

Teaching the Animal: Human–Animal Studies across the Disciplines

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All of us who teach or plan to teach courses on human–animals relations (henceforth: HAR) owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Margo DeMello, editor of *Teaching the Animal*. She has produced a goldmine of a book. Containing essays commissioned specifically for this ambitious project, *Teaching the Animal* is a treasure trove of information, ideas, and advice for developing new courses or integrating HAR into existing courses. There has been a remarkable growth of interest in HAR in many academic disciplines, and a main function of this book is to encourage instructors to look beyond disciplinary boundaries and to borrow concepts, methodologies, theories, and resources to enhance their work. One of the many virtues of this book is that it is so well-organized. There are three sections: Humanities, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. Each chapter follows a consistent format: a history of how that particular discipline has viewed HAR, a summary of contemporary scholarship and theoretical issues, and suggestions for developing courses. Each chapter closes with very practical information, including at least one sample syllabus and a bibliography, and often strategies to stimulate student discussions and essays.

Although each chapter focuses on a specific discipline, several topics are addressed in most of the essays. For example, there is wide agreement that HAR courses should encourage the analysis of traditional constructions, narratives, concepts, perceptions, and ideologies. In particular, courses should scrutinize the conventional and pervasive human–animal and culture–nature dichotomies. Other topics deserving attention are the anthropocentric nature of academic disciplines, and assumptions about the value of animals, about species boundaries, and about the parallel subordination of animals and marginalized humans. Many of the book's authors recommend that HAR scholars strive to generate new methods of analysis and new conceptual structures.

Another common issue is the challenge of presenting material about inhumane treatment of animals to students who may become emotionally upset or who may resent feeling that their beliefs and behavior are being criticized. The authors describe strategies that have proved effective for them. Similarly, they offer helpful advice about how to “sell” HAR courses to administrators and colleagues who may be skeptical about the intellectual rigor of such courses, and may also be concerned that their purpose may be to promote activism rather than academic inquiry.

Many of the authors require that students engage in off-campus learning, either by visiting animal facilities, such as zoos, livestock housing, and dog shelters, or by doing community service at animal facilities.

Most of the authors recommend the use of films as part of the course material, and have included titles of films they have found useful. (I was surprised that no one recommended “The Pig Picture,” produced by the Humane Farming Association, a film which I have found very effective in presenting the issues surrounding modern methods of raising pigs.)

Humanities. In Chapter One (Cultural Studies), Potts and Armstrong examine the features of cultural studies that make it an ideal system in which to explore HAR. For example, cultural

studies draws on material from a range of fields and reveals how all knowledge is shaped by cultural and political emplacement.

Porter addresses the topic of films about animals in Chapter Two (Film Studies), noting the extent to which modern human understanding of animals is shaped by human representations of, rather than by direct interaction with, animals. He also maintains that films distort the experiences of animals because of their reliance on dominant models of storytelling.

Historical writing is the topic of Chapter Three (History), in which Montgomery and Kalof discuss historical writing that looks at animals as subjects, rather than objects, that is, as agents of their own history.

In Chapter Four (Literature), Rohman argues for the analysis of how nonhuman animals are represented in literary and cultural discourses. She stresses the importance of examining our narrative assumptions about other animals.

Engel and Jenni observe in Chapter Five (Philosophy) that the focus of ethics courses on HAR is the question of whether nonhuman animals possess moral standing, and, if so, how and why. Readers will appreciate their clear and concise exposition of various philosophical theories relating to HAR. In addition, they suggest ways in which questions about HAR can be introduced into other branches of philosophy, such as metaphysics and epistemology.

Waldau emphasizes in Chapter Six (Religious Studies) the need to encourage students to understand that the anthropocentric western religious tradition is alien to many non-western cultures. He recommends courses that inform students about how diversely people in different religious traditions and cultures have thought about HAR.

In Chapter Seven (Women's Studies), Gruen and Weil assert that animal studies and women's studies have joint theoretical concerns, in particular the process of "othering." They recommend the analysis of how patriarchal societies construct women and animals as different and thereby justify their objectification and oppression.

