In the modern adult world it is very easy to get through an entire day without encountering even a faint reminder of the existence of the nonhuman world. But take a step inside the average child’s bedroom and you will find an incredible array of creatures—goldfish and teddy bears, cartoon chipmunks and puppy slippers, elephant noises and monkey business—spilling from every corner. It is almost as if one comes of age precisely by stepping through a filter that strips one of any animal fellow travelers. How did this happen, and what does it mean?

This course will explore how ideas about animals come to be mixed up with ideas about childhood in the modern West, as well as how adulthood comes to be something from which the animal is necessarily absent. We will look carefully at tales of feral children, chimpanzees raised by humans, Teddy Bears, Tarzan, “wire mothers,” neotenic cartoon animals, and Nature Deficit Disorder, among other wild and wonderful things. By the end, we will have a much deeper understanding of what our civilization has told us it means to be animal and human, child and adult.

No prerequisites: all students with an interest in animals, the environment, child development and psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and/or cultural studies are encouraged to enroll and explore.

Objectives and Goals

This course offers a deep and varied investigation of the historical roles that animals have played in human culture from the particular perspective of childhood and child development.

Course Format

Lecture, film screenings, and limited in-class discussion.

Course Materials


Excerpts on Canvas from novelists, poets, philosophers, historians, cultural critics, psychologists, and natural scientists.


Means of Evaluation

10 short assignments, due throughout the quarter (70-100%); optional Final Exam (30%)

Requirements:
This class is designed to reward steady attention and moderate effort rather than concentrated performance on exams and written projects. If you attend class and keep up with the weekly reflection exercises, it should be fairly easy to get a high grade. By the same token, repeatedly missing class assignments will quickly put you behind in a way that will be difficult or impossible to make up. Carefully note the requirements below and plan ahead around your other commitments this quarter.

Workload: Expect to spend 60 hours on this course, spread evenly over the quarter (~6 hrs / wk) and broken down as follows: pre-class reading and preparation: up to 2 hrs; in-class lectures and screenings: 2.5 hrs; after-class short assignments: 1.5 hrs. Note that on Thursdays we will have film screenings that will go beyond the official 7pm end time. I cannot compel you to stay after 7pm—and indeed I understand if you have legitimate conflicts that require you to leave—but unless you take the extra step of watching them outside of class, those half-watched films will gnaw at you for the rest of your life. Just sayin’.

Attendance: Given the nature of this course, it is vital that you make attendance a priority. Attendance will be occasionally be taken, unannounced; absences will result in a loss of 1/3 of the points for the week’s assignment (3% of your overall grade). Officially excused absences will not incur a penalty, but it is the responsibility of the student to bring the necessary note to the attention of the professor. App-based attendance taking may be used to collect attendance data.

Reflection Assignments. After each class meeting there will be a short assignment, indicated on the main syllabus and detailed in the weekly reading guide, due by 11:59pm the day after they are assigned. You are responsible for completing ANY TEN of these, provided at least FOUR of them are from Week 6 or later. Your work on these assignments will be graded on a simple 0-3 scale (Complete, satisfactory, on time = 3; Incomplete, deficient or late = 2; Incomplete, deficient, and late = 1; missing = 0). If you do more than 10 assignments, the lowest scores will be dropped.

Final examination (Th 6/2, 6:10-7pm in 2 Wellman). OPTIONAL. If you have completed your full complement of ten short assignments and/or are satisfied with the grade earned, you do not need to sit for the final exam. This is by far the best and most time-efficient option. If you wish, however, you may take the final exam and substitute the grade you earn there for up to three lower short assignment scores. The final exam will be a comprehensive test on all material (lecture, readings, screenings) for the course, consisting of short answer questions, passage identifications, and longer essays. To prepare for the final exam during the quarter, be sure to read all of the assigned texts and to attend all of the lectures.

Grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Assignments</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Due Wednesdays and Fridays by 11:59pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam (optional)</td>
<td>up to 30%</td>
<td>6:10-7pm Thursday 2 June in 2 Wellman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Plagiarism: I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism and other forms of cheating. If you are in a time crunch and are tempted to pass off someone else’s work as your own out of desperation, don’t! It is much better to come talk to me ahead of time to arrange a compromise on the due date. You will incur a small penalty but avoid an F and a referral to Student Judicial Affairs (the minimum penalty for cheating). See the official UCD academic dishonesty policy here (https://ossja.ucdavis.edu/code-academic-conduct).

Lateness: a standard 1 pt (out of 3) grade penalty (e.g. 3 to 2) for each 24-hour period after the listed due date applies. Exceptions are granted only for serious reasons, and then only when arranged with me at least 12 hours ahead of the due date (late-breaking documented medical emergencies excepted).

