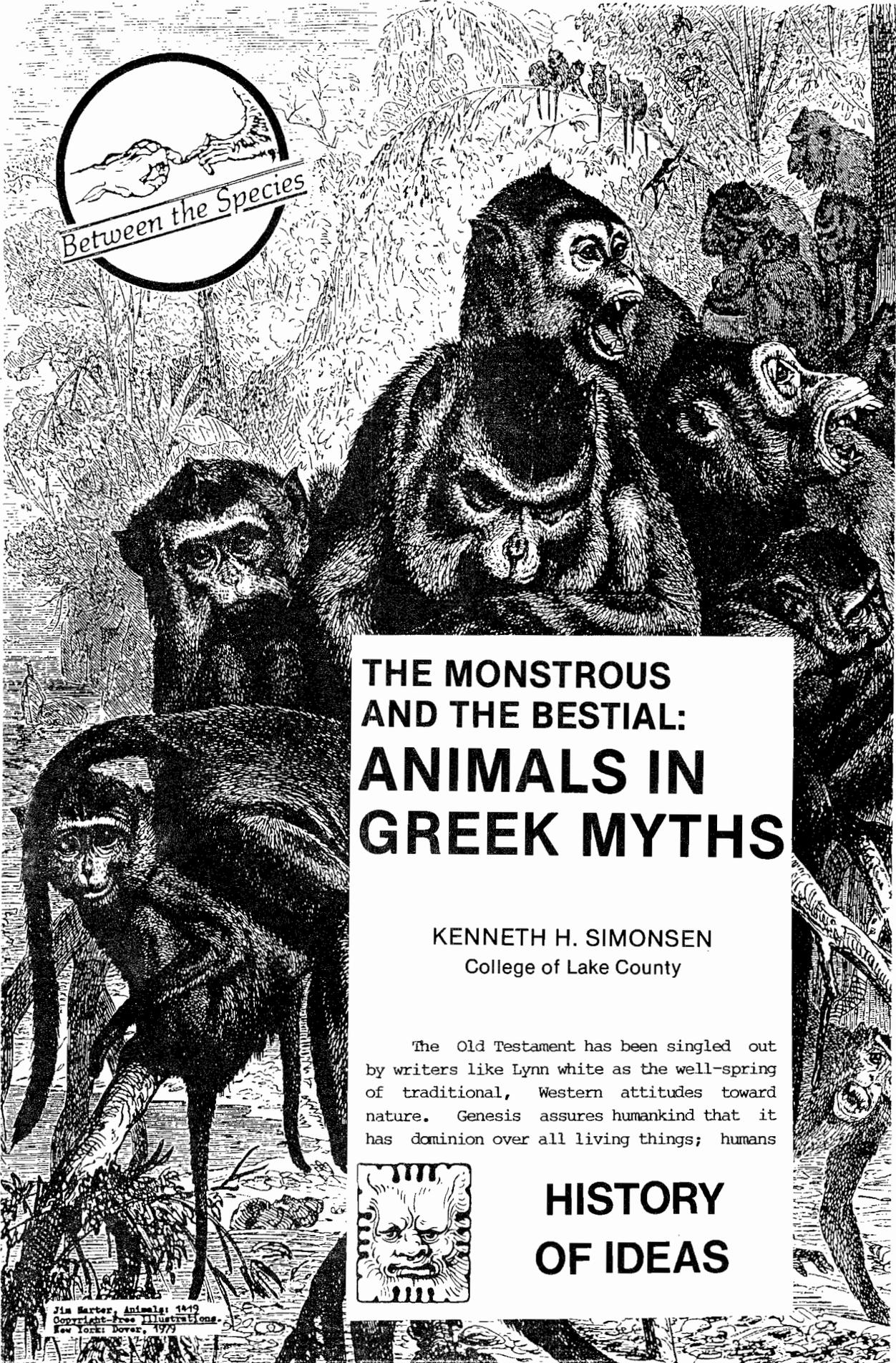


Between the Species



THE MONSTROUS AND THE BESTIAL: ANIMALS IN GREEK MYTHS

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The Old Testament has been singled out by writers like Lynn White as the well-spring of traditional, Western attitudes toward nature. Genesis assures humankind that it has dominion over all living things; humans



HISTORY OF IDEAS

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have, to borrow some lines from W. B. Yeats, sovereignty over

--Those dying generations--at their
song,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-
crowded seas,
Fish, flesh or fowl, commend all
summer long
Whatever is begotten, born and
dies.

St. Thomas carries on this Biblical tradition, claiming that animals have been created for human purposes. Since animals are below humans on the chain of being, humans have no obligations to these inferior, less spiritual creatures. One cannot, of course, injure one's neighbor's ox, but Thomas' concern is for the neighbor, not for the ox. Toward wild beasts in the fields or sky, or fish in the sea, the restrictions of morality appropriate for humans would be inappropriately applied.

The Judeo-Christian tradition is not wholly negative toward the animal kingdom; there is a minor strain in which animals are viewed with greater respect. In early Medieval, Christian sculpture, a beardless Christ is often depicted as the good shepherd carrying a lost lamb on his shoulders. This representation of Christ, which may have its source in archