

**Political Science 73H**  
**Honors First Year Seminar**  
**Politics and Animal Life**

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Department of Political Science  
Professor Hollie Sue Mann



Dr. Mann's office: 354 Hamilton Hall  
Office hours: Mon 11 – 3; and by appointment on Tuesday  
Class Meeting Location: Hanes 0112  
Class Meeting Times: Tues & Thurs 12:30 – 1:45PM  
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## Course Description

This class orbits one central question: How do we as humans understand ourselves in relationship to other non-human animals? Our approach to answering this question, and to refining it, is to examine political thought, read literature, view films, and study the work of artists who have attempted to answer this question in some way.

Humans and non-human animals have lived together since time immemorial, our relationships exhibiting a range of qualities, including interdependence, hostility, indifference, and care. Despite the fact that our form of life is always one lived in close proximity to the animal world, we tend to think of non-human animals as existing outside the boundaries of political life. Indeed, animal life has been, at best, a marginal topic in the field of political science, as well as in others, such as English, Anthropology, History, and even Biology, at least where what is at stake is animals' relationship to human beings and our ethical commitments to animals, as researchers and fellow creatures. But animals have always played a fundamental role in political and ethical thought, even since ancient times. Over time, a range of different arguments have been made on behalf of animals, many of them playing out on explicitly political grounds. We will consider why we might want to make such arguments in the first place, and on what ground it makes sense to do so. Our course materials span a considerable degree of time and space—from the ancient world to contemporary life—in an effort to get at what sorts of questions have animated concerns about human-animal life, and what is it about animal life that resonates most deeply with us today.

## Required Texts

J.M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton)

Raymond Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog* (Routledge)

Cass Sunstein and Martha Nussbaum, *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions* (Oxford)

Articles on Sakai (SK)

**Always bring the readings to class, as you will need them for reference. Bring hard copies, as I do not allow laptops or e-readers in my classes.**

## Course Goals

At the end of this course, you will have a relatively deep and broad understanding of the figuring of the non-human animal in the history of political thought, as well as an introductory knowledge of some of the most basic and pressing questions that we (human animals, living in the West) face regarding our relationship to the animal world today.

In addition to the substantive knowledge I hope you will gain in this course, one general goal of a liberal arts education is for you to develop abilities of analytic thinking, writing, and speaking. I find useful the following definition of “analytic” or “critical” thinking: “a practical reflective activity that has reasonable belief or action as its goal” (*Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice*, ed. Joan Baron and Robert Sternberg, p. 10). In the context of this course, such thinking is “practical” in that it requires us to gain (through the readings) substantive knowledge about actual conditions and dilemmas in contemporary democratic society. It is “reflective” in that we will be evaluating the authors’ descriptions and assessments of these dilemmas. And we will engage in deliberation about what is a “reasonable belief or action” with respect to particular dilemmas. Of course, we will not all end up in agreement, which is fine. What is important is that we each practice the ability to make an argument for our judgments, in terms of identifying stated and unstated assumptions, offering textual or empirical evidence, considering counterarguments, and explaining and defending our reasons (including reasons for making particular value judgments, since that is also part of critical thinking).

You can probably tell that this work involves a lot of creativity and effort on your part. It is my hope that you will also experience—at least occasionally!—the exhilaration that can come with doing this

kind of practical intellectual work. Another goal of your liberal arts education is to cultivate an affection for a sustained and serious examination of the world and of oneself. The aspiration here is that the search for knowledge through ongoing critical thought and learning will become an habitual and pleasurable activity for you, one that continues to shape your life and give it meaning long after college. I always try to hold this intention when I take the seat of the teacher, and I ask that you do the same as you undertake the work of this course.

**A note about contacting me:** Coming to my office hours is the best way to communicate with me. I prefer face-to-face interaction with students, and always for substantive questions. If you cannot make my office hours, we'll set up another time to meet. Email is fine for some things. I usually respond within 24 hours, except on weekends, when I will often not respond until Monday morning. Please do not expect an automatic reply. Be patient. I will get back to you. Calling my office number is also fine.

