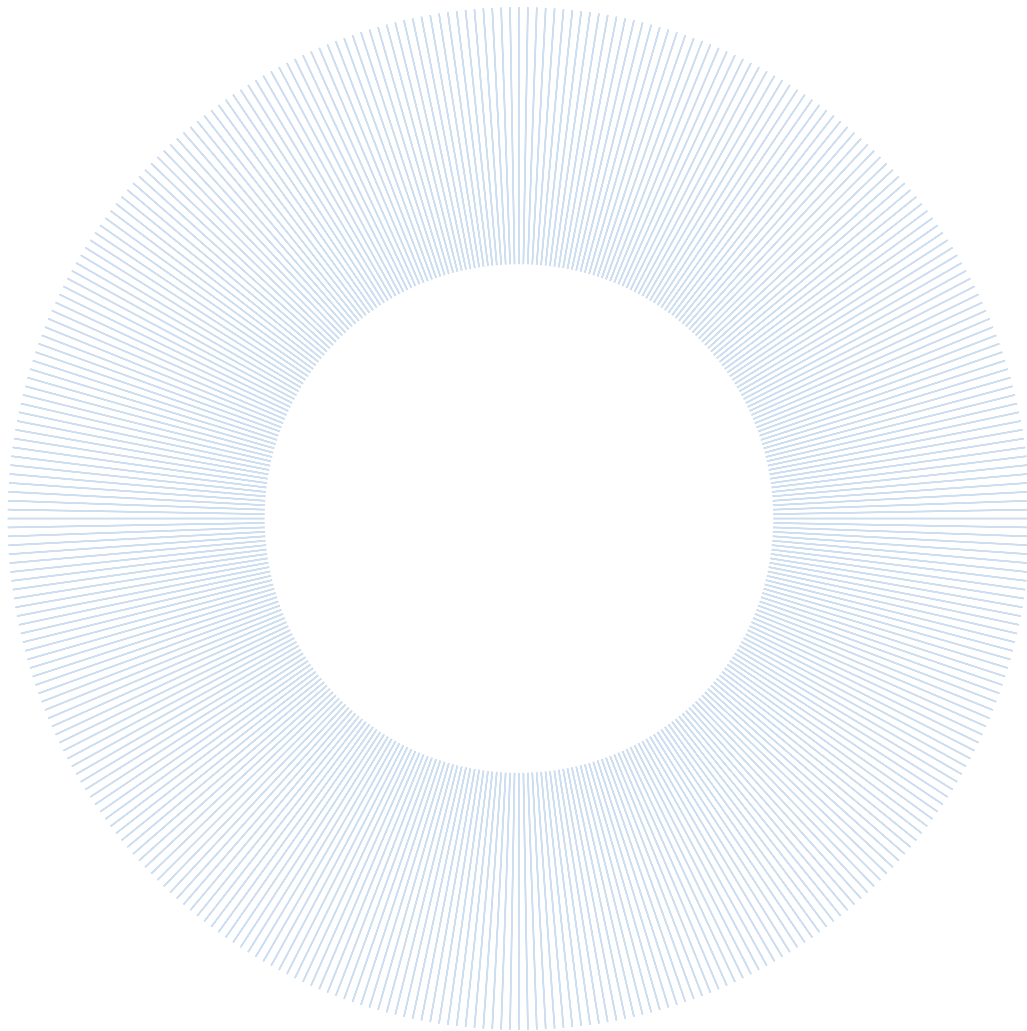


Political Bestiary: On the Uses of Violence



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POLITICAL BESTIARY: ON THE USES OF VIOLENCE

*A bestiary is a manual, a treatise that catalogues wild, fantastic, demonic, uncompromising and undomesticable beasts. While such bestiaries generally served pedagogical and moralizing ends, today they have become powerful political apparatuses that instigate a violence that is simultaneously sanctified while also unhinged from political legitimacy and accountability. The modern political bestiary, which includes terrorists, Islamo-fascists, narco-traffickers, pederasts, etc. mobilizes an animal imaginary that results into logic that: the bestialized other has to be exterminated, and in order to do so, we ourselves must become like beasts. Through a consideration of the role of certain animal or beastly creatures in some key works, such as Homer's *Odyssey*, Plato's *Republic*, Plutarch's *Moralia*, Schmitt's *Land und Meer*, we elucidate the ways in which the contemporary political bestiary takes up and transforms the question: what does it mean to be human? into the question: can only humans be beastly, or is the human the only animal capable of becoming beastly?*



*Omnis mundi creatura
Quasi liber et pictura
Nobis est et speculum¹*

Dedicated to Chris Gollon, who sees more because he makes what we see.