There is, surprisingly, no chapter in the Humanities section of the book on integrating HAR into Art and Art History courses. This is a curious omission.

Social Sciences. In Chapter Eight (Anthropology), Mullin points out that animals have always figured into anthropological research, but as "windows" to observe and analyze human behavior. In recent years, however, anthropologists have taken animal agency into account. Mullin illustrates how a course focusing on animals is conducive to demonstrating the connection between the four main subfields of anthropology.

Emel and Urbanik maintain in Chapter Nine (Geography) that geographers have long had an interest in the spaces and places of human encounters with animals, but have recently begun to investigate how the lives of the animals themselves, in urban as well as rural spaces, are affected by human political, economic, and social practices.

Many undergraduate courses in HAR include references to animal law, and therefore Chapter Ten (Law) will be of interest to instructors in many disciplines. Waldau notes that over 50% of American law schools now offer courses in animal law, and that almost all of these courses were initiated because students lobbied the administration for them. Students eager to make the law responsive to animals' interests must deal with the stark dualism in the legal system between legal "persons" and legal "things," a legal system in which animals have the status of "things" or property.

In Chapter Eleven (Psychology), Shapiro acknowledges that psychology has been slow to take an interest in HAR, in large part because of its history of aspiring to be recognized as an

experimental science in which animals are studied only as models of human phenomena. He suggests the development of courses on the ethics of using animals in research, the welfare of animals in research, and the treatment and assessment of animal abusers.

Risley-Curtiss confirms in Chapter Twelve (Social Work) that the goal of the social work profession is to enhance the functioning of human individuals and families. However, because 62% of American households have companion animals, HAR should be included in social work education, and attention should be given to the link between cruelty to animals and domestic violence, and, on the other hand, to the positive link between companion animals and a sense of security and comfort.

In Chapter Thirteen (Sociology), Joseph asserts that it is appropriate for sociologists to examine animals within the context of human environments and social systems because animals are an inescapable part of human society. HAR can be studied from the perspectives of functionalism, social conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and humanistic sociology.

Natural Sciences. There are, unfortunately, only two essays in this section of the book. In Chapter Fourteen (Agricultural Sciences), Fraser, Weary and von Keyserlingk observe that many students have little basic knowledge of how animals are utilized in human society, for example, that well over 90% of the animals used by humans are used for food. They describe courses accessible to students in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in animal sciences. Their goals are that students become informed about the contexts in which animals are utilized, and learn to evaluate the ethical issues that arise from human–animal interactions.

Goedeke comments, in Chapter Fifteen (Environmental Studies), on the need for courses that explore how humans, with their artifacts and institutions, fit into ecological communities. These courses may focus on understanding how the science and management of wildlife are themselves products of cultural and social factors, on identifying the tensions between human versus wildlife utilizations of the environment, and on exploring the interconnections between managing wildlife and managing people.

The book ends with two appendices. The first, titled “Marketing Human–Animal Studies at Your College,” offers important strategies for introducing HAR courses. Appendix 2 provides an extensive list of books, articles, journals, and films on HAR, as well as a list of academic programs and HAR organizations and websites.

This book will be a valuable and much-used resource for instructors in all disciplines. Lantern Books deserves commendation both for publishing it and for doing such an excellent production job. The layout of the book is very attractive. Lantern has decided also to publish the Humanities and Social Sciences sections separately, as two shorter books (as well as making several sections available as e-books). The shorter books have a lower price than the original and comprehensive one, but I strongly recommend that people purchase the longer book. It would be counterproductive to the aims of the book if humanists, social scientists, and natural scientists did not take the opportunity to learn from one another. I have gained many insights, and much pleasure, from reading chapters written by instructors in disciplines traditionally far removed from my own. DeMello’s project was undertaken to encourage instructors to utilize the work being done in other disciplines. The study of human–animal relationships is an interdisciplinary venture, and HAR courses will be most appealing and most successful when they draw on knowledge and material from many fields.