

ANIMALS IN ANCIENT THOUGHT

Dr Pamela Zinn, Tuesdays & Thursdays 2-3:20pm, Spring 2018



How human are animals? Or, how animal are humans? Are there fundamental differences between us? Can animals think, feel, and reason as we do, or do they act through instinct alone? Do they have language or free will? What consequences do such things have for how we treat them? To this day, these sorts of questions are the topic of lively debate — not only among pet owners, but also among scientists and the movements for animal rights and wildlife conservation. There was even outcry among theologians when Pope Francis recently assured a boy, who was mourning the loss of his dog, that heaven is open to all of G-d's creatures. This debate was no less lively in antiquity, and the responses no less varied. The horses of Achilles were immortal and could predict the future. The raven who called 'Hail Caesar!' every time the emperor walked into the forum was awarded a state funeral. Aristotle denied reason to animals (as well as to slaves, women, and children), and Empedocles thought that he had been one.

In this course we will study the ancient Greek and Roman views on the nature of animals and our relationship with them. We will look at evidence from philosophy, literature, history, and the archaeological record — from the eighth century B.C.E. through the third century C.E. Topics will include domestication, husbandry, animal sacrifice, animal minds and souls, social contracts with animals, animal gladiators, and animal ethics. We will investigate what concerns the ancients prioritized, what questions they posed, and what answers they offered; we will also compare these to our modern debates and practices. Tracing the evolution of these ancient views, across time and in different contexts, will help us to ask: how much do someone's theoretical and practical commitments influence his or her views on animals? It may well inspire us to rethink our own!



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