



CALL OF THE WILD No. 2 A VIST TO THE CONSERVATORS CENTER in CASWELL COUNTY, NC

(4 points) – Animal Captivity – spring 2012 **There is a vast sub-culture of “animal spirit” and shamanism devotees. What should philosophy students make of this? Considering the long-term co-evolution of humans and other animals, that sub-culture shouldn’t be surprising. You may not take this way of speaking about animals seriously. Be philosophically astute, even skeptical. But be open-minded too.**

Animal Partner. You chose or got stuck with an animal partner in Philosophy 375. The partner began as an image and name. Then its name became your name, and your name became that animal for three months. Whether it was a delight or insult to be identified with this animal, you’ve been growing into the partnership. This partner provides a perspective on life and how to engage the world quite different than yours. This is an exploration of other kinds of identity relationships. **Token animals** are animals you may call upon, individually or as a tribe, for special abilities or as a guardian and protector. You already see in this animal something with which your personality resonates, even if you can’t explain why. Perhaps you resent your animal partner because it’s not your real token animal. The danger here is that token (in the most pejorative sense of the word) can reduce a living animal into your personal anthropomorphic horoscope. You ask “What does this animal teach about who I am?” and have no interest in this animal’s own life and what that life teaches.

Spirit Animals or “totem animals” teach humans life lessons. They populate folk history whether Indian lore or Chinese myths and legends. They may be animals communicating spiritually or spirits embodied as animals. Meeting this spirit animal is a surprise because you do not choose this animal. It chooses you. No words are necessary. And you know that choice as soon as it happens. Your spirit understands that it needs to learn something from this spirit animal. This animal might teach or heal you in certain ways. Don’t’ discount the wisdom which animals can embody and communicate. Today you will see tigers, lions, leopards, wolves, lemurs, binturongs, servals, red foxes, caracals, bobcats, lynxes, New Guinea Singing Dogs, jungle cats, kinkajous, chausies, genets, ocelots, and geoffrey’s cats. They are not interchangeable. Each species, each individual is unique.

Your Animal Name _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Today, expect to encounter your Spirit Animal. You may not recognize this animal at first. You will be introduced to 17 kinds of animals. Pay attention. This may or may not be a charismatic animal. Find out its name. This animal is your teacher. It has chosen you as student. You aren’t making up stories about this animal. It is communicating wisdom and challenge to you which you did not expect. Of course, you may be disappointed too.

1. IF YOU THINK YOU ENCOUNTERED A SPIRIT ANIMAL: Which animal was it, and how were you convinced that this individual was also a Spirit Animal? In philosophy, this is called an epistemological inquiry: What can we know? What kind of knowing can we trust?

Which animal was the Spirit Animal?

What did you observe, notice, or experience that convinced you?

What changed in the **way** you knew this particular animal?

What do you have doubts or questions about regarding this experience?

2. IF YOU THINK YOU ENCOUNTERED...WELL, JUST CAPTIVE ANIMALS, how is their life here similar to or quite different from the Pondicherry Zoo in *Life of Pi*? Do you think that *Life of Pi* gave a realistic depiction of how tigers and other animals behave?

What was spiritually missing from your experience of being with the animals?

You were not in a cage, but did you feel awkward or out of place in the presence of these captive animals? Why? Does this trip count as a spiritual experience or just a psychological group situation on a given afternoon?