The Bestiary

The most basic definition of a bestiary is that it is a book of beasts, a kind of encyclopedia or compendium of the descriptions and, in many cases, pictorial representations of fantastic, unusual, but sometimes quite pedestrian and common, animals. The bestiaries did expose us to the exotic, but it did not stop there; the bestiary sought above all to offer a catalogue of God's creation with a key to unlock its moral message. Bestiaries were eminently religious and spiritual works. They flourished during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and most of the extant ones were produced in England. They were as popular as the Bible and some of the breviaries that were also produced during the late medieval period.²

The bestiary, however, had a pedagogical-spiritual function. Bestiaries were used to educate Christians about the beneficence of God's creation, its moral design, and how that design was evident in all that was living. Thus, a monk who would read and contemplate these beautifully produced books, would be reading them at three different levels: first, the monk would read the bestiary literally, in terms of what it would say about certain animals, and the etymologies of their names; second, the text would be read as establishing a link between the Old and New testaments, and how those links were embodied in the virtues and qualities of certain animals; finally, and on a third level, the text would be read so as to decipher the moral lessons that should become legible by linking these intertextualities. The theological,

pedagogical and spiritual function of the bestiary was succinctly formulated by the thirteenth century English theologian Thomas of Cobham (c. 1236), when he wrote:

The Lord created the various creatures with different natures, not only for the sustenance of men but also for their instruction. There is no creature in which we cannot see some characteristic which leads us to imitate the Lord or some characteristic which induces us to avoid the devil; for the whole world is full of different animals, like a book filled with written words and sentences in which we can read what we should imitate or avoid (*Summa de Arte Predicandi*, viii) (quoted in White, *Book of Beasts. A Facsimile of MS Bodley 764*, Christopher de Hamel, p. 15).

Nature is God's book, and we just have to decipher its meanings and messages. The bestiary is an attempt to decipher the layered meanings of God's book in terms of animals. Yet, while the bestiary is a Christian device, its sources are far more ancient. In fact, the bestiary is the appropriation of an older practice. According to T. H. White, who translated *The Book of Beasts* from a twelfth century Latin bestiary, the bestiaries' sources can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, specifically Herodotus, Aristotle, Pliny, Solinus and Aelian (White, 1954, pp. 231–2). White is surely right about these Greek thinkers having contributed to the tradition, but what is significant are the absences. He does not mention Homer, Plato and Plutarch. In fact, before Aristotle could contribute to the development of what later became the *Physiologus*, Homer and Plato had already contributed to the foundations of what are in fact philosophical bestiaries. I would like to discuss briefly some key sections in Homer's *Odyssey* and some of Plato's dialogues that I take to be direct contributions to both the *Physiologus* and the bestiary. I want to discuss these passages because of their overt ethico-political overtones.

Homer's Beast

Odysseus begins the narration of his odyssey in book 9 of the *Odyssey* with the story of his encounter with Polyphemus, the Cyclops. Polyphemus is the son of Poseidon and the nymph Thoosa, who was child of Phorcys, lord of the barren sea. The story is well-known. Odysseus and his crew land on the island where the race of the Cyclops live. Odysseus visits the cave of Polyphemus, hoping to be offered hospitality, namely in the form of food and provisions for his voyage back to Ithaca. Here is what Homer tells us:

We came to the land of the Cyclops race, arrogant lawless beings who leave their livelihood to the deathless god and never use their own hands to sow or plough; yet with no sowing and no ploughing, the crops grow for them – wheat and barley and grapes that yield wine from ample clusters, swelled by the showers of Zeus. They have no assemblies to debate in, they have no ancestral ordinances; they live in arching caves on the tops of hills, and the head of each family heeds no other, but makes his own ordinances for wife and children (Homer, 1980, p. 101).

This passage must be read alongside another one that occurs a few pages later, when Odysseus has introduced himself and in the name of Zeus asks for hospitality:

We of the Cyclops race care nothing for Zeus and for his aegis; we care for none of the gods in heaven, being much stronger ourselves than they are. Dread of enmity of Zeus would never move me to spare either you or your comrades with you, if I had no mind to it myself (Homer, 1980, p. 105).

The Cyclops is your quintessential beast. They are living creatures, and thus, they are a sort of animal. They are above the human and below the gods, although they think themselves more powerful than the gods. They have no religion; no law – no ordinances – and, most importantly, they do not cultivate the land or create political and social alliances. They are lawless and pre-political, even anti-political. They are beastly precisely because they are lawless. They have no law and they are outside the law, and refuse to acknowledge any

law. Their beastly nature is most dramatically manifested when the Cyclops proceeds to eat Odysseus' companions. So, he is both lawless and carnivorous, or rather anthropophagous. The beastly is that which both refuses the law and eats humans. The Cyclops, however, does not lack all *techne*, or technology. After all, the Cyclops have their sheep, which, as Odysseus narrates, are tended to with method and care. So, the Cyclops is a shepherd, but a lonely shepherd, an autarkic and lawless carnivore that has no fear of God, though he benefits luxuriously from the beneficence of the gods.