NOTE: This syllabus and all other course handouts will be posted on the HUM 4 Canvas site. Important reading links, images, etexts, writing guides, class policies, and FAQs will also be posted there. Make it a habit to check the site on a regular basis.
**Week One: Introductions**

**Tu 3/29** Preparation: none

In-class: Introductions and Course Overview

**Reflection 1:** Animal Introduction. Write up a short “autobiography in animals” in which you describe your life to this point through the nonhuman animals that have impacted you in memorable ways. This might include pets, of course, but also vermin (those lice that so embarrassed you, the cockroaches in the kitchen), plush toys, TV characters, and wild animal encounters, etc. Describe them as completely as possible, and include a reflection on what influence they have had on you individually and collectively. 300 words minimum, uploaded via the Assignments page on Canvas. Due Wednesday 3/30 by 11:59pm.

**Th 3/31** Preparation: read excerpts from Kellogg and Kellogg, *The Ape and the Child* (C)

In class: film, *Project Nim* (2011, 93min)

**Reflection 2:** Pick any one of the characters, human or nonhuman, in *Project Nim* and write the transcript of an imaginary interview with them (2pp double spaced). Try to illuminate something that the documentary overlooks or merely suggests. Upload your response to the Assignments page by Friday 4/1 at 11:59pm.

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**Week Two: Lost Siblings**

**Tu 4/5** Preparation: begin Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (parts I and II, to p103)

In class: lecture, Adopting Apes

**Reflection 3:** browse the images of the early Soviet chimpanzee adoption experiments of N.N. Ladygina-Kohts ([http://www.kohts.ru/ladygina-kohts_n_n./iche/html/apc.html](http://www.kohts.ru/ladygina-kohts_n_n./iche/html/apc.html)). (Click on ‘След.’ (an abbreviation of the Russian word for “next”) at the top right corner to access the appendix images. Choose one or two images or compound images, paste it/ them into a Word file, and write a 300-word (min.) response to it or, alternatively, edit the image(s) in some significant way—re-contextualize, re-mediate in paint or needlepoint, radically crop and collage, etc. Your critical or creative response should be uploaded to Assignments by Wednesday 4/6 at 11:59pm.

**Th 4/7** Preparation: continue reading Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (to pt IV, p209)

In class: film: *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011, 105min)

**Reflection 4:** While great apes are usually favored in super-intelligent animal SF for obvious reasons, there are plenty of examples of genius dolphins, dogs, mice, rats, ants, etc. running around the pages of literature. Write a pitch for a film franchise “Like *Planet of the Apes* but with X,” where X is some unexpected biological species that suddenly becomes the dominant intelligence on earth. Sketch out the details of plot, character, dramatic conflict, etc., in a proposal to get funding from Hollywood investors. 300 words min, due Friday 4/8 by 11:59pm.

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**Week Three: Reports from the Lab**

**Tu 4/12** Preparation: finish *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (Parts V and VI, to p308)

In class: lecture: Ethology and Child Psychology; discussion of Fowler

**Reflection 5:** The California National Primate Research Center ([https://cnprc.ucdavis.edu/](https://cnprc.ucdavis.edu/)) administered by the UCD campus (ride your bike out to where Hutchison Drive tees into Pedrick Road if you want to see it for yourself from outside) has recently been in the news regarding allegations that it mistreated macaque monkeys being used to develop brain-implant technology for a company called Neuralink. Research the issues here and defend your opinion about whether any wrongdoing was committed here in a narrow technical sense and/or a broadly moral one, including your thoughts about the presence of the CNPRC on our campus. Write up your research and argument (~2pp) and upload it to Assignments by Wednesday 4/13 at 11:59pm.

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**Week Three: Reports from the Lab (cont’d)**

**Th 4/14** Preparation: read Franz Kafka, “Report to an Academy” (C)
read J. B. Watson, “The Dangers of Too Much Mother Love” (C)
read Blum, “Untouched by Human Hands,” “Nature of Love,” “Perfect Mother” (C)
In class: film, Human Nature (2002)

Reflection 6: Human Nature makes a number of implicit claims about the motivations behind the training of animals and children to suppress their innate desires. What are these claims, in your own words? And to what extent do you agree with them? Your 300-word response should be uploaded by Friday 4/15 at 11:59pm.

Week Four: Feral Children
Tu 4/19 Preparation: read Benzaquén, from Encounters with Wild Children (Ch1-2) (C)
In class: lecture, The History and Meaning of Feral Children

Reflection 7: On Canvas is a set of lists of wild children taken from Adriana Benzaquén’s book. Choose one wild child and produce a verbal or visual portrait of him/her/it. You can base your portrait on information you find online or in the library, or you may allow your imagination some free rein. 300 words min. Due by Wednesday 4/20 at 11:59pm.