### **Course Expectations**

#### **Reading Assignments:**

You are expected to prepare the readings by the day for which they are assigned. By "prepare" I do not mean simply giving them a cursory reading. Rather, I mean read them carefully, think about them, identify sections or parts of the readings that you think work well or that you have problems with, use whatever note-taking system works best for you, and be sure to come to class with any questions you may have. I will sometimes pass out reading questions or thoughts to help guide your reading; these are designed to help you think about the text, and you are to work through these questions before class as part of your preparation. Remember that these readings are not like textbooks, but are much more dense and complex; they will probably take you longer to read, and you may need to read tough sections a few times, so be sure to plan accordingly.

#### **Recommended Readings:**

Occasionally, I will post recommended readings on Sakai. These are meant to supplement our required readings, and to give you more context and background. While you are not required to complete these readings, I strongly recommend that you do. Also, if there is ever a particular subject that interests you and you'd like to do more reading on your own, don't hesitate to ask me for further reading suggestions.

#### **Class participation:**

This course requires a considerable amount of active and sustained participation. You will need to come to class ready to work actively on your understanding of the material, to analyze texts using critical thinking, and to consider complex social and political issues. Your work for this class will involve both autonomous and collaborative learning. The idea of autonomy stresses your personal responsibility for your own learning, while the idea of collaboration stresses your responsibility for teaching and learning from one another. It is my responsibility as the teacher to secure the necessary conditions in which both types of learning can occur, and to engage in analytic thinking with you. So this class is not like a theater, where you come and watch me perform for you. Instead, it is best thought of as a lab, where you come in to work with, examine, and enhance the knowledge gained from the readings and from your own experiences.

You will work in learning groups for much of the semester. We will keep the same group for several class periods in a row before switching to new groups. In addition to small group work, the class as a whole will work together to discuss and analyze issues and questions in the readings. I expect everyone to participate in the larger discussions as well, in order to practice and develop your communicative abilities, or, in other words, in order to help you come to voice (Note: participation in the learning groups will not suffice to do well overall on participation.) If you find yourself struggling with this, please feel free to come to my office hours so that we can discuss strategies to help you

become more comfortable speaking aloud in class. The good news is that I have a very broad notion of participation, including active listening, asking questions of one another (including, “What do you mean? Can you say more about that?”), reading relevant passages aloud, helping another person find the right page, explaining why you agree or disagree with what someone else has said, taking detailed notes, and engaging in and facilitating discussion. Everyone must experiment with a variety of forms of participation, rather than always playing the same role.

**Important note:**

Turn off all cell phones before class begins. I ask that you not take out phones at any point during class to check or send messages. Also, the **use of laptops will not be allowed, no exceptions**. I find them distracting and unnecessary for the kind of work we will be doing together, which, as I hope I’ve made clear enough by now, relies heavily on your engagement with other classmates with whom you are working to create and sustain a stimulating and engaged learning environment. If you are someone who usually takes notes on your laptop, you will need to work on developing different listening and writing skills that work for this course. I am happy to work on developing alternative strategies with you. You will also need to print out the SK readings and bring them into class; there are quite a few of them. So be sure to budget accordingly.

Your participation grade will rely on both subjective and objective measures. Subjective measures include my evaluation of your labor in the classroom, including group work, class discussion, and in-class writing assignments. Objective measures include attendance, possession of readings, and the quality of group reports in learning groups.

**Attendance:**

You are responsible for contributing to our learning in this class, and you cannot do this if you are not here. You will receive one attendance credit for each class you attend (we have 30 scheduled meetings following the first day). Regardless of the quality of your other participatory work, attendance credits will operate as a baseline for your overall participation grade. To be clear: Attendance credits are a “floor” for your overall participation grade, which includes a variety of components; it does not guarantee you a particular grade.

To be eligible for an A for your participation grade, you must have at least 29 attendance credits.

To be eligible for an A-, at least 28.

To be eligible for a B, at least 27.

To be eligible for a C, at least 26.

