

[Browse By Subject](#)
[Browse By Series](#)
[New Books](#)
[Featured Authors](#)
[Columbia Business School Publishing](#)
[Distributed Presses](#)
[Electronic Resources](#)
[Exam and Desk Copies](#)
[Sign Up For Our Newsletters](#)
[About the Press](#)
[Home](#)
SPECIAL OFFERS

[CUP blog >](#)

 SEARCH WITHIN
CUP BOOKS

 POWERED BY 

 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ANIMALS -- A SERIES
EDITED BY GARY L. FRANCIONE AND GARY STEINER

Critical Perspectives on Animals

Edited by Gary L. Francione and Gary Steiner

With this series we seek to promote and give crucially needed direction to the emerging interdisciplinary field of animal studies. A generation ago the tendency in scholarship was to focus questions pertaining to animals within narrow disciplinary boundaries. This tendency has been replaced by an increasing recognition of the importance of crossing disciplinary boundaries and exploring the affinities as well as the differences between the approaches of fields such as philosophy, law, sociology, political theory, ethology, and literary studies to questions pertaining to animals. At stake in these explorations is an appreciation of the subjective experience and the moral status of animals as well as of the nature and place of human beings.

The ancient Greeks conceived of humanity as a form of life located between divinity and animality. Humans should aspire to emulate the gods and resist our animal impulses. The more we permit ourselves to resemble animals, with their lack of rationality and their submission to bodily desires, the more we permit our nature to be corrupted; the more we raise ourselves above animals and regulate our actions through the guidance of reason, the more we render ourselves godlike. The Greeks thereby set the tone for the subsequent history of Western thinking about animals, which characterized humans as fundamentally superior to nonhuman animals. There is nothing to be gained from conceiving of animals in terms of their similarities with human beings, just as there is nothing to be gained from conceiving of human existence in the light of animality. Moreover, the human uses of animals are morally unproblematic in principle in that animals either exist for the sake of satisfying human desires or, at the very least, are not the kind of beings toward which we can have any direct moral obligations.

The path toward contemporary interdisciplinary studies of questions pertaining to animals was paved by three primary developments in intellectual history. First, post-Enlightenment thinkers such as the Romantics reacted to and largely rejected the proposition that human beings are superior to “mere” nature. Second, Darwin’s theories challenged the notion that the differences between humans and nonhumans are matters of kind rather than matters of degree. Third, postmodernism critiqued the possibility of objectivity in its assertion of the relativity of all truth claims to particular historical, cultural, and conceptual frameworks and points of view. Although each one of these developments remains the subject of heated controversy and disagreement, their cumulative force has been an increasing recognition of the need to question traditional presuppositions, beliefs, and values about animals and human beings and to explore the similarities and differences between the two from a perspective that does not commence within a framework of human superiority.

To engage in this sort of critical questioning is not only to rethink traditional conceptions of animality and humanity; it is, just as importantly, to embark upon a rethinking of the very terms of critical inquiry—the ways in which we pose fundamental questions, the basic concepts and language that we use in posing and thinking through such questions, and the forms of evidence and standards of proof we employ in assessing the legitimacy of different possible answers. To do all these things is to place the human, if only implicitly, at the center of critical inquiry alongside the animal. It is to demand a radical rethinking of the very idea of critical inquiry, to acknowledge that any specific conception of critical inquiry presupposes an answer to the question what is human, and to recognize precisely what the Western intellectual tradition was unable or perhaps simply unwilling to recognize: that we genuinely grasp our humanity only through a reflection on our relationship to animality, and that by seeking to distance ourselves from animals we render unattainable the goal of ethics, understood in the Heideggerian sense of finding our proper place within the larger cosmic scheme of things. To find ourselves is, in a deep sense, to find ourselves alongside and in common cause with animals.

The goals of this series are thus ambitious and urgent: to contribute to contemporary reflections on the basic terms and methods of critical inquiry, to do so by focusing on fundamental questions arising out of the relationships and confrontations between humans and nonhuman animals, and ultimately to enrich our appreciation of the nature and ethical significance of nonhuman animals by providing a forum for the interdisciplinary exploration of questions and problems that have traditionally been confined within narrowly circumscribed disciplinary boundaries. The following are some central themes that will be examined by books published in the series:

- Historical and contemporary theories of the moral status of animals
- The legal status of animals in Anglo-American and other legal traditions, and questions pertaining to the adequacy of existing legal conceptions of animals
- The potential of contemporary approaches in continental philosophy to shed light on the nature and moral status of animals
- The contributions made by contemporary literary theory to our understanding of the nature and moral status of animals
- Sociological, literary, and philosophical reflections on the ways in which human beings represent themselves, animals, and the human-animal boundary
- Developments in contemporary ethology and psychology that enrich our understanding of the cognitive and affective capacities of animals
- Representations of animals and the human-animal boundary in the fine arts
- The economics of treating animals as commodities, and the economic implications of limiting or abolishing the status of animals as property