Philosophy of Animals
PHIL 216 | Mondays 7pm to 9:40pm | Hopkins Hall Rm 400 (The Rogers Room)

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Office Hours: Mondays 1:30pm-3:30, Wednesdays 9:30am-11 and by appointment

REQUIRED MATERIAL

—All other required readings are in the course reading packets. The first volume is available for pickup at the mail and copy center in the Class of ’37 House at 51 Park Street (behind Paresky and the Freshman Quad).

—This course has a series of art works associated with it on display in the Object Lab at the Williams College Art Museum. These give a small view into the way that we have conceived of our relationship with non-human animals. You will be expected to incorporate material from the Object Lab into your weekly papers or in your final paper.

You are required to attend one “field trip” to WCMA. There will be two offered during the semester—Thursday March 10th 7pm-8pm and Thursday April 14 7pm-8pm—and you may choose which to attend. You are also welcome to visit the Object Lab any time during open museum hours, every day 10am-5pm except Wednesday (closed) and Thursday when it is open 10am-8pm. Visiting by yourself is optional and is not a substitution for the class field trip.

—We may from time to time watch videos in class to enhance our understanding of the empirical or contextual details of the readings. In some cases these may be upsetting. Every attempt will be made to describe the video in advance in a way that will give you enough information on whether you want to view it. Watching the videos is not required.

GRADING

1. Participation

Discussion is essential to the vitality of the seminar. Your first priority is reading the assignments carefully and working diligently on the writing for the course. Thoughtful, honest, and respectful participation derives from these. Every effort will be made to ensure that the class is a welcoming forum for sharing serious ideas. In addition, participation is more inclusive than many students realize. Being attentive and engaged in class, asking clarificatory questions, and discussing aspects of the course with the instructor during office hours all fall under this heading. 10% of the final grade.

2. Seminar papers

You are required to write four seminar papers during the semester, at least two of which must be before Spring Vacation. The topics for semester essays are open; you may write on any element of the reading material from the week that you select. For example, you may briefly summarize the empirical and philosophical issues of the reading and critically respond by using other material from the course. Or, you may pick a few direct quotations from the readings and attempt to show that the ideas contained in it are misguided or fail to take into consideration important factors. Note that your responses need not be negative. You may take these papers as an opportunity to sympathetically review or to elaborate on proposals made in the literature.

4-5 pages. Typewritten, double spaced in a 12 point font. Each is worth 15% of your final grade.

3. Final paper

The final paper may be an extension of a weekly paper or may advance completely new ideas. This will be an opportunity for extended discussion of any topic in the course. You are not required to seek additional sources for final papers, though you may.

8-10 pages. Typewritten, double spaced in a 12 point font. No title page. 30% of final grade. Essays are due on May 21st at 5pm by email.

Grading on all writing assignments will be anonymous. Please turn in your papers with only your Williams ID number on it in some unobtrusive place. Anonymous grading is one way of assuring that the collegiality of our interactions does not cloud my assessment of your work. One disadvantage to anonymous grading is that the instructor will not know when your work is systematically inadequate and will not approach you with concerns about your writing. As a result, there is an additional burden responsibility on your shoulders. You must elect to visit office hours to seek out opportunities to improve your writing.

The desire to preserve the integrity of the anonymous grading system should never prevent you from seeking advice on assignments for this course. You are encouraged to speak with me with your work in hand. Naturally this will reveal facts of authorship, and may give the instructor some insight into your style and interests. Still, your success in meeting the challenges of this course should always be our first concern.
Schedule of Readings
All readings to be done in advance of the class meeting
NO LAPTOPS OR FOOD IN SEMINAR

Week One, February 8—Introduction to Minds and Morality

Week Two, February 15—Sentience and Animal Consciousness I

Week Three, February 22—Sentience and Animal Consciousness II

Week Four, February 29—Self Awareness

Week Five, March 7—Animal Cognition: Beliefs and Concepts
Stich, S. (1979) Do Animals Have Beliefs?

Week Six, March 14—Language

Week Seven, April 4—Animal Rights

Week Eight, April 11—Duties to Animals

Week Nine, April 18—Emotions

Week Ten, April 25—Eating Animals

Week Eleven, May 2—Human Beings and Animals

Week Twelve, May 9—Wild Animals