POLS 390C: Humans, Animals and Politics

Sp 14 / LIB Rm B / 8:20­9:50 MW

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Office: AH 107 / Hrs: W 1:45-2:45, F 2:00-4:00

and by appointment

**Course Description**

Welcome. This course is a foray into the world of human/animal studies, seen through the lenses of political theory. It will address the following questions:

* What is the essence of human nature? What defines animal life? What separates the two?
* What rights do humans have “by nature”? What obligations do humans have to non-human animals?
* What is the early modern idea of a state of nature, and how does it continue to shape politics?
* What is the *anthropocene?* What does it mean to live in a world “after nature”?
* How do visions of animal life shape humanism and posthumanism?

**Course Assignments**

* **Participation** (50 pts): come to class every day having read the material. Be prepared to talk about it. I will deduct points for absences over one week (2 seminar sessions) across the span of the semester.
* **Reflection Paper** and **Presentation** (2 X 25 pts): each student will be responsible for presenting **two** short (2-3 page) thematic papers to the class. This paper should not be read but summarized, and it should conclude with a question for discussion on that day. The presentation should take about ten minutes, and it should take place at the beginning of class for that day. I will provide a sign-up for the reflection paper/presentations at the beginning of the term.
* **Analysis Papers** (4 X 25 pts): each student will design and complete four essays, which should be understood as a sophisticated reading of primary and secondary sources, combined with some original observations and a highly specific and provocative thesis. Each paper will revolve around a response to a conceptual issue or debate. I will provide the prompts for the papers, and they should be 5-7 pages in length.
* **Total Pts Possible**: 200/2=percentage score.

**Assigned Texts:**

Jacob von Uexkull, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* (Minnesota, 2010).

Giorgio Agamben, *The Open* (Stanford, 2004).

Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media* (Minnesota, 2010).

Additional readings on moodle.

**Reading Calendar**

Jan 27

Introduction to the course

I: Insects and others

Jan 29

Jakob von Uexkull, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, “Introduction.”

Feb 03

*Foray*, selections.

Feb 05

Bonner reading and discussion on slime molds.

Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media*, Introduction and Chapter 2.

Feb 10

*Insect Media*, Chapter 3.

**Feb 12: First Paper due.**

II: Wolves

Feb 12

La Fontaine, *The Wolf and the Lamb*.

Feb 17, 19

Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* Volume I, selections.

Feb 24, 26

Agamben, *The Open*, selections.

**Mar 03: Second Paper due.**

III: More Wolves, Transformations, “Becoming-Animal”

Mar 03, 05

Agamben, “The Wolf and the Ban,” Chapter 6 of *Homo Sacer*.

Mar 10, 12

Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, selections.

Mar 17, 19

Film “Grizzly Man.”

**Mar 24, 26 (Spring Recess)**

IV: Life “after Nature,” Theorizing the Anthropocene

Mar 31. Apr 02

Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind” (on moodle).

Bressan, “Time for a New Epoch?” (on moodle).

Apr 07, 09

Latour, “Waiting on Gaia” (on moodle).

Apr 14, 16

Additional readings TBA.

**Apr 16 Third Paper due.**

V: Animal Rights

Apr 21

Video: Gilles Deleuze, “A is for Animal.”

Apr 23, 28, 30

Elizabeth Fontenay, *Without Offending Humans: A Critique of Animal Rights*, selections.

May 02, 05

Film: “Blackfish,” discussion on film.

May 07

Review, Evaluations.

**May 12 Fourth Paper due.**