Polyphemus imprisons Odysseus and his companions, eating two of them each time he returns to the cave after pasturing his sheep. We know that Odysseus comes up with a plan to escape. The plan cannot involve killing the Cyclops, for otherwise they would be caught in the cave, which is closed by a giant rock that humans cannot roll. The plan must involve making the Cyclops roll the rock, while also preventing him from seeking the aid of the other Cyclops. The plan entails blinding the Cyclops, forcing him to leave the cave, to pasture his flock without sight. This is where Odysseus' next ploy comes in. When the Cyclops seeks to extract information from Odysseus, his name and where he came from, Odysseus tells him that his name is 'Noman,' 'Noone,' or 'Nobody.' As Horkheimer and Adorno have pointed out in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this ruse has been metonymic of the relationship between nature and subjectivity.³ To become subjects, we must deny our nature. I think that this reading is very plausible and insightful, but I want to offer another.⁴

At the heart of book IX of the *Odyssey* is the juxtaposition between law and lawlessness, savagery and civility, the wild and the tame, the primitive and culture. And in the juxtaposition is the boundary that separates the two diametrically opposed worlds: the use of violence. Civilization is based on the proscription of violence, and its sublimation and neutralization in ritual and through myth. To be human is to renounce violence, and in particular violence against other humans, and, more specifically, to become human is to reject anthropophagi by entering into the circle of ritual and the sublimation of violence into sacred ritual. The Cyclops lack all of this, as they have absolutely no fear of Zeus. In this case, however, in order to survive before or against a lawless violence, humans themselves have to become lawless. Odysseus has to become no-one, no man, that is, he has to abandon his fear of the gods, the interdictions against killing, by stepping outside the civilized order. To vanquish the Cyclops, Odysseus has to become like the Cyclops – he has to become no-man. The Cyclops, thus, operates like a specimen in the Greek political bestiary.

Plato's Bestiary

Plato's dialogues are full of allegories, metaphors, similes and metonyms. One could argue that Plato's entire philosophy is captured in two key allegories. One is the allegory of the ring of Gyges, which is told in book two of the *Republic* (2.359a–2.360d). The ring of Gyges is a magical ring that allows whoever wears it to become invisible, rather as what happens with Frodo when he wears the ring in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The question is whether we would chose to do either moral or immoral acts under the cover of invisibility. The moral of this allegory, or mythological device, is that morality must be based on something other than coercion or fear of retribution. We have to have an inner motivation towards morality. The other key allegory in Plato is also to be found in the *Republic* and this is the allegory of the cave which is probably one of the most descriptive and also metonymic allegories ever conceived. The allegory of the cave captures in one image Plato's ontology, epistemology, ethics and, ultimately, what he thinks philosophy is about. I want to suggest that there is yet another allegory in Plato's work that is as important, and this is what I will call the

allegory of the philosophical dog. In fact, I would argue that we could discern a Platonic bestiary, that is, a catalogue of beasts that Plato finds terrifying and objectionable. We can find references to this bestiary in the *Lysis*, the *Euthyphro*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, the *Laws*, and most distinctly in the *Republic*. In the *Sophist*, an extremely important dialogue about the distinction between sophistry and philosophy, a dialogue that is pivotal in Plato's hagiography of Socrates, Plato compares the sophists to wolves:

Stranger [curiously Plato does not assign a name to this speaker]: For all these reasons, Theatetus, we must admit that refutation is the greatest and chiefest of purifications, and he who has not been refuted, though he be the Great King himself, is in an awful state of impurity; he is uninstructed and deformed in those things in which he who would be truly blessed ought to be fairest and purest.

Theatetus: Very true.

Stranger: And who are the ministers of this art? I am afraid to say the Sophists.

Theatetus: Why?

Stranger: Lest we should assign to them too high a prerogative.

Theatetus: Yet the Sophist has a certain likeness to our minister of purification.

Stranger: **Yes, the same sort of likeness which a wolf, who is the fiercest of animals, has to a dog, who is the gentlest.** But he who would not be found tripping, ought to be very careful in this manner of comparisons, for they are most slippery things. Nevertheless, let us assume that the Sophists are the men. I say this provisionally, for I think that the boundary in dispute will prove to be an important one, should it ever be resolutely defended (*Sophist*, 230d–231a. Bold added).

Here the stranger is suggesting that the sophists are comparable to the ministers of purification – those who help us detect error, deception, ignorance, deceit and infamy – in the way that wolves are comparable to dogs. Evidently, wolves are fierce and not to be trusted, while dogs are both gentle and trustworthy. In the *Lysis*, an early dialogue, Socrates claims that he has a passion for friendship, to such an extent that he would prefer a friendship to the best cock or quail, nay, he would trade the best horse or dog for a good friend (*Lysis*, p. 212). Socrates is willing to give up the best of the best, either a horse or a dog, for a good friend. So, the closest thing to a great, the greatest friend, is either a dog or a horse. In the *Euthyphro*, piety, as the art of attending to the gods, is compared to the training of dogs. If the former activity is for the benefit of the gods, the latter is for the benefit of the hunter. If one is for the benefit of the community, the other is for the benefit of the household. These comparisons and similes converge in the *Republic*, where the wolf is linked both to the sophists and the dictator or tyrant, and the dog to the philosopher. The relevant passage in the *Republic* is in book two, where Socrates argues, comparing the dog to the guardian of the state, that is, the philosopher:

Would not he who is fitted to be a guardian, besides the spirited nature, need to have the qualities of a philosopher?

I do not apprehend your meaning.

The trait of which I am speaking, I replied, may be also seen in the dog, and is remarkable in the animal.

What trait?

