

Animals Are Our Relations

Preface

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Two firsts are to be celebrated. The first is the inaugural volume of this journal, *Relations*, and the second is *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, the first conference of its kind in Italy. Together, they signify the continuing emergence of Human-Animal Studies in Italy and across the world.

I understand Human-Animal Studies (HAS) to mean the study of our relations with animals and their relations with us. “Our interest lies in the intersections between human lives and human cultures”, writes Margo DeMello, “and those of nonhuman animals, whether real or virtual” (DeMello 2010, XI).

Ken Shapiro, co-founder of the Animals and Society Institute (ASI) and Editor-in-Chief of *Society & Animals* elaborates

HAS is the only field that directly investigates relationships between human and nonhuman animals and their environment. The forms of bonds, attachments, interactions, and communications under investigation are impressively variable because of (1) the number of species of nonhuman animals, (2) the ingenious (and often exploitative) ways that humans have used other animals, and (3) the ways that humans view other animals. These latter views also have played a critical role in the complex and often contradictory ways that we compare ourselves to them. The different names of the current field reveal these contradictions in their disregard of the fact that humans are also animals. (Shapiro 2008, 1)

The journal *Society & Animals* began publication in 1993. Since then, HAS has established itself in the humanities and social sciences as a legitimate field of academic endeavour. For example, the ASI website (www.animalsandsociety.org) publishes the details of courses in nearly 10 countries, including the USA, Canada, Britain, Germany, Australia, New Zea-

land, Israel, Poland, Sweden, and Puerto Rico. There is also information about 15 journals, seven listservs, syllabi, and books.

By its very nature, HAS is trans-disciplinary bringing together such diverse fields as anthropology and psychology, criminology and religious studies. With such significant growth across the world covering many different subjects and perspectives, it is to be expected that HAS develops various specialised research areas, including Anthrozoology (<http://www.anthrozoology.org>) and Critical Animal Studies (<http://www.critical-animalstudies.org>). Indeed, the focus of this journal, *Relations*, is “research adopting a non-anthropocentric ethical perspective on both interspecific and intraspecific relationships between all life species – humans included – and between these and the abiotic environment” (*Relations* 2012).

Any new academic endeavour experiencing rapid growth throughout the world is in need of an international organisation that provides a platform for its development. In his Commendation, Dr. Rod Bennison briefly describes the formation of Minding Animals International (MAI), which seeks to “act as a bridge between academia and advocacy and is a network of academics, artists, activists and advocates, dedicated to the study and protection of all planetary life through the advancement of Animal Studies” (*Minding Animals* 2012). Dr. Bennison and myself welcome you, as MAI’s Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive respectively, to our third conference in Delhi, India, January 14-20, 2015. Sign up for our e-newsletter to stay in touch: <http://www.mindinganimals.com>.

In addition to triennial international conferences and bimonthly e-newsletters, MAI partners with others to co-sponsor conferences throughout the world which helps to further HAS in the academy. One such conference took place in May 2012 and was organised by Minding Animals Italy – MAnITa (<http://mindinganimalsitaly.wordpress.com>). The two-day conference was a huge success and played an important role in helping to establish this journal, *Relations*.

Keynote speaker Professor Marc Bekoff addressed participants with a two-part presentation which explored *Animal Emotions and Wild Justice*. The program also included plenary panels and parallel workshop sessions. The titles of presentations indicate the trans-disciplinary nature of HAS. The plenary panels included, for example, *The Emotional Lives of Animals: a Christian Perspective*; *Antispeciesism: Morality and Politics*; *Non-Human Animal Emotions and Genetic Engineering*; and *The Contemporary Debate on Experimentation*. Whereas the workshops addressed such issues as *Animal or Human? Liminal Identities in Margaret Atwood and Alice Walker*; *Advancing Understanding of Animal Science*; and my own paper, *Animal Rights: Moral Crusade or Political Movement?*.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Alma Massaro and her colleagues and everyone at the University of Genoa for such an important and successful event.

In a recent conversation with scholar and author Paul Waldau, he made the observation that the academic study of our relations with animals in Human-Animal Studies was a necessary prerequisite to persuading society to embrace moral and legal rights for animals (<http://www.paulwaldau.com>). As someone who has been personally committed to animal rights since 1974 and worked professionally in the animal rights movement in the UK and USA since 1976, I was taken aback by his comment. Even though I had co-founded the Animals and Society Institute with Ken Shapiro in 2005, it had never occurred to me that what Paul Waldau had to say was, indeed, true. Now, I realise he is correct. I believe it is necessary for us to peel away the layers of contradiction and confusion which are the hallmarks to our relations with animals. Only then we will be able to see how animal rights is not in competition with human rights as they are essentially one and the same. Most social movements appear to have corresponding fields of academic study. Animal rights need not and should not be the exception. This is why I am proud to have been invited to participate in both *The Emotional Lives of Animals* conference and the publication of the inaugural issues of *Relations*.

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