2018 NEH Summer Seminar

Animal Minds and Animal Ethics

June 19-July 12, 2018
SUNY Potsdam

Seminar Leader:
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Applications Due by February 12th

to
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2018 NEH Summer Seminar:  
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“Rico, get the tyrex.” Rico ambles into the next room, picks up Tyrex, the blue dinosaur, from among a jumble of stuffed toys, and carries it back with him. “Rico, get the ball… the Santa Claus… the sock, the white bunny…” Again, and again, Rico leaves the room, and returns with the named object. Rico’s linguistic performance would be pretty good for a small child. For a border collie, it is astounding.

Aldrin was a sickly little fellow, and didn’t play with the others very much. In fact, he usually didn’t do much besides sit next to his babysitter and hug her leg. But one day his babysitter played a terrible joke, and left a live turtle in front of him. Aldrin was so startled he climbed high in a tree to escape the horror. Later that day when it was time to head back to camp, the babysitters realized that Aldrin wasn’t with them. They never saw him come down from the tree. Then the babysitters noticed that Cecep, the leader of the group of youngsters, wasn’t around either. When they went back to where the turtle had been, they found Aldrin and Cecep perched high in different trees. Cecep’s tree was closest to the path, and he looked back at Aldrin, caught his eye, and then moved on to the next tree. Aldrin followed Cecep from tree to tree until they reached the path back to camp. Though Cecep had been looking back at Aldrin from time to time, when he got down to the ground he just scampered away, joining the rest of the group, with Aldrin following. Cecep’s social behavior would be pretty good for a small child. For an orangutan, it is astounding.

Tommy was a child actor, starring in a Hollywood movie and performing live in New York. It sounds like a dream come true, but as for many child actors, as he got older things started going wrong. Tommy’s downfall wasn’t due to financial excess or substance abuses. Rather, he just grew up into a normal guy. And he was treated like any normal guy of his kind in our culture—he was locked away in a cage. Tommy was left behind bars in a small concrete cage, prisoner in a dark, damp shed, fed and watered, but kept in hiatus until someone might want to use him again. You see, Tommy is a chimpanzee, and chimpanzees are property under the law. There are some regulations regarding how we handle them—much like the regulations regarding hazardous materials. But Tommy doesn’t have any legal rights because he is not a legal person. For a chimpanzee, it is just another day in America.

The scientific field of animal cognition investigates what animals can do, how they do it, and how the capacities are evolutionarily related across species. The philosophical field of animal minds examines the concepts used in these explanations, the assumptions underlying the experimental set ups, and works to integrate the sciences of the mind and behavior in order to better understand mentality generally. The ethical implications of these debates are profound. In the last few years, The Nonhuman Rights Project, headed by lawyer Stephen Wise, has been filing lawsuits on behalf of Tommy and other chimpanzees, and most recently an elephant, who
are being held in horrific conditions. Wise argues that these animals have autonomy, and since they are being held against their will, he is asking the judges to order a writ of habeas corpus to release the animals to a sanctuary. The argument for autonomy is defended by briefs from animal cognition researchers who testify to the cognitive capacities of chimpanzees and elephants, and from philosophers who offer arguments about the relationship between cognitive capacities and personhood--and who argue that persons need not be humans, or members of human society.

In the seminar, we will be examining philosophy and animal research (with some infant research too!) to examine the claims made supporting the Nonhuman Rights Project or other arguments for the moral standing of other species. In our analysis of what counts as autonomy, we will focus on the relationship between metacognition and social cognition, or self-knowledge and other knowledge-in nonhuman animals, and then use that analysis to examine the moral standing of nonhuman animals and the evolution of morality. We will start by examining the kinds of representations and beliefs possible for those who lack language, including propositional, perceptual, causal, logical, and normative thinking, while looking at some research on physical and logical cognition in apes, corvids, dogs, and other species. We will also look at recent reports of bee cognitive capacities, social learning, and tool use, and examine what sorts of mental representations might be needed to explain the bee behavior. We will then turn to examine metacognition and self-knowledge in other animals. Current research on primates, rats, and dolphins suggest that these species have some understanding of their own mental states, and can monitor how certain they are, and how well they remember. There is a debate between nonrepresentational accounts of these behaviors offered by José Bermudez and Peter Carruthers, and representational accounts given by Joelle Proust. Emotional states such as curiosity will also be examined, and we will read new work by Peter Carruthers on questioning without metacognition. In addition, we will examine episodic memory, a kind of memory in which one is thought to re-experience past experience. In the third week we will focus on the question of animal social cognition, with particular emphasis on mindreading/theory of mind, given the wealth of new empirical findings and theoretical discussion on this topic. We will read the recent ape false belief studies by Krupenye et al. and Buttelmann et al., and the critiques of these studies by Tyler Burge and myself. In the fourth week participants will present their projects, and we will discuss some ethical implications of the cognition research. Here we will focus on the question of animal personhood and the recent court cases filed by the Nonhuman Personhood Project.

Participants will share their seminar goals during the first week of the seminar, and in the last week we will take time to revisit those goals. I envision seminar participants offering support, critique, and guidance to one another, as desired.

