

Animal Minds

Spring 2014



Description

This course will examine animal minds from a primarily philosophical perspective. We will start with a survey of philosophy of mind and cognitive ethology. What is a mind, and who or what can have one? How can we learn about animal minds, and what are the main research methods that scientists use to study them? We will then ask what, as far as we know, animal minds are like. How do animals perceive the world? Do they have memories? Self-awareness? Language? Rationality? Pleasure and pain and emotion? Finally, we will consider the philosophical implications of our answers to these questions. What, if anything, does this discussion tell us about the human/nonhuman divide, and about the nature, value, and meaning of human and nonhuman life?

General Information

- Time: M 5:00–7:30
- Place: GCASL 375
- Instructor: Jeff Sebo
- Email: jeffsebo@gmail.com
- Office: 285 Mercer, #902
- Office hours: M 11:00-12:00 or by appointment

Readings

The required books for this class are:

- Robert Lurz, *The Philosophy of Animal Minds*
- Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*
- Clive Wynne, *Animal Cognition: The Mental Lives of Animals*

You can find these books at Bluestockings (172 Allen Street between Stanton and Rivington) as well as online. All readings not from the required book will be posted on blackboard.

Grading

Your grades will be determined as follows:

- **Exams (70%):** You will complete three take-home exams for this course. Each exam will consist of several short essay questions that draw from all the course material up until that point. The first exam (20%) will be about six pages long and will be due on 3/8; the second (20%) will be about six pages long and will be due on 4/12; and the third (30%) will be about eight pages long and will be due on 5/16.
- **Presentations (10%):** You will give a 10-15 minute presentation. For your presentation, you will find a scientific article related to the topic of discussion for that day, summarize the article, and then raise some questions or comments about this research and its implications for animal minds.
- **Daily Questions (10%):** At least two hours before each session, you will send me an email with (a) a short summary of one of the main claims from each assigned reading, and (b) a question or comment about that claim. These will be graded on a pass/fail basis.
- **Attendance and Participation (10%):** I expect regular attendance and thoughtful participation from all students. My assessment of the quality of your performance on these items will account for 10% of your grade.

Policies

- **Laptops/Cell Phones:** Laptops are allowed, but only for taking notes. Cell phones must be on silent.
- **Special Accommodations:** If you need special accommodations, please let me know so that I can properly assist you.
- **Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. See the NYU College of Arts and Science policy on Academic Integrity for more information.
- **Late Papers/Extensions/Incompletes:** Late papers will be accepted, but will lose 1/3 letter grade for each day late. Extensions and incompletes will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. If you would like to request either, please do it well before the due date.

Schedule

- **1/27 - Introduction**
John Heil, “Cartesian dualism”
John Heil, “The identity theory”
- **2/3 - Philosophy of Mind**
John Heil, “Functionalism”
John Heil, “The intentional stance”
- **2/10 - Perception**
Clive Wynne, “Other ways of seeing the world – I: physical dimensions”
Peter Carruthers, “The problem of other minds”
- **2/24 - Learning**
Clive Wynne, “Detecting cause and effect”
John Fisher, “The myth of anthropomorphism”
- **3/3 - Memory**
Clive Wynne, “Remembering”
William Roberts, “The questions of temporal and spatial displacement in animal cognition”
- **3/10 - Mindreading**
Sara Shettleworth, “Social intelligence”
José Luis Bermúdez, “Mindreading in the animal kingdom”
- **3/24 - Language**
Sara Shettleworth, “Communication and language”
Elisabeth Camp, “A language of baboon thought?”
- **3/31 - Rationality**
Fred Dretske, “Minimal rationality”; Ruth Millikan, “Styles of rationality”
José Luis Bermúdez, “Animal reasoning and proto-logic”
- **4/7 - Interpretation**
Donald Davidson, “Rational animals”
Daniel Dennett, “Do animals have beliefs?”
- **4/14 - Consciousness**
Peter Carruthers, “Animals and conscious experience”
Rocco Gennaro, “Animals, consciousness, and I-thoughts”
- **4/21 - Pain**
Colin Allen, “Animal pain”
Sahar Akhtar, “Animal pain and animal welfare”
- **4/28 - Emotion**
Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, “Love and friendship,” “Grief, sadness, and the bones of elephants”
Robert Roberts, “The sophistication of non-human emotion”
- **5/5 - Morality**
Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, “Rage, dominance, and cruelty,” “Compassion, rescue, and altruism”
Richard Joyce, “Moral language and moral emotions”
- **5/12 - The Human/Nonhuman Divide**
Jacques Derrida, “The animal that therefore I am”
Thomas Nagel, “Death,” “The absurd”