

Animal Minds

Spring 2021



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: T 5:00-7:30pm EST

Place: Zoom

Instructor:

Name: Jeff Sebo

Email: jeffsebo@nyu.edu

Office: Zoom

Office Hours: M 12:00-2:00pm EST

Teaching Assistant:

Name:

Email:

Office: Zoom

Office Hours: T 12:00-2:00 EST

Readings

The required books for this course are Kristin Andrews, *The Animal Mind*, 2nd edition and Clive Wynne & Monique Udell, *Animal Cognition: Evolution, Behavior, and Cognition*, 2nd edition. You can also find these books at online retailers.

All other readings will be made available as PDFs.

Grading

Your grades will be determined as follows:

- **Papers (75%):** You will write three papers explaining and evaluating the ideas and arguments discussed in class. You will email this paper to animalminds21@gmail.com. For each paper, you can either create your own prompt or select from prompts that we create. The papers will each be 1,500 words, and will each count for 25% of your final grade. Paper 1 will be due at the end of the day on 3/7, Paper 2 will be due at the end of the day on 4/11, and Paper 3 will be due at the end of the day on 5/16.
- **Weekly Writing (15%):** Prior to each session, you will send an email to animalminds21@gmail.com with the subject heading Last Name Date (e.g. Smith 9/12) that briefly (a) summarizes one of the main ideas in the reading(s) and (b) presents a question or comment about this idea. This assignment is due no later than 1:30pm on the day of class and will be graded Pass/Fail.
- **Attendance and Participation (10%):** We expect regular attendance and thoughtful participation from all students. Our assessment of the quality of your performance on these items will account for 10% of your grade in this class.

Policies

- **Late Assignments:** Late papers will lose 1/3 letter grade for each day late. Late DW assignments will be accepted for half credit up until the start of class. Extensions and incompletes will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. If you want to request either, you must do so in advance.
- **Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to a dean. Plagiarism includes: not citing sources, copying material without quotes or references, and more. You are subject to the CAS guidelines on plagiarism: <https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>.
- **Academic Accommodations:** Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Schedule

- **2/2 - The problem of other minds**
Tom Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?"
Peter Carruthers, "The problem of other minds"
- **2/9 - Comparative psychology**
Kristin Andrews, "Understanding animal behavior"
Kristin Andrews, "The science of other minds"
- **2/16 - Philosophy of mind**
John Heil, "Cartesian dualism," "The identity theory"
John Heil, "Functionalism," "The intentional stance"
- **2/23 - Perception**
Clive Wynne & Monique Udell, "Other ways of seeing the world: 1"
Clive Wynne & Monique Udell, "Other ways of seeing the world: 2"
- **3/2 - Learning and memory**
Clive Wynne & Monique Udell, "Detecting cause and effect"
Clive Wynne & Monique Udell, "Remembering"
- **3/9 - Mindreading and self-awareness**
José Luis Bermúdez, "Mindreading in the animal kingdom"
David DeGrazia, "Self-awareness in animals"
- **3/16 - Communication and social awareness**
Clive Wynne & Monique Udell, "Communication and Language"
Kristen Andrews, "Social knowledge"
- **3/23 - Reason and consciousness**
Kristen Andrews, "Can animals think?"
Kristin Andrews, "Consciousness"
- **3/30 - Pain and emotion**
Sahar Akhtar, "Animal pain and welfare"
Jeffrey Masson and Susan McCarthy, "Love and friendship," "Grief and sadness"
- **4/6 - Invertebrates**
Peter Godfrey-Smith, "Other minds"
Bryce Huebner, "Minimal minds"
- **4/13 - Plants and machines**
Michael Pollan, "The intelligent plant"
Nick Bostrom, "Paths to superintelligence"
- **4/20 - Moral status**
Peter Singer, "All animals are equal"
Jeff Sebo, "The moral problem of other minds"

- **4/27 - Moral agency**

Jeffrey Masson & Susan McCarthy, "Compassion, rescue, and the altruism debate"

Dale Jamieson, "Animal agency"

- **5/4 - The meaning of life**

Tom Nagel, "The absurd"

Duncan Purves & Nicolas Delon, "Meaning in the lives of humans and other animals"