Th 4/21 Preparation: read Shattuck, “Prisoner Without a Crime,” from The Forbidden Experiment
In class: film, The Wild Child (1970; 85min)

Reflection 8: The Wild Child has often been called Truffaut’s most personal film (he wrote, directed, and starred in it). Speculate about what a filmmaker in particular might find in this subject matter that speaks directly to questions about his artistic project and his chosen medium. You can do this purely as a thought experiment, but if you want to you might look into Truffaut’s biography to some degree. 300 words min. by Friday 4/22 at 11:59pm.

Week Five: Model Savages
Tu 4/26 Preparation: read Kipling, “Mowgli’s Brothers” “Kaa’s Hunting,” “The Cat that Walked by Himself” (C)
In class: lecture: Imperialism and the Wild Man

Reflection 9: Kipling was born in Bombay and in many ways embodied the perspective of the English imperial administrative class, including its sense of racial and civilizational superiority to nonwhite peoples. Read George Orwell’s mixed assessment of Kipling (http://orwell.ru/library/reviews/kipling/english/e_rkip) and write about the reasons that we might want to distance ourselves from his worldview. How strong is the case against Kipling? Do you see particularly strong evidence or counterevidence? 300 words min., due Wednesday 4/27 by 11:59pm.

Th 4/28 Preparation: read Edgar Rice Burroughs, from Tarzan of the Apes (1912) (C)
In class: film, Tarzan and his Mate (1934, 104min)

Reflection 10: From Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O’Sullivan’s premarital dalliances to Alexander Skarsgård’s abs, the Tarzan franchise has always emphasized the sexuality of its main characters. The Tarzan movie we are watching, Tarzan and his Mate (1934), was notoriously risqué for its time.) I’d like you to come up with 3 distinct theories about why the premise of Tarzan might invite such sexual frankness, writing up each in about 125 words. The idea here is to get you to 1) practice articulating an obvious interpretation (an important skill!); 2) push you to seek out more complex reasons; and 3) encourage you to float even more radical ideas. 375 words, due Friday 4/29 by 11:59pm.

Week Six: Squee! Nurturing and Critiquing Cuteness
Tu 5/3 Preparation: read Lawrence, “Neoteny in American Perceptions of Animals” (C)
read Gould, “Homage to Mickey Mouse” (C)
read Kingsley, from Water-Babies (C)
read Lerer, “On Beyond Darwin” from *Children’s Literature* (C)

In Class: lecture, Cuteness, Human and Animal; short film, “The Silver Fox Experiments” (Belayev)

**Reflection 11:** Kawaii tattoo design. *Kawaii* (“tiny” or “cute” in Japanese) is an aesthetic that emphasizes neotenic facial proportions (take a gander online if you are not already familiar with it). For this assignment, the Kawaii Yakuza has come knocking to demand that you tattoo an image in the kawaii style somewhere on your body. (Why? That’s a long story.) Pick a kawaii image that speaks to you (or invent one of your own) and write out an argument about why this image should be tattooed on a given body part. What does the image mean to you, and how does it function as a personal statement? Remember: tattoos are forever, so you’d better have a justification that you think will survive the years. Write up your answer (image plus 300-words min) and upload to Canvas by Wednesday 5/4 at 11:59pm.

**Th 5/5 Preparation:** read Daniel Harris, “Cuteness” and “Baby Talk” (C)

read Christine Yano, from “Kitty Backlash,” from *Pink Globalization* (C)

In Class: film, *Milo and Otis* (90 min)

**Reflection 12:** On Canvas site are two recent and sophisticated theoretical investigations of “cuteness” as an aesthetic category (Merish and Ngai). Choose one of these articles, read it, and then write up a response that quickly summarizes the main argument in your own words and then engages one statement or facet of the argument. If you wish, you may apply these arguments to *Milo and Otis* or another cultural text. Upload your 300-word (min) response by 11:59pm on Friday 5/6.

**Week Seven: Moralizing with Pets**

**Tu 5/10 Preparation:** read from Grier, *Pets in America* (C)

read Sivils, “Juvenile Environmental Literature” (C)

read Ascione, from *Children and Animals* (C)

In Class: lecture, The Biological and Cultural History of Pets

**Reflection 13:** As Sivils details, some of the earliest didactic animal fables in the US appeared in children’s magazines and story collections. I have placed scans of two of these—*The Juvenile Magazine* (1802) and *Peter Parley’s Tales* (1830)—on Canvas. Pick one tale from either source and discuss it from the imagined perspective of a 19th-century reader (a rambunctious child, a hunter, a Native American, a schoolteacher, etc.). Upload your 300-word (min) response by 11:55pm on Wednesday 5/11.