Why, a dog, whenever he sees a stranger, is angry; when an acquaintance, he welcomes him, although the one has never done him any harm, nor the other any good. Did this never strike you as curious?

The point never struck me before; but I quite recognize the truth of your remark.

And surely this instinct of the dog is very charming; your dog is a true philosopher.

Why?

Why, because he distinguishes the face of a friend and of an enemy only by the criterion of knowing and not knowing. And must not an animal be a lover of learning who

determined what is or is not friendly to him by the test of knowledge and ignorance?
(*Republic*, 376 a-b.)

Much later in the *Republic*, Plato returns to the wolf, but now in order to compare it to the tyrant:

How then does the protector [of the state] begin to change into a tyrant? Clearly when he begins to do what the man is said to do in the tale of the Arcadian temple of Lycaean Zeus.

What tale?

The tale is that he who has tasted the entrails of a single human victim minced with the entrails of other victims is destined to become a wolf. Did you never hear it?

O yes.

And the protector of the people is like him; having a mob entirely at his disposal, he is not restrained from shedding the blood of kinsmen; by the favourite method of false accusation he brings them into court and murders them, making the life of man to disappear, and with unholy tongue and lips tasting the blood of his fellow citizens; some he kills and others he banishes, at the same time hinting at the abolition of debts and partition of lands: and after this, what will be his destiny? Must he not either perish at the hands of his enemies, or from being a man become a wolf—that is, a tyrant?

Inevitably.

This, I said, is he who forms a party against the owners of property.

The same.

After a while he is driven out, but comes back, in spite of his enemies, a tyrant full grown.

That is clear.

And if they are unable to expel him, or to get him condemned to death by a public accusation, they conspire to assassinate him secretly.

Yes, he said, that is their usual way (*Republic*, 565d–566b).⁵

We can now see how a particular beast operates in Plato's bestiary. The wolf is the metonym for deception, deceit, fierceness, enmity, lawlessness and predatory violence. More specifically still, the wolf is to the sophist as the dog is to the philosopher, and as the tyrant is to the philosopher king. And even if the wolf may become a tyrant, the dog will never become a sovereign. The dog, in the guise of the philosopher, is merely the guardian of the state, qua philosopher. Once the dog seeks to be more than that, it threatens to become a wolf. The philosopher is a faithful guardian of the state. The philosopher serves the sovereign by discerning between the enemies and friends of the state, something that the sophist could not and would not do.

Aristotle's Zoology

It would not be an understatement to claim that the scientific and philosophical study of animals begins with Aristotle. In fact, it has been claimed that science, as the methodical study of the causes of things and events, began with Aristotle. Before Aristotle wrote on ethics, politics, logic and metaphysics, he had spent many years doing observations and gathering a wealth of information on different animals, from sea to air-born animals. Several of Aristotle's manuscripts from his fieldwork survive. In Latin they are known under the collective name of *Historia Animalium*, which sometimes is excerpted and published under the name of *Zoology*. This manuscript is made up of ten volumes. But, in addition, we also have *Parts of Animals*, *Movement of Animals*, *Progression of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*. In the *Corpus Aristotelicum* these works are listed under 'Study of Nature.' It is noteworthy and not to be left unnoted that these works are collected next to those that also deal with the sky, the earth,

as well as the soul, or *De Anima*. Aristotle's scientific works on the observation, classification and chronicling of nature had an inordinate influence on what later on became the tradition of the *physiologus*, which later on is taken up in the Christian bestiary. Important for our purposes here is the fact that, in contrast to his teacher Plato, Aristotle had worked closely for many years with animals, observing them, categorizing them, noting their differences and similarities. We could say that Aristotle was the Greek Darwin. Many of the treatises from his *Historia* and on *Generation of Animals* read like Darwin's journals and diary from his voyage on the *Beagle*. It is evident that Aristotle approached animals with a scientific attitude, which is less inclined to the fancies of imagination, flights of rhetoric and loose similes. Yet, one of the reasons why Aristotle's zoological writings would be taken up, in many cases almost in plagiarized fashion, is that even Aristotle could not dispense with the inclination to rely on allegories, comparisons, parables and morals. So, for instance, we can read in book IX of *Historia Animalium*, in which Aristotle studies bees, wasps and ants, the following:

Among the insected animals, about the most industrious, and to be compared with all the other animals, are the ant kind and the bee kind, also anthrines and wasps and virtually all that are akin to them. Among the spiders too the smoother are the leanest and the most ingenious over their living. Now the working of the ants is on the surface for all to see, and how they all go on one path and put aside and store their food; for they work at night too when there is a full moon (*Historia Animalium*, Book IX, paragraphs XXXVIII to L).

Aristotle devotes the next several pages to describing in the most surprising detail the behaviors of both ants and bees, which he holds evidently in high esteem. He talks about their work habits, their social structure and hierarchies, what they do when wasps attack them, whether they wage war on other species or only on other bees, or ants. Notwithstanding the descriptive and distance language, Aristotle cannot but observe, or remark, on the well-ordered character of bee and ant societies. In fact, Aristotle repeatedly resorts to the language of praise, even encomium. Both bees and ants, in fact, seem to personify discipline, respect, deference, frugality, cleanliness and industriousness. While most of these works were devoted to an analysis of the structure and order of nature, Aristotle is also aiming at educating his readers about the virtues that we all should strive to inculcate in our co-citizens and ourselves. In this way, animal behavior becomes a cipher for what we ought to strive to achieve among ourselves. Nature is a moral educator, or if not, then at the very least a moral text from which we can extract indispensable moral lessons.

While this is not a survey of what Greek and Roman philosophers had to say about animals that may have contributed to the development of the tradition of the *physiologus* and later the bestiary, I cannot not discuss very briefly Pliny the Elder and Plutarch, two key figures in the preservation and transmission of Aristotle's work on zoology. Pliny the Elder can be said to have invented the encyclopedia and the zoological compendium. His *Naturalis Historia*, or *Natural History*, is one of the few works to have survived in its entirety from the first century after the death of Christ. The work is made up of 37 books, generally published in three thick volumes. The first books concern the physical description of the earth, as well as the mathematical theories that allow us to describe it. This is what we generally call cosmology. Books III through VI deal with geography and the description of cultures. In these books, in fact, we find one of the earliest elaborations of the geographical theory of the races. Book VII deals with the physiological description of humans. Books VIII through XI deal with zoology. The next books deal with botany, agriculture, horticulture and pharmacology, as well as mining and mineralogy. Pliny's *Natural History* (the 'History of Nature' would be more accurate) – is a veritable encyclopedia, gathering the most useful knowledge that was to be procured at the birth of our first millennium. For my purposes, I am interested in a particular passage in Book VIII that describes elephants. Elephants are peculiar creatures: they do not appear in

the Hebrew Bible until quite late, yet they were used to personify and symbolize Christ.⁶ In this way, we can see how Roman works about nature were appropriated and assimilated into a Christian sacred zoology and geography.

In discussing many of his topics, Pliny combines description with narratives that involve the particular animals, plants or minerals under discussion. This is what today we would call intertextuality and web linking. So, in his discussion of elephants, Pliny moves back and forth between describing the behavior of elephants to recording stories where they appear. Here is one telling example:

Elephants always travel in a herd; the oldest leads the column and the next oldest brings up the rear. When going to ford a river they put the smallest in front, so that the bottom may not be worn away by the tread of the larger ones, thus increasing the depth of the water. Antipater states that two elephants employed for military purposes by King Antiochus were known to the public even by name; indeed they [the elephants] know their own names. It is a fact that Cato, although he has removed the names of military commanders from his *Annals*, has recorded that the elephant in the Carthagian army that was the bravest in battle was called the Syrian, and that it had one broken tusk. When Antiochus was trying to ford a river his elephant Ajax refused, though on other occasions it always led the line; thereupon Antiochus issued an announcement that the elephant that crossed should have the leading place and he rewarded Patrochus, who made the venture, with the gift of silver harness, an elephant's greatest delight, and with every other mark of leadership. The one disgraced preferred death by starvation to humiliation; for the elephant has a remarkable sense of shame, and when defeated shrinks from the voice of its conqueror, and offers him earth and foliage. Owing to their modesty, elephants never mate except in secret; the male at the age of five and the female at ten; and mating takes place for two years, on five days, so it is said, of each year and not more; and on the sixth day they give themselves a shower-bath in a river, not returning to the herd before. Adultery is unknown among them, or any of the fighting for females that is so disastrous to the other animals—though not because they are devoid of strong affection, for it is reported that one elephant in Egypt fell in love with a girl who was selling flowers, and (that nobody may think that it was a vulgar choice) who was a remarkable favourite of the very celebrated scholar Aristophanes.⁷

Pliny's elephants are paragons of moral virtue. They model virtue by choice, not by the force of nature; for they are moral not by instinct, but self-reflection, which they exhibit in their sense of modesty. Where there is modesty, that is, the possibility of shame, there is morality. For Pliny, elephants exhibit in the highest form the combination of both the elemental and elaborated dimensions of moral existence. These elephants exhibit shame, fear, courage, but also modesty, gratitude and love. Above all, they know themselves not just in their shame or modesty, but also because they recognize their name. They know who they are because they recognize their name. They have a name and thus, they have a sense of 'I.'

Some of these themes are echoed in another extremely important source for the bestiary, Plutarch. Plutarch was a Roman historian, biographer, essayist and moralist, who influenced the development of Christian neo-Platonism through his own works on Plato and Socrates. Among his numerous works we have 15 volumes of what is called Plutarch's *Moralia*, or moral writings. These books cover everything from love, courage and ire, to whether sea or land animals are more rational, and whether it is acceptable to eat meat. There is a particularly wonderful essay that brings us full circle to Homer's Odysseus. The essay is presented as a dialogue between Circe, Odysseus and Gryllus. Circe is the sorceress who turns Odysseus' crew into swine in book X of the *Odyssey*. As in book X, Odysseus pleads before Circe to convert his men back to human form. In Plutarch's playful dialogue, his men refuse to be turned back to

humans. Circe cannot turn them back if they do not want to be returned to their human form. Odysseus disbelieves Circe and asks to talk to them. Enter Gryllus, one of Odysseus' men, who engages him in a most instructive discussion about why they would rather stay as swine. There are two particular passages that I want to discuss briefly. They are:

Gryllus: At this moment, then, you are conceding the point that the soul of beasts has a greater natural capacity and perfection for the generation of virtue; for without command or instruction, 'unsown and unploughed,' as it were, it naturally brings forth and develops such virtue as is proper in each case.

Odysseus: And what sort of virtue, Gryllus, is ever found in beasts?

Gryllus: Ask rather what sort of virtue is not found in them more than in the wisest men? Take first, if you please, courage, in which you take great pride, not even pretending to blush when you are called 'valiant' and 'sacker of cities.' Yet you, you villain, are the man who by tricks and frauds have led astray men who knew only a straightforward, noble style of war and were unversed in deceit and lies; while on your freedom from scruple you confer the name of the virtue that is least compatible with such nefariousness. Wild beasts, however, you will observe, are guileless and artless in their struggles, whether against one another or against you, and conduct their battles with unmistakably naked courage under the impulse of genuine valour. No edict summons them, nor do they fear a writ of desertion. No, it is their nature to flee subjection; with a stout heart they maintain an indomitable spirit to the very end. Nor are they conquered even when physically overpowered; they never give up in their hearts, even while perishing in the fray. In many cases, when beasts are dying, their valour withdraws together with the fighting spirit to some point where it is concentrated in one member and resists the slayer with convulsive movements and fierce anger until, like a fire, it is completely extinguished and departs.

Beasts never beg or sue for pity or acknowledge defeat: lion is never slave to lion, or horse to horse through cowardice, as man is to man when he unprotestingly accepts the name whose root is cowardice. [Slavery (*douleia*) as though derived from 'cowardice' (*deilia*).] And when men have subdued beasts by snares and tricks, such of them as are full grown refuse food and endure the pangs of thirst until they induce and embrace death in place of slavery' (Plutarch, 1957, pp. 501–5).

The passage is fairly transparent and does not require too much glossing. Animals, in contrast to humans, have a greater aptitude for virtue because they cannot deceive. Their relationship to virtue is not mediated by either calculation or fear. The following passage is also particularly important and it comes at the very end of the dialogue:

Gryllus: [...] I scarcely believe that there is such a spread between one animal and another as there is between man and man in the matter of judgement and reasoning and memory.

Odysseus: But consider, Gryllus: is it not a fearful piece of violence to grant reason to creatures that have no inherent knowledge of God?

Gryllus: Then shall we deny, Odysseus, that so wise and remarkable a man as you had Sisyphus for a father? (Plutarch, 1957, pp. 531–2.)

In fact this last line should read: 'If those who do not know God cannot possess reason, then you, wise Odysseus, can scarcely be descended from such a notorious atheist as Sisyphus.' This is a very provocative ending because Plutarch is now making reference to the Cyclops, whose bestiality and brutality were related to his lack of fear, or reverence, for the Gods.

Animals, Plutarch seems to be suggesting, are more virtuous, not just because they lack the kind of calculative cunning that leads to duplicity, perfidy and deception, but also because they are without fear, or knowledge of the gods. They are virtuous, or rather, they are moral

despite their lack of fear of God. Put in a positive way, to be truly moral and virtuous requires that one acts morally and virtuously from an inner motivation and not from fear or subordination. Plutarch's beasts are not just rational, but they are moral in the way in which Kant defined the moral worth of moral actions: namely, that they are done out of duty and respect for the moral law, untethered either to threat or reward.

The Good Animal vs. The Demonic Beast

At this point, it would make sense to explain the relevant entries in some bestiaries concerning some of the animals we have discussed thus far, namely, the wolf, the dog, the bee and the elephant. It is noteworthy that the longest entries in Latin and French bestiaries are devoted to these creatures, along with the horse (Hassig, 1995, p. 129). But I will only discuss, briefly, the wolf, the dog and the elephant. In the twelfth century bestiary translated by White, we read that the wolf is so called from the Greek *lykos* because of its bite and because 'they massacre anybody who passes by with a fury of greediness.'⁸ Wolves are known for 'their rapacity, and for this reason we call prostitutes wolves, because they devastate the possession of their lovers' (p. 56). Most interestingly, we read in this bestiary, 'the devil bears the similitude of a wolf: he who is always looking over the human race with his evil eye, and darkly prowling round the sheepfolds of the faithful so that he may afflict and ruin their souls.' And 'Its eyes shine in the night like lamps because the works of the devil are everywhere thought to seem beautiful and salubrious, by darkened and fatuous human beings.' The power, abilities and behavior of the devil, furthermore, are already anticipated in this creature that resembles it the most: 'Because a wolf is never able to turn its neck backward, except with a movement of the whole body, it means that the devil never turns back to lay hold on repentance' (p. 59). To be evil is thus not to be able to repent. The Christian wolf, in fact, resembles the Platonic wolf, which, as we noted, was compared to both the tyrant and the sophists, for its cunning and for its embellished and attractive use of rhetoric. The beauty of the eyes that shine in the darkness is similar to the beauty of the rhetorician that deceives the people.