In order for an absence to be excused, you must: a) provide written documentation of a medical or family emergency AND, b) meet with another student in the class to replicate the participation that you missed, and affirm to me that you have done so. Excused absences will not count against your attendance credit total. I will send an attendance sheet around at the beginning of each class. Should you need to sign it at the end of class because you were late, you will need to note that you were late.

**Research Project:**

One important skill I want you to work on in this course is analytic and imaginative writing—in other words, to perform clear, thoughtful written analyses of the political theory and philosophy we will read in this course. You will be required to submit a 12-15 page research paper at the end of the semester. The topic will be of your choosing and must be approved by me ahead of time. You will submit a detailed outline of your paper to me about a third of the way through the semester. Soon after, you will submit a draft of the first three pages. Together, these will constitute part (15%) of the overall grade for the paper. The rest of the grade will come from the final paper itself.

Since the research paper constitutes a large part of your grade, I urge you to carefully read and consider the instructions I hand out and the expectations I outline, to allow yourself time to revise drafts.

### **Microthemes:**

A microtheme is a written response to the reading. There are two different types: summary and thesis-supported. I will provide a handout on this assignment as we get close to the first one that is due. There are four microthemes, two summary and two thesis-supported.

### **Animality in Film Project:**

Since we only have roughly 16 weeks to cover such an expansive subject, I'd like to give you the opportunity both to examine a topic not covered on the syllabus AND to do a critical analysis of a film that in some way depicts human-animal relationships. On your own, you will view a film and offer an analytic reading of its subject matter and the way in which it explored its subject. Here are some guidelines: 1) The paper should be 2 full pages, 11 or 12 point font (Times New Roman or Garamond), single-spaced, with one line in between paragraphs, one-inch margins, 2) Include a brief one-paragraph summary of the film at the start of your essay, a middle section with ideas, themes, or questions, that emerge for you based on our readings from class, and a concluding paragraph with some further questions the film spurs or final thoughts, and 3) You will upload your response on Sakai and make it available for your classmates to review. Think of this as a review that might be published for readers of a popular feminist publication (so, a sophisticated readership but NOT a purely academic one).

You will need to have your film approved by me two weeks in advance of the due date, but here are some suggestions: Planet of the Apes (the original), Buck, Finding Nemo, Earthlings, The Elephant in the Living Room, Grizzly Man, Forks Over Knives

### **Animal Self Portrait:**

For Thursday, January 15, write a 1 – 2 page piece on your own relationship to animal life, as you see it. This could mean many things to you, so feel free to interpret it as you wish. But one question that might animate your portrait is this: How do you understand yourself as an animal being living with other non-human animals? Feel free to include accounts of close or problematic relationships you've had to animals, but do try not to limit the essay to a story of how much you loved your dog growing up. You might also think about this portrait in the context of why you are taking this class. Is there some reason you are drawn to think about politics and animals? What are the questions that arise for you as you think through this, admittedly broad, topic. The technical guidelines for this are the same as the Film Project. Papers should be 11 or 12 point font (Times New Roman or Garamond), single-spaced, one line in between paragraphs, and one-inch margins.

### **Animality in Art Project:**

On April 2, our class will visit the Ackland Art Museum to take a look at some works in a study gallery created specifically for our class that explicitly engage the relationship between humans and animals. We will have a group discussion, in which you are expected to participate by commenting, asking questions, taking notes, etc.

You will also select one piece from the gallery OR from the larger collection at the Ackland that moves you in some way and about which you would like to write. This project is similar to the Animality in Film project, and the requirements are the same. 1) The paper should be 2 full pages, 11 or 12 point font (Times New Roman or Garamond), single-spaced, with one line in between paragraphs, one-inch margins, 2) Include a brief one-paragraph description of your piece at the start of your essay, a middle section with ideas, themes, or questions, that emerge for you based on our

readings from class, and a concluding paragraph with some further questions the piece sparks or final thoughts, and 3) You will upload your response on Sakai and make it available for your classmates to review. Think of this as a review that might be published for readers of a popular feminist publication (so, a sophisticated readership but NOT a purely academic one).