**Th 5/12 Preparation:** read Yi-Fu Tuan, from *The Making of Pets: Domination and Affection* (C)

read Ascione, from *Children and Animals* (C)

In Class: film, *Lassie Come Home* (1943, 89 min)

**Reflection 14:** Our reading from Yi-Fu Tuan makes a powerful case that petkeeping is as much about domination and control of animals as it is about affection for them. This can be a pretty hard pill to swallow for pet lovers, to say the least! Do you agree with Tuan? Partially? Are there important distinctions to be made between pets like dogs, who have been coevolving with humans for thousands of years, and somebody’s pet chinchilla or alligator? If you’d like, you can use *Lassie Come Home* as a source of evidence. Upload your 300-word (min) response by 11:59pm on Friday 5/13.

**Week Eight: The Animal’s-Eye View**

**Tu 5/17 Preparation:** read Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty*, Part I (to p100)

read von Uexküll, from *A Stroll the Worlds of Animals and Men* (C)

In class: lecture, Representing Animal Worlds

**Reflection 15:** One of the classic philosophical investigations of the problem of consciousness in analytic philosophy is Thomas Nagel’s “What is it Like to be a Bat?” (1974), which introduces
some difficulties into the study of von Uexküll’s “lifeworlds.” (I’ve posted his essay if you are curious.) Nagel ends by hazily proposing that we figure out how “to describe, at least in part, the subjective character of experiences in a form comprehensible to beings incapable of having those experiences” (449). Though Nagel is wary of the imagination as a means of doing this, *I* want you to use your imagination to try to get at the experience of another species. Imagine that you are an octopus, or a tardigrade, or a dragonfly, or any other nonhuman animal, but have somehow retained your full understanding of human language and human senses. Your job is to explain to a human audience “what it is like” to be your species. What is it like, for instance, to squeeze your octopus self through a tiny crevice? Is there an analogy to a particular human experience? Pick an animal about which you know something, or spend a little time learning about that species’s special sensory and neurological endowments. 300 words, due Wed 5/18 by 11:59pm.

**Week Nine: Animal Cruelty and Child Welfare**

**Tu 5/24** Preparation: read Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty*, part III (to p181)
read Pearson, from *Rights of the Defenseless* (C)
In class: lecture, Human and Animal Rights

**Reflection 17:** An alien spaceship lands in your front yard and you—being the gracious host your parents raised you to be—invite the creatures inside for a steak dinner. After confirming that you are of the dominant species on the planet, the aliens happily consent. Midway through the meal, one of the aliens reaches down and plucks up your housecat, Freckles, and pops her into its elastic maw. A silence falls upon the room, and the alien—sensing its *faux pas*—earnestly asks for an explanation of the difference in ethical bearing due the cow on the plate vs. the cat on the windowsill (now in one of its 17 digestive pouches). As delicately as possible (for there may be an intergalactic diplomatic incident brewing here) explain to the aliens how we do things, animal-wise, around these parts. Use dialogue form and include the aliens’ clarifying questions to further the inquiry. 300 words minimum, due Wednesday 5/25 by 11:59pm.

**Th 5/26** Preparation: finish Sewell, *Black Beauty*, part IV (to end, p193)
In class: film, *The Plague Dogs* (1982, 103 min)

**Reflection 18:** *The Plague Dogs* ends on an ambiguous note. Your task is to write a 1-2 page fanfic ending that clarifies Rowf and Snitter’s fates in any way you choose. 300 words min, due Friday 5/27 by 11:59pm.

**Week Ten: Graduating into the Human**

**Tu 5/31** Preparation: read Haraway, “Training in the Contact Zone,” from *When Species Meet* (C)
In class: film, *Babe* (1995, 91 min)

**Reflection 19:** One way of understanding *Babe* is as an illustration of and meditation on the concept of “meritocracy,” the system that aims to parcel out social inequality based on certain designated individual competencies and attainments. Babe is saved from the slaughterhouse and allowed to survive past the holidays because of his way with sheep; a life in middle management awaits. For this assignment, I want you to reimagine your own rise so far through the institutions
of American meritocracy as a tale of an animal rising above its “natural” station through training, self-mastery, and the instruction of others. 300 words minimum--and it had better have a snappy title. Due Wednesday 6/1 by 11:59pm.

**Th 6/2**

**NO CLASS:** Please spend a fraction of the time you would be in class responding to the online course evaluation circulated by the Humanities program. I am very interested in hearing your thoughts about what was most and least valuable to you intellectually; future Aggies will thank you! Good luck on the rest of your finals and coursework!

**OPTIONAL Final Exam: 6:10-7pm in 2 Wellman Hall**