As with Plato's philosophical dog, so with the Christian dog. For Plato, the dog embodied the truth of philosophy, the ability to distinguish the friend from the foe of the polis and the sovereign. In the Christian bestiary we read: 'Now none is more sagacious than Dog, for he has more perception than other animals and he alone recognizes his own name. He esteems his master highly' (p. 62). Dogs are known for their loyalty, to the point that they would rather die than betray or abandon their masters. But their sagacity is based on reason. Dogs marry virtue with reason. The dog 'shows his sagacity in following scent, as if enunciating a syllogism. "Either it has gone this way," says he to himself, "or that way, or, indeed, it may have turned twisting in that other direction. But as it has neither entered into this road, nor that road, obviously it must have taken a third one!" And so, by rejecting error, Dog finds the truth' (p. 64).⁹ Which then makes almost inevitably the following comparison: 'In certain ways, Priests are like watchdogs. They always drive away the wiles of the trespassing Devil with admonishment—and by doing the right thing—lest they should steal away the treasury of God, i.e. the souls of Christians' (pp. 66–7). Priests resemble dogs in another way. Their speech is like a dog's tongue and its barking. 'The tongue of a dog cures a wound by licking it. This is because the wounds of sinners are cleansed, when they are laid bare in confession, by the penance imposed by the priest. Also the tongue of a puppy cures the insides of men, because the inside secrets of the heart are often purified by the work and preaching of these learned men' (p. 67). The Platonic philosophical dog has become the Christian priestly dog;

one was the guardian of the sovereign, the other the savior of God's treasury, the souls of the flock. As in the Greek zoological imaginary, the dog is the nemesis of the wolf.

Now, here is what the bestiary has to say about the elephant, which we heard from Pliny the elder: 'There is an animal called an ELEPHANT, which has no desire to copulate' (p. 24). But when they do copulate, they do with great discretion, to the point that as the Bestiary notes, 'they copulate back-to-back' because of their modesty. But they are also extremely intelligent, have long memories, and are loyal and faithful, like the dog. The virtues of modesty, sexual abstinence and filial devotion make them a unique cipher for the sacrament of marriage. As our bestiary notes: 'the Elephant and his wife represent Adam and Eve. For when they were pleasing to God, before their provocation of the flesh, they knew nothing about copulation nor had they knowledge of sin' (p. 27). And 'They never quarrel about their wives, for adultery is unknown to them. There is a mild gentleness about them, for, if they happen to come across a forwandered man in the desert, they offer to lead him back into familiar paths' (p. 28). The elephant, precisely as the representation of both Adam and Eve, is also the cipher of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The elephant is the divine messenger par excellence: 'When the Big elephant arrives, i.e. the Hebrew Law, and fails to lift up the fallen, it is the same as when the Pharisee failed with the fellow who had fallen among thieves. Nor could the Twelve Elephants, i.e. the Band of the Prophets, lift him up, just as the Levite did not lift the man we mentioned. But it means that Our Lord Jesus Christ, although he was the greatest, was made the most Insignificant of All the Elephants. He humiliated himself, and was made obedient even unto death, in order that he might raise men up' (p. 27). What I have not noted yet is that just as the dog is the nemesis of the wolf, the elephant is the nemesis of the dragon. The dragon, like the wolf, represents the devil. Most of the numerous representations of the elephant also depict menacing dragons.

These three animals, as well as the horse and the bee, have a relationship to truth, to violence, to the sovereign and to salvation or beatitude. Their relationship is semiotically and metaphorically juxtaposed. The dog is to the priest, as the elephant is to Jesus, while the wolf is to the false prophet, as the dragon is to the devil. In this parallelism we find that some animals lead to truth, renounce violence and are guides to salvation. In the other case, the bestial animals use violence without measure and reason, deceive and lie, leading astray and to perdition. While the text in bestiaries laid out interpretations that interlink ancient texts with the Bible, the images and representation used semiotic devices to inspire horror, revulsion and even violent outbursts against the represented evil.

It is thus not coincidentally that many of the bestiaries that survive bear the traces of violence done against the representations of evil, iniquity and sin. So, as Alex Bovey notes with respect to the Tiberius Psalter, in particular in his discussion of the image of St Michael killing a dragon: 'So potent was this image of the confrontation between Good and Evil that a viewer physically attacked the image of the dragon, leaving small irregular slashes in the surface of the page. Indeed, every image representing evil in the Psalter has been treated the same way, with small yet distinct scratches piercing the parchment page. This kind of defacement is common in medieval manuscripts, where the face of evildoers (particularly the tormentors of Christ), devils and demons frequently show signs of being smudged and scratched' (Bovey, 2002, p. 32).