### **Syllabus Statement:**

For Tuesday, January 13, please bring to class a written or typed statement, signed and dated, that confirms that you have re-read the entire syllabus carefully. I do this because I want to ensure that you studied the information and requirements for this course, including the attachments, so you understand my expectations of you. It's important that you understand all of the requirements, have a general sense of the topics we'll cover, and just know what you're getting into! Reading the syllabus carefully will also help you figure out what your expectations should be of me.

### **Honor and Honesty:**

All work done in this class must be carried out within the letter and spirit of the Honor Code (<http://honor.unc.edu/honor/index.html>). You are also responsible for consulting with me if you are unclear about the meaning of academic dishonesty, plagiarism, or adverse conduct, or about whether any particular act on your part constitutes such a violation of the University's honor code.

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments:  
Class Participation (including group work and attendance): 20%  
Microthemes and In-class Writing Assignments: 20%  
Art, Film, and Self Portrait: 20%  
Research Paper: 40%

### **Schedule**

Th Jan 8 Introduction and introductions. Course requirements, procedures, and expectations will be reviewed. Students are responsible for having and remembering information given on the first day.

#### **I. Introduction, Politics and Animal Life: Surveying the Landscape**

This introductory section will provide a broad overview of the current literature on animals and politics. Many of us have heard the term "animal rights" or its precursor, "animal liberation," but only have a vague notion of what this actually means in practice. Rights have historically been reserved for human beings, and not all of them at that, so we will need to think deeply about what it might mean to extend such rights to animals, or to reformulate them in a way that makes sense for different species. With these readings, we will gain a better understanding of the explicitly *political* contours of our relationship to animals. In particular, we will learn the distinction between animal rights and animal welfare, and discuss whether such a distinction is meaningful. Questions regarding how animal rights have historically been grounded and how they might be further secured moving forward will surface in these readings, as well as whether and when it makes sense to secure certain rights for animals in the first place, and on what philosophical grounds we might do so. Finally, we will start to consider our relationship to animals, on a personal and communal level, as well as begin our exploration of textual representation of animals and animality in art, music, literature, film, and news media.

Tu Jan 13 Sunstein, Introduction to *Animal Rights*

Singer, “All Animals Are Equal,” from *Animal Liberation* (SK)

- Th Jan 15 Wise, “Animal Rights, One Step at a Time” (Sunstein)  
Posner, “Animal Rights: Legal, Philosophical, and Pragmatic Perspectives”  
\*Animal Self-Portrait Due
- Tu Jan 20 Anderson, “Animal Rights and the Values of Nonhuman Life” (Sunstein)
- Th Jan 22 Nussbaum, “Beyond Compassion and Humanity” (Sunstein)
- Tu Jan 27 Nagel, “What Is It Like To Be a Bat?” (SK)  
Microtheme 1 Due (Summary)
- Th Jan 29 Poetic Interlude  
Read the poems in the “Poetry” file on Sakai and come ready to discuss them.

## II. **Animals in the Ancient World**

Now that we have at least a glimpse of relationship of animals to political life in the modern world, we will turn to the ancients as a way to draw out some deep contrasts between the space that animals occupied in politics and philosophy. Although the ancients lived very closely with animals, they engaged in vastly different practices concerning them and conceived of animals in ways quite different from moderns. For example, although they acknowledged things like sentience, will, and even intelligence in animals, they lacked a notion of animal rights. Further, although many of the animal practices were quite violent by today’s standards, animals occupied a sacred status in Greek political life. Some were vegetarians but for very different reasons than we find in contemporary culture. We will try to parse the distinctions between animals and politics in the ancient world and our modern life, and see what we find appealing in the ancient picture and what we are perhaps happy to leave behind.

