

HUMAN NATURE



INSTRUCTOR

Simone Gubler

CONTACT

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LECTURE TIMES

MWF 2PM- 3PM

LECTURE LOCATION

BEN 1.126

OFFICE HOURS

Mondays 12PM-2PM

OFFICE LOCATION

WAG 427

COURSE DESCRIPTION

When philosophers have attempted to investigate human nature, they have often turned to consider our fellow creatures, the other animals, as well. In itself, this move is unsurprising. After all, we human beings hold ourselves as animals, and tend to describe many of our properties as “animal” properties. So, if we are to understand ourselves, then we must understand what it is to be an animal. But, at the same time, philosophers have also been attracted to the other animals as a foil for self-distinction. For, as is obvious to any person who has spent time with animals (but perhaps, especially, cats), our fellow creatures are also alien to us in some deeply felt way — they are profoundly other.

The perplexing mix of alterity and familiarity that attends human encounters with the other animals has given rise to a philosophical literature on human nature, animal nature, and their relationship, that is distinctive for its richness, ingenuity, humor, frequent wrongheadedness, and variety. In this class, we will examine this history of thought in a topical fashion. We will begin by considering attempts to carve nature at its joints; attempts to identify and classify natural kinds, including human beings, within the animal realm. Next, we will move to study the work of early modern philosophers, who sought a clearer understanding of human minds and mental faculties through comparison to those of the other animals. Then, we will proceed, starting in the early Twentieth Century, through a series of philosophical reflections on our ability to relate to, inhabit, and imagine the lives of the other animals. This line of inquiry will convey us into a contemporary debate about the moral status of the other animals relative to human beings; a debate in which the traditional questions of natural kinds and comparative psychology reemerge and take on added significance.

By studying different ways of theorizing our relationship to the other animals, we will develop critical insights into what it is to be and to conceive of oneself as human, as a human animal, and as an animal among other animals.

POLICIES

Office Hours

All students are encouraged to visit me during my office hours (Mondays 12PM-2PM in WAG427). I want each of you to come and see me in my office at least once, early on in the semester, so that I can get to know you. In the first week of class, I will pass around a sign-up sheet, so that you can make an appointment to meet with me in Week Two. After that, you are welcome to drop by at any time during office hours, or by appointment as necessary. Office hours represent a good opportunity to discuss any questions you might have in relation to the course, as well as to troubleshoot any challenges that threaten your academic success.

Readings

All readings are compulsory. You only need to purchase one text: JM Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016). All other required readings (short, edited extracts of longer texts) may be found in the course packet, which you will receive in hardcopy on the first day of class. A pdf of the course packet will also be available on Canvas. Readings in the packet consist of edited extracts from longer works.

Disabilities

Accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. If you think that you are likely to need accommodations, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (the office is located in the Student Services Building), and present your SSD Accommodation Letter to me as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the requirements of the student Honor Code. Academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the relevant assignment and may be referred to the Dean.

Electronic Devices

No phones are to be used during class time. Use of other electronic devices is discouraged. If you need to take notes, take them by hand. Electronic devices are distracting - not merely for you, but for the people around you. A bonus: studies of memory retention suggest that you'll enjoy better recall if you take notes by hand (see for example: <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>).

Charity

Some of the ideas that we'll deal with in this class are likely to seem very odd to you. You might even want to reject them outright. That's perfectly normal. When we encounter new or unfamiliar ideas and arguments, especially when they seem to threaten our standard ways of thinking about things, there's a strong impulse to reject them. But the art of being a good philosopher is, in part, the art of pushing through (and then rationally investigating) that initial reaction of repulsion to a strange idea. So, to that end, let's operate according to a guiding principle: 'the principle of charity':

"The principle of charity governs the interpretation of the beliefs and utterances of others. It urges charitable interpretation, meaning interpretation that maximizes the truth or rationality of what others think and say"

- R. Feldman, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

I'd like us to follow this principle in all of our work in this class — in our interactions with each other, with invited guests, as well as with the ideas in the set readings.

So, when someone makes an argument or claim:

- Start from the assumption that the person is rational and is trying to communicate something interesting and meaningful to you.
- Be generous: try to give the best possible interpretation to their statement.
- Be patient: avoid attributing wrongness or confusion until you've carefully considered whether a relevant insight may be derived from their statement.

ASSESSMENT

Short Discussion Paper: Natural Kinds

- 5%** The prompt will be posted on Canvas on the first day of class. Due January 31.

In-Class Reading Quizzes

- 10%** These five quizzes contain questions that anyone who has done their reading should be able to address. When will I give them? Only time (and diligent class attendance) will tell!