The Sovereign Beast

The moral economy and semiotics established by the bestiary continue to inform much of our discourse about political power, the enemy, as well as those we take to be the protectors of the social order. For instance, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, from 1651, arguably one of the most important treatises of politics to inform English political philosophy, makes explicit reference to bestiaries, or to the biblical beasts. What is peculiar about Hobbes' *Leviathan* is not just its iconography, but also the reference to the beast. Hobbes refers to Leviathan only three times, and each time with different overtones. In one case, Leviathan refers to the automaton that is artificial and made. In another case, it refers to the biblical beasts of the whale and the crocodile and dragon. In yet another case, Leviathan refers to the composite man that is represented in the cover image of the book. A giant man made up of many small individual men (Tralau, 2007, pp. 61–2). Hobbes thus combines three allegories: the beast, the automaton or robot, and the giant man. With this conflation of three allegories Hobbes intended to say that the state is a beast, the work of men, but also an artifice. As Hobbes' scholar Patricia Springborg put it: 'The metonym of Leviathan was the synecdoche of the state' (1995, p. 362). What is significant in Hobbes' iconography, however, is how he plays off the Biblical and Christian imaginary of the beastly and monstrous against the obvious violence and power of the state. The state is in fact a divinely ordained monster, necessary for the preservation and salvation of humanity.

If we had space, we could also discuss the work of Immanuel Kant, which also makes reference to animals, in particular the bee, thus picking up the allegory of the bee as the model citizen, which was present already in Aristotle's work, but that found its most elaborate articulation in Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees* from 1732. And, if we had more time, we would have to include a discussion of Carl Schmitt's fascinating book from 1942 *Land und Meer*, which has the subtitle of *eine weltgeschichtliche Betrachtung*, that is, a world-historical consideration (Schmitt, 1942). Yet, this provocative book is really a combination of a modern bestiary with a reflection on war, world history and tools of waging war. In this book Schmitt relates the basic elements of the cosmos, namely earth, water, air and fire, to mythological beasts: thus water is to the leviathan, as land is to the behemoth, as fire is to either the dragon or the phoenix.¹⁰ Each beast stands for a form of military power: sea power, land power and air power combined with fire power. Like Hobbes, Schmitt thought that the state was a beast, or beastly, but unlike Hobbes, he thought that each beast also stood for the unique kind of state that arose out of a particular ability to wage war and thus to take, partition and toil the land.¹¹ What is remarkable is that already in 1942 Carl Schmitt had anticipated the defeat of Nazi Germany by the phoenix of the US and English air forces.

This essay, in short, has discussed animals, political power and violence by discussing beasts, the guidance of the sovereign and the ways in which certain forms of violence are thought to be inherent or endemic to certain kinds of beasts. How we have imagined animals, whether angelic or demonic, has allowed us to articulate the limits of sovereign political power and its inherent violence. If the animal is the metonym for the non-rational in us, the beast is the synecdoche for the lawless violence of a sovereign power that turns on its subjects.



Notes

¹ Alan of Lille, *De Incarnatione Christi*, PL CCX, 579A. Quoted in Flores, 2000, ix.

² I have found extremely informative and useful the chapter on 'The Bestiary' in Lisa Verner (2005, pp. 91–122), as well as the introduction to Clark and McMunn (eds.) (1989), which has an extensive bibliography on bestiaries.

³ Horkheimer and Adorno (2002). See Excursus 1: 'Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment,' pp. 43–80.

⁴ See Walter Burket's (1983) discussion of this chapter, pp. 130–4.

⁵ See Burket's (1983) discussion of this myth, pp. 84–93.

⁶ See the entry on 'Elephants' under 'Animals in the Bible' in the Catholic Encyclopedia, available online at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01517a.htm>

⁷ Pliny (1938–1963), sections 3–111, pp. 11–13.

⁸ *The Book of Beasts* (1954, p. 56). Henceforth all page numbers in body of text refer to this edition.

⁹ Here T. H. White has introduced a very telling footnote that begins: 'Jews did not like dogs, and the attitude of the Bible to these charming creatures is uniformly revolting.' Footnote 1, p. 64.

¹⁰ Carl Schmitt does not mention the Sphinx, but, given the context and what is explicitly said, we can safely conclude that this is what he would have said. What Schmitt does write is the following: 'The invention of the airplane marked the conquest of the third element, after those of land and sea. Man was lifting himself high above the plains and the waves, and in the process, acquired a new means of transportation, as well as a new weapon. Standards and criteria undertook further changes. Hence, man's possibilities to dominate nature and his fellow man were given the widest scope. It is easy to understand why the air force was called the "space weapon." The spatial revolution which it is carrying out is especially direct, forceful and obvious. Aware as one is that airplanes criss-cross the air space above seas and continents, and the waves broadcast by transmitters in every country cross the atmosphere and circle the globe in a matter of seconds, the temptation sets in to conclude that man has conquered not only a third dimension, but also the third element, air, the new elemental space of human existence. To the two mythical creatures, leviathan and behemoth, a third would be added, quite likely in the shape of a big bird. Notwithstanding, caution is recommended when making such affirmations, the implications of which are not all at the tips of our fingers. As a matter of fact, if one thinks of the technology necessary for human prowess to manifest itself in the air space, and of the engines that propulsate the air fortress, it seems that the new element of human activity is fire' (1997, pp. 57–8). The bird that is fire and spits fire, would be either a dragon or a sphinx.

¹¹ Carl Schmitt was a keen analyst of Hobbes, thus it is not arbitrarily that I refer to him (see Schmitt, 2008).

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Insights

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