss which religious tradition we might choose to focus on in Week 5 (we will decide this next week).

Week 2. A Closer Look at Religion

Reading: *A Communion of Subjects*, two essays on the Jain tradition and a selection of those on indigenous traditions

The class as a whole will choose which religious tradition to focus on during Week 5.

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 our society?
- Are the views of other animals that prevail in our own culture typical or somehow 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?
- Which other cultures had, prior to your arrival on campus, impressed you regarding their views of other animals?

Week 3. Christianity and Other Animals

Reading: (1) *A Communion of Subjects* essays on Christian tradition; (2) Deloria, Vine, Jr., 1969, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Chapter 5 regarding Christianity (.pdf available); (3) White, Lynn, Jr., 1967. “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”, *Science*, 155, 1203-1207 (.pdf available)

Focus Questions

- In what ways are nonhuman animals seen by different segments of the Christian tradition? (the Wikipedia article “List of Christian Denominations” indicates that there are more than 41,000 denominations based on a 2011 report from The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life).
- 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. Where does the field of “Animals and Religion” fit into the Animal Studies firmament?

Reading: *Animal Studies*, Chapter 3 (“Science, Politics and Other Animals”) and Chapter 4 (“Early Twenty-First Animal Studies: Three Cutting Edges”)

Week 5. A Specific Religious Tradition—in Week 2, the class as a whole will choose which religious tradition to focus on during our two sessions this week.

Week 6.

Session 1 (Monday): Student Presentations—in previous weeks, each student will choose a religious tradition on which she/he will present during one of the two sessions this week.

Session 2 (Wednesday): 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 directions and possibilities as we choose our own future and thereby impact future generations of both humans and nonhumans alike.

Reading: *Animal Studies*, Chapter 5 (“Animals in the Creative Arts”), Chapter 6 (“Animals in Philosophy”), and Chapter 7 (“Comparative Studies: Legal Systems, Religions, and Cultures”)

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”?

Final Exam in Week 7, August 5, 630-930PM: Open-book student exam based on question discussed in previous weeks (this question focuses directly on course objectives called out above in this Course Syllabus)