Texas Memorial Museum Field Trip Scavenger Hunt

- 5%** Museums play an important role in the construction and expression of popular understandings of the human subject. Natural history museums are of particular interest here, for they present us with conceptions of the human being in its animal context. They instruct their visitors, subtly and unsubtly, in the art of hierarchical thinking about human and animal life. They rely heavily on significant relics, often corpses, both human and animal, to communicate stories about life on Earth — its origins, its diversity, its mutability, and its interrelations. These stories, and the ways in which they are communicated and received, are of significant philosophical interest. On Friday, the 16th of February, we will take a field trip to the Texas Memorial Museum, a natural history museum located on campus. We will meet outside the main entrance to the museum (2400 Trinity Street, by the saber-toothed tiger) at 2PM. A docent will give us a guided introduction to the museum holdings. You will then receive a scavenger hunt assignment to complete on site. The completed scavenger hunt assignment is due in class on Monday, the 19th of February. The experience of the museum visit will also serve as the basis for your next writing assignment.

Dear Curator: An open letter from a philosopher

- 15%** For this assignment, you will write an "open letter" to the museum curator. Having reflected critically on your experience of the museum, you will make a careful

ASSESSMENT

argument for a reform, arguing for some aspect of the human/animal story treated in the museum to be presented in a different way. This proposed reform may take the form of an amendment or amendments to existing exhibits, or it may require the introduction of a new exhibit. Whatever the target of your argument is, the argument itself needs to be well constructed and theoretically informed. Furthermore, since you are writing to the curator as a philosopher with particular experience in traditions of thought concerning humans, nature, and human nature, you must draw upon at least two of the readings from this course in making your argument. A detailed prompt will be posted on Canvas in the week before the museum trip. Due in class on the 23rd of March.

Midterm Take-Home Exam

20% The take-home exam will be distributed in class on the 2nd of March and will cover all material up to that date. Answers are due in class on the 5th of March.

Litigation Exercise: Animal Personhood

5% In week fourteen, the classroom becomes a courtroom, as we debate the “personhood” of chimpanzees. I will assign you to legal teams and you will be given parts of a real legal brief to defend or refute. We will spend Monday engaged in careful preparation, and Wednesday and Thursday in raucous debate.

Final Paper

30% Topics for the final paper will be distributed on the 26th of March. This assignment has two components.

1. You are to produce a 2 page blueprint for the paper, including a topic sentence, paragraph by paragraph argument plan and an annotated bibliography. The blueprint is worth 1/4 of the final paper grade. It is due on the 9th of April. You will receive feedback the following week.
2. The final 8 page paper is due in class, in hardcopy, on the 2nd of May.

Attendance

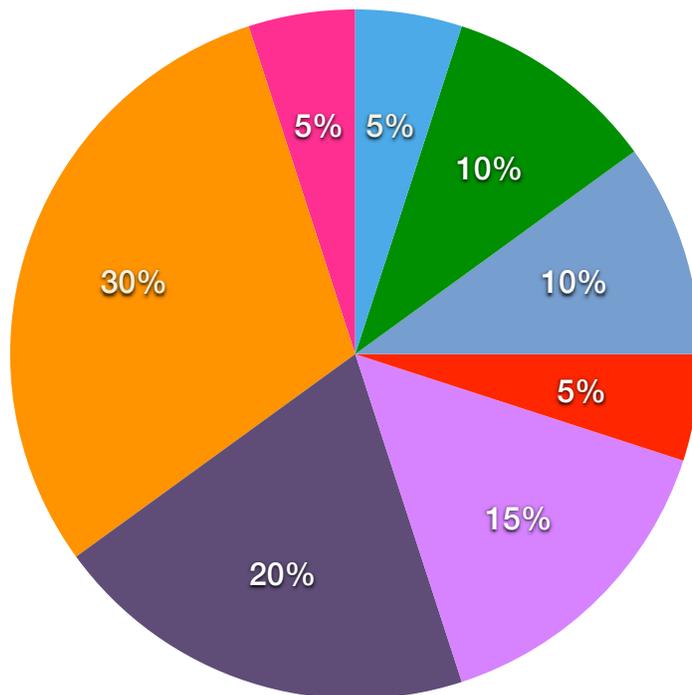
10% Attendance is compulsory. Each student is permitted a maximum of two unexplained absences. Each further unexplained absence will result in a 20% decrease in the attendance grade.

FINAL GRADE BREAKDOWN

Grades will be computed using the plus-minus system. The values are as follows:

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
F	0-59

- Short Discussion Paper
- Attendance
- Reading Quizzes
- Scavenger Hunt
- Dear Curator
- Mid-Term Exam
- Final Paper & Blueprint
- Litigation