- Tu Feb 3 Plutarch, *On the Cleverness of Animals* (SK)
- Th Feb 5 Porphyry, *On the Abstinence from Animal Flesh*, Books One and Two (SK)
- Tu Feb 10 Porphyry, Books Three and Four (SK)
- Th Feb 12 Homeric Readings (SK)

## III. **Figuring Animality in Modern Political Thought**

As we transition out of the ancient world and into the modern era, we find a growing distance between the human and the animal world. And yet, this is precise the time when we find representations and discussions of animals, or the animality of humans, emerging in political philosophy. Some philosophers draw interesting comparisons between the cleverest of animals and the most successful rulers—strange, given that this is also the Renaissance period, and that we have just come out of the “Dark Ages—and others justify entire political systems based on “natural” human characteristics believed to shape human behavior inevitably. A great many modern political thinkers draw on the artifice of “state of nature,” some pre-political era in which every man fought for himself, in order to explain why politics, which are thought to be distinctly human, are necessary, suggesting a need to get as far away from our animal nature as possible. Still others embrace our animality and reject the

dichotomy of human/reason on one side and animals/instinct on the other; or, if they do not reject the dichotomy, they certainly come down on the side of instinct rather than reason! Many of these ideas continue to function as basic principles and assumptions in contemporary political thought, and we will gain better insight into our present way of “doing theory” by taking a closer look into the not-so-distant past.

- Tu Feb 17 Machiavelli, selections from *The Prince* (SK)  
Rousseau, selections from *Discourse on Inequality*, (SK)
- Th Feb 19 Nietzsche, selections (SK)
- Tu Feb 24 Descartes, Selections from *Meditations* (SK)  
Derrida, Selections from *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (SK)  
Microtheme 2 (Thesis-Supported)
- Th Feb 26 Cinematic Interlude: *Buck*
- Tu Mar 3 Finish *Buck*, discussion

SPRING BREAK

#### IV. **Current Debates: Democratic Citizenship and Living with Animals**

In this section we return to some of the original problems and dilemmas with which we started, some of which may seem quite obvious (whether and how much freedom to accord to animals) while others are perhaps less obvious but certainly important in contemporary political life (do we ban certain cultural practices that violate the majority culture’s norms and to what extent is animal inequality related to gender inequality, if at all). We will read portions of a recently published book in the field of political theory, which will give us a sense not only for the pulse of the dialogues today but also what the actual work of a political thinker looks like when it is complete. Finally, we will see if any of the insights we gained from the ancients and the moderns might be helpful for analyzing pressing problems we face in our lives with animals today. Let us begin by considering how the questions moderns ask are different from the start.

- Th Mar 5 Casal, “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Animals?” (SK)  
\*Animality in Film Project Due
- Tu Mar 17 MacKinnon, “Of Mice and Men” (Sunstein)
- Th Mar 19 Kymlicka, *Zoopolis*, Chapters 1 - 3  
Microtheme 3 Due (Summary)
- Tu Mar 24 Diamond, “Eating Meat and Eating People” (Sunstein)

#### V. **Beyond Animal Rights**

These final two sections will take us in an entirely new direction, as they offer a kind of critique of the current literature on animals, specifically, they reject the idea of “animal rights,” although they do not necessarily disagree with the outcomes such a program advocates. Instead, they suggest a different orientation to first *thinking* about animals, second

thinking *with* them, and finally *being* differently in the world with them. Although the politics of this view are not made explicit, there are many implications we will discover and probe together, such as the reconceiving our own self-understandings, the ground on which rights claims are made in the first place, the philosophical implications of our animality and how this matters for our shared moral life, and the centrality of writing and reading about animals to living more peaceably with them.

- Th Mar 26 Gaita, *The Philosopher's Dog*,  
Tu Mar 31 Gaita  
Th April 2 Artistic Interlude: Class Trip to the Ackland  
**\*Detailed outline of research paper due**  
Tu April 7 Gaita  
Tu April 9 Gaita  
\*Microtheme 4 Due (Thesis-Supported)

## VI. The Lives of We Animals

- Tu April 14 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*  
\*Animality in Art Project Due  
Th April 16 Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*  
Tu April 21 To be decided by the class  
\*First three pages of research paper due  
Th April 23 To be decided by the class