



Department of English and Cultural Studies
McMaster University

**English & Cultural Studies / Cultural Studies
and Critical Theory 767**

Graduate Course Outline
Winter Term 2012

**Regarding Animals:
Theories of Non-Human Life**

Instructor: Dr. David L. Clark

Apes too have organs that can grasp, but they do not have hands. The hand is infinitely different from all grasping organs--paws, claws, or fangs--*different by an abyss of essence*. Only a being that can speak, that is, think, can have hands.

--Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*

Francisco de Goya, *El Perro Semihundido*
(*The Half-Buried Dog*) 1821-23, Museo del Prado
134 x 80 cm (oil on canvas)

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Website: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~dclark/>
Class-time: Thursday 3:30-6:30 pm
Office Hours: CNH 210; Thursday, 2:30-3:30 pm, or by appointment

Brief course outline

Isaac Bashevis Singer once wrote—in the voice of a character in a short-story--that factory-farmed animals endured conditions comparable in their killing violence to those suffered by the Jews in the Nazi death-camps. Life for animals, his character says, “is an eternal Treblinka.” To say the very least, Singer’s allusion to the Holocaust is consequential and controversial (although not without precedent). To satisfy the world’s appetite for meat, are animals not only slaughtered but also murdered? Does “the Final Solution” (the systematic killing of the European Jews) share a hidden history with the industrialization of the business of raising pigs, chickens, and cows for human consumption? More broadly, is injustice irreducible to inhumanity? Do non-human animals oblige us? But who, “us”? Are animal bodies *bodies that matter*? This three-unit course explores the question of human understandings of and obligations towards non-human life, especially that life which is often too quickly called “the animal.” What *is* an “animal”? What does it mean to fall under its gaze? What could it mean for an animal to bear witness to the human? Are obligations towards animals exhausted by the concept of rights? Can an animal

speak...or be heard? If the thought of the animal represents a challenge to ethics, it is also certainly a scandal for epistemology. In what ways does the animal disrupt existing theories of knowledge and knowing, especially those that quarantine theory and that privilege the social, cultural, and empirical? We will explore these and related questions through a close, contextualized reading of a selection of philosophical and theoretical texts. Although this course will address a wide range of positions in animal studies, including the “analytical” traditions of animal rights and animal liberation which dominate discussions of the ethics of non-human life in North America, its primary focus will be on work that is rooted in Continental philosophy and theory (ranging from Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben to the cultural theory that inflects the work of Nicole Shukin and Anat Pick). Continental philosophy and theory robustly *dissents* from both cultural studies models of analysis—which are oriented around “culture,” i.e., human-formed worlds—and the existing analytical tradition in animal studies. It is the importance, history, and rationale of that dissent that will call for rigorous discussion and elaboration in our class.

Although strictly speaking this is not a course on Derrida, Derrida’s challenge to us to begin the task of doing justice to animals and to ask, as never before, “the question of the animal,” informs the course from start to finish. Derrida asks: What does it mean to be “seen” by an animal, i.e., to dwell in the unraveling presence of the precariousness, mortality, singularity, and finitude not of “animals,” in general, but of *this* animal. That suggestive question will orient our thinking from the start.

Although this course involves working with some “philosophical” texts (albeit texts written *against* the grain of conventional understandings of “philosophy,” and read in a robustly non-philosophical context), and although it falls under the category of “critical theory” and “cultural theory,” no previous expertise in these areas is assumed or necessary. In other words, students from a broad variety of intellectual backgrounds are warmly welcomed. Along the way, I will circulate supplementary materials to assist students with the reading material. One assigned text is on the course specifically for that purpose, i.e., Calarco’s *Zoographies* (which includes helpfully illuminating introductory discussions of Derrida, Agamben, and Heidegger).

Two-thirds of the way through the course (“Landing Place,” 22 March 2012), we take time to pause and devote a class to drawing together the course’s various threads to date, as well as exploring specific and general questions pertaining to the course material.

Because I am sharing work at other universities that is drawn from my own research in critical animal studies, our class schedule is slightly altered. There is no class 15 March 2012, but we will make that cancellation up by meeting one extra time at the end of term. Note though that we meet for the last time *Monday*, 9 April 2012 (rather than Thursday 12 April 2012) at a time and place to be announced.

Assigned Texts

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004.
- Calarco, Matthew. *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008.
- Cavaliere, Paola. *The Death of the Animal: A Dialogue*. New York: Columbia UP, 2009.
- Clark, David L. “On Being ‘The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany’: Dwelling with Animals after Levinas;” and “Towards a Prehistory of the Postanimal: Kant, Levinas, and the Regard of Brutes.” [To be posted on course-webpage.]
- Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999.

- Derrida, Jacques: *The Animal (Therefore) that I Am*. [Selections] New York: Fordham UP, 2008
- Derrida, Jacques. "Violence Against Animals" [<http://www.myspace.com/simon289/blog/529686686> or, better, Google "Derrida + Violence Against Animals" and click on "For What Tomorrow: A Dialogue"]
- Levinas, Emmanuel. "The Name of a Dog; or, Natural Rights." [To be posted on course webpage.]
- Pick, Anat. *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*. Columbia UP, 2011.
- Shukin, Nicole. *Animal Capital: Rendering Life In Biopolitical Times*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2009.

Work and Mark Distribution; Assignment Descriptions

Seminar Participation and Creation (15%)

Instead of delivering formal presentations, members of the class will be encouraged and expected to *create*, on an ongoing basis, a *lively graduate seminar*—i.e. an inquisitive and informed space of critical labour, discussion, and debate. All students will therefore be expected to contribute consistently and meaningfully to the intellectual life of the seminar, developing and volunteering questions and arguments as well as responding mindfully to queries and challenges that are put to them by their classmates and by their instructor.