**CLASS
SCHEDULE
AND
READINGS**

	TOPIC	READING
WEEK ONE Wednesday, January 17		<i>Syllabus</i>
WEEK ONE Friday, January 19	Natural Kinds	<i>The History of Animals</i> Aristotle
WEEK TWO Monday, January 22		<i>On the Parts of Animals</i> Aristotle
WEEK TWO Wednesday, January 24		<i>The Animal Kingdom</i> Carl Linnaeus
WEEK TWO Friday, January 26	Evolution	<i>The Origin of the Species</i> Charles Darwin
WEEK THREE Monday, January 29		<i>The Received View of Evolution</i> Kim Sterelny and Paul E. Griffiths
WEEK THREE Wednesday, January 31	The Unit of Natural Selection	<i>The Received View and its Challenges</i> Kim Sterelny and Paul E. Griffiths Short discussion paper due in class
WEEK THREE Friday, February 2		<i>Caring Groups and Selfish Genes</i> Stephen J. Gould
WEEK FOUR Monday, February 5		<i>The Units and Levels of Selection</i> Samir Okasha
WEEK FOUR Wednesday, February 7		<i>Self and Non-Self</i> Moira Howes
WEEK FOUR Friday, February 9	The Promise of Evolutionary History in the Quest to Understand Ourselves	<i>Is There an Essential Human Nature? and From Sociobiology to Evolutionary Psychology</i> Kim Sterelny and Paul E. Griffiths

	TOPIC	READING
WEEK FIVE Monday, February 12		<i>Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections</i> Kwame Anthony Appiah
WEEK FIVE Wednesday, February 14		Class discussion exercise
WEEK FIVE Friday, February 16		Field Trip
WEEK SIX Monday, February 19	Animals, Minds, and Machines	<i>Question 75: Human and Animal Souls</i> Thomas Aquinas Scavenger hunt due in class
WEEK SIX Wednesday, February 21		<i>Treatise on Man</i> René Descartes
WEEK SIX Friday, February 23		<i>The Meditations</i> René Descartes
WEEK SEVEN Monday, February 26		<i>The Meditations</i> René Descartes
WEEK SEVEN Wednesday, February 28		<i>Man a Machine</i> Julien Offray de la Mettrie
WEEK SEVEN Friday, March 2		<i>New System of Nature</i> Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Midterm takehome exam distributed in class
WEEK EIGHT Monday, March 5		<i>Rorarius</i> Pierre Bayle Midterm takehome exam due in class
WEEK EIGHT Wednesday, March 7		<i>Apology for Raymond Sebond</i> Michel de Montaigne

	TOPIC	READING
WEEK EIGHT Friday, March 9		<i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> David Hume
WEEK NINE	SPRING BREAK	No class
WEEK TEN Monday, March 19	Crossing Over, Falling Short	<i>A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans</i> Jakob von Uexküll
WEEK TEN Wednesday, March 21		<i>About Behaviorism</i> B.F. Skinner
WEEK TEN Friday, March 23		<i>What It Is Like to be a Bat?</i> Thomas Nagel “Dear Curator” letter due in class
WEEK ELEVEN Monday, March 26		<i>The Sucker, The Sucker</i> Amia Srinivasan
WEEK ELEVEN Wednesday, March 28		<i>What are Animals? Why Anthropomorphism is Still Not a Scientific Approach to Behavior</i> Clive D. L. Wynne
WEEK ELEVEN Friday, March 30		<i>The Philosopher’s Dog</i> Raymond Gaita
WEEK TWELVE Monday, April 2		<i>The Panther</i> Rainer Maria Rilke <i>Report to an Academy</i> Franz Kafka
WEEK TWELVE Wednesday, April 4		<i>The Lives of Animals</i> J.M. Coetzee pp.15-45
WEEK TWELVE Friday, April 6		<i>The Lives of Animals</i> J.M. Coetzee pp.46-76
WEEK THIRTEEN Monday, April 9		<i>The Lives of Animals: Response</i> Peter Singer pp. 85-91 Blueprint due in class

	TOPIC	READING
WEEK THIRTEEN Wednesday, April 11		<i>The Lives of Animals: Response</i> Barbara Smuts pp. 107-120
WEEK THIRTEEN Friday, April 13		<i>Eating Meat, Eating People</i> Cora Diamond Amicus brief distributed in class and debate teams assigned
WEEK FOURTEEN Monday, April 16		<i>In class debate preparation</i>
WEEK FOURTEEN Wednesday, April 18		<i>Court is in Session: Teams A&B and C&D debate parts 1 & 2 respectively of the amicus brief</i>
WEEK FOURTEEN Friday, April 20		<i>Court is in Session: Teams E&F and G&H debate parts 3 & 4 respectively of the amicus brief</i>
WEEK FIFTEEN Monday, April 23	Ethical Life Alongside Our Fellow Creatures	<i>An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation</i> Jeremy Bentham
WEEK FIFTEEN Wednesday, April 25		<i>Animal Liberation</i> Peter Singer
WEEK FIFTEEN Friday, April 27		<i>The Case for Animal Rights</i> Tom Regan
WEEK SIXTEEN Monday, April 30		<i>Our Fellow Creatures: Kantian Ethics and Our Duties Toward Animals</i> Christine Korsgaard
WEEK SIXTEEN Wednesday, May 2		<i>Beyond the Social Contract: Toward Global Justice</i> Martha Nussbaum Final Paper due in class