The readings for each week will be along the lines of the papers listed below. Specific articles will be chosen given the most recent work on the topics, and based on the interest of the seminar participants.

Week 1 Introduction to ethical arguments and mental states


Week 2: Metacognition and memory

Week 3: Mindreading or theory of mind
• Tyler Burge (forthcoming) Do infants and animals attribute mental states? *Psychological Review*.

Week 4: Individual presentations and ethical implications
• Nonhuman Rights Project philosopher brief (2017)
APPLICATION
SUNY Potsdam NEH Faculty Development Program
Summer Seminar for Faculty

Our summer seminar is offered to faculty of the Associated Colleges of the St. Lawrence Valley (SUNY Potsdam, Clarkson University, St. Lawrence University, and SUNY Canton). The seminars provide area faculty with a valuable opportunity to enrich their knowledge of the subjects that they teach and research by working with distinguished outside experts, by studying alongside other instructors and scholars, and by undertaking individual projects of their own design.

There are up to eight participants selected for each seminar. Through research, reflection, and discussion with the seminar director and with other seminar members, participants have an opportunity to deepen their understanding of their field and improve their ability to convey that understanding to others. Participants are expected to take part fully in the work of the seminar and to complete all seminar projects.

Although writing may be encouraged by seminar directors, lengthy papers typical of graduate courses are not required. Seminar topics are broad enough to accommodate a wide range of interests. The topics allow participants to address significant questions, explore major texts, and extend their thinking beyond disciplinary concerns.

Eligibility
To be eligible applicants must be members of the faculty of SUNY Potsdam or faculty of one of the Associated Colleges. Faculty members who have participated in previous SUNY Potsdam NEH Seminars are eligible to apply, but preference will be given to those who have not previously participated.

Selection Criteria
The selection committee will review applications and select participants on the basis of (1) applicant’s qualifications to do the work of the seminar and make a contribution to it; (2) the conception and organization of the applicant’s proposed study project in relation to the seminar topic; (3) the potential value of that project to other members of the seminar.

Stipend and Conditions of Award
Individuals selected to participate in the four-week seminar will receive a stipend of $3500 and an allowance of up to $500 for purchase of library books and travel related to the seminar project.

Participants are required to attend all seminar sessions and to engage fully in the work of the seminar. During the tenure of the seminar they may not undertake other professional duties that will interfere with their participation in the seminar (in particular, they may not be teaching Summer School in tandem with participating in the seminar).

Immediately following the completion of the seminar, participants will be asked to submit an evaluation. In addition, ten months following the seminar, participants will provide an evaluation of the impact the seminar had on their profession development with particulars about papers given, scholarship published, and curricula projects implemented as a result of participation in the seminar.

Applications may be submitted by ordinary post to the NEH Program Chair, Professor
APPLICATION MATERIALS
Please assemble your application by drafting the following documents:

1. Application Cover Sheet
   - Applicant's Title and Name
   - Home Address
   - Work Address
   - Email Address
   - Telephone Number (Work/Cell)
   - Major Field of Applicant

2. Description of Objectives
   Applicants must write an essay describing their objectives in applying to the seminar. Close attention should be given to the preparation of the description of objectives because it will be considered carefully by the committee members as they make their selections. This essay should include any relevant personal and academic information. The essay should address reasons for applying to the seminar; the applicant's interest, both academic and personal, in the subject of the seminar, qualifications to do the work of the seminar and to make a contribution to it; what the applicant wants to accomplish in the seminar; and the relation of the seminar to the applicant's professional responsibilities. The descriptive material provided about the seminar should be read carefully because the committee may request that particular information be given in the description of objectives.

   The application essay should be NO MORE THAN three to four double-spaced pages. Be sure to address the following questions in relation to the proposed project:
   a. The specific study, research, or curricular project, including the basic ideas, problems, and questions that are of interest, with a specific concrete plan of investigation and a statement of its rationale.
   b. If the proposed project is part of a long-term undertaking, the present state of the larger undertaking and how the summer project fits in.
   c. The relation of the study to the applicant's immediate and long-range objectives as a teacher and scholar.
   d. Other information relevant to the proposed project.

3. Professional History
   An application must include the professional history form (included below). A C.V. may be attached but will not be accepted in lieu of the professional history.
Professional History Form

1. Applicant’s Name and Institutional Affiliation (include department).

2. Applicant’s Field of Specialization

3. Full Time _______ Part Time _______

4. Number of Years Teaching __________

5. Education (list institutions, dates of attendance, major field and graduate degrees

6. Graduate Work in field of seminar

7. Teaching/Research interests in field of seminar

8. Sabbatical Leaves or other released time for research or study (specify when, where, and for what purpose)

9. Employment History (give institutions, dates, major responsibilities)
10. Courses Taught during the last two years

11. Academic Awards and Grants (mention any special awards or professional distinctions)

12. Previous SUNY Potsdam NEH Seminars

13. Most significant Publications and Professional Activities (This list should be selective and not all inclusive.)