Students must be willing and able to:

- read and engage all assigned materials.
- attend all classes and participate in all classes.
- explore and absorb as much related critical material as possible, both seeking this material out independently and in consultation with their classmates and instructor.
- develop questions and arguments that are directly relevant to the materials at hand, and actively to introduce these points into the class discussion on a consistent basis.
- listen and respond thoughtfully to the issues raised in class, engaging the issues in ways that complicate and advance the intellectual life of the seminar.
- foster a developing scene of pedagogy, bearing in mind that a central part of our task is to *teach* others and to be *taught*.

At midterm, students will be given an informal assessment of the quality of their seminar participation work. Authors of response papers circulated in a given class should contribute to the class discussion in an especially robust way, taking particular responsibility for *leading* the seminar on that day.

Response Papers (2 x 15%=30%)

Each student will be responsible for two 750-word (3 pages) responses to the readings, each of which is worth 15% of your final grade, for a total of 30%. Response papers should provide a succinct summary of and engagement with some of the text's most pressing themes, arguments, and questions. The response paper should be written in such a way to prompt and provoke discussion in class. Students who have submitted response papers for a particular class will be expected to elaborate upon their remarks. Remember: critique is welcome, but the object here is not to find fault, but rather to *engage* the materials at hand, and risking the chance of taking some of their arguments and provocations on board.

The response papers must be completed and circulated by e-mail to all members of the course (as well as to me) at least **24 hours** before the start time of the relevant class, i.e., 3:30 p.m.. Beyond that point no response paper may be submitted since it does not give the class or me time carefully to consider that paper. Failing to submit a response paper according to these

stipulations will result in a zero grade for that paper. If for significant and documented health reasons, and *only* for said reasons, a student fails to submit a response paper, a new and different response paper may be submitted for another class, but only after making special written arrangements with the instructor. Students are free to exchange response paper assignments among themselves, but should inform me of this swap. University regulations compel us to use our McMaster e-mail addresses, so please ensure that these addresses are active and that your quota is not full. Don't forget to confirm that your response papers are copied to all members of the class, including me!

Occupy Earth Project (15%)

The class is responsible for creating a short multi-media presentation about the question of the animal and of doing justice to non-human life. This presentation will be rooted in and routed through the Continentally inflected materials that we parse in this course. I strongly encourage members of the class to work *together* to create this video-based presentation, which will then be posted on the course-page and my Facebook page, and available to all students in the course to circulate at will. Although I envision this project as a collective effort, it is also possible for the class to break up into smaller groups, each producing their own *Occupy Earth Project*. One meeting of the seminar (16 February 2012) has been set aside to free up time for you in your term to work together on this project.

Research Essay (40%)

15-20 page essay. Students will write a research essay—i.e., an essay that fully engages extant theory and criticism and that either breaks new ground or significantly reframes existing arguments--on a topic of their own choosing. It's important to begin work on your essay earlier in the term rather than later, not only because of the complexity of the questions and problems with which you will be engaging, but also because it will take time to gather together the relevant primary and secondary sources. With the approval of the student, essays will subsequently be made available on the coursepage I am happy to discuss your research essay with you at every stage, but all students are expected to consult with me about their work in person at least once prior to submitting the essay. Research essays are due at start of class Thursday 29 March 2012. Essays handed in after that date may not have a marking commentary. The very last day and time that essays may be submitted for this course is noon, 26 April 2012. Essays must be submitted as hard copies.

Seminar Schedule

January	12	Prefatory Remarks	
	19	Introduction (Derrida: "Violence Against Animals")	
	26	Derrida (Chptr. 1)	Class 1 / Student # 1, 5, 9, 13
February	2	Derrida (Chptr. 3,4)	Class 2 / Student # 2, 6, 10, 14
	9	Levinas + Clark	Class 3 / Student # 3, 7, 11, 15
	16	No Class	
March	23	Reading Week	
	1	Coetzee	Class 4/ Student# 4,8,12,16
	8	Cavalieri	Class 5 / Student# 1,5,9,13
	15	No Class	
	22	Landing Place	

[seminar schedule continued on next page]

March	29	Agamben	Class 6 / Student # 2,6,10,14
April	5	Pick	Class 7/ Student # 3,7,11,15
	9*	Shukin	Class 8/ Student# 4,8,12,16

*Note change of class day from Thursday to Monday

E-mail protocol:

The Faculty of Humanities has issued the following set of instructions to students: “It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account.”

All e-mails must be written in full sentences (i.e. no point form, no text-messaging short form), and must contain a subject line that includes the course designation, i.e., "767." Receipt of all e-mails from me must be acknowledged.

Class cancellations:

In the unlikely event of class cancellations, students will be notified on the Department of English and Cultural Studies website and on my website. It is your responsibility to check these sites regularly for any such announcements.

Link: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~english/> (Department of English and Cultural Studies)

Link: <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~dclark/> (Dr. David L. Clark)

University Statement Regarding Academic Dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- i) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- ii) Improper collaboration in group work (Insert specific course information)
- iii) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld. See:

http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/ac_ethics.htm

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>.

Statement from the Office of the Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.



Francisco de Goya, *El Perro Semihundido*
(*The Half-Buried Dog*) 1821-23, Museo del Prado
134 x 80 cm (oil on canvas)



Anonymous, *The bombing of Guernica* (April 26, 1937)