

Fri Oct 9, Environment Class Notes, Biodiversity and ‘the animal issue’

***Environment*, chapter 17 (pp. 376-391): Preserving Earth’s Biological Diversity**

- Why were bald eagles going extinct in the US? What does the fact that we have a specific law protecting eagles say about our probable motives for protecting various species?
- What distinguishes **genetic diversity** from **ecosystem diversity**?
- What is **genetic engineering**? How does it work, and where has it produced the most visible changes?
- What are some of the reasons put forth to defend biodiversity? Which of these arguments do you find to be the most persuasive or unpersuasive?
- What’s the difference between **background extinction** and periodic **mass extinctions**?
- Characteristics that may lead to **endangered** or **threatened** status in species
 - Localized range
 - Requiring a large territory
 - Living on islands (defined biologically to include **habitat fragmentation**)
 - Low reproductive success
 - Specialized breeding needs
 - Specialized feeding habits
- Where are most of the world’s **biodiversity hotspots**? (Figure 17.7)
- What are the human causes—both direct and indirect—of species extinction (Figure 17.8)
- What distinguishes **in situ conservation** from **ex situ conservation**?

“Why Look at Animals”, by John Berger

- The focus of this essay is very different from that of the *Environment* textbook; how do you think that having such distinct views of the world and its inhabitants might nuance one’s views?
- What does Berger mean when he says that animals are “both like and unlike” humans?
- What is the core of the dualism that Berger argues used to be the foundation of our relationship with other animals?
- What is anthropomorphism? How does Berger say that our view of it has changed throughout history?
- How did Descartes view animals? What effect do you think this philosophical position had?
- What events precipitated the transition from viewing animals as machines to viewing them as commodities, or raw materials?
- What are some of his criticisms of the modern concept of keeping animals as pets?
- How have animals become co-opted into family images (simulacra, really)?
- Why does Berger say that zoos are, “in fact, a monument to the impossibility of [genuine human-animal] encounters”
- Do you agree with Berger’s view that zoos radically distort our vision of the lives of animals (in his words: “*you are looking at something that has been rendered absolutely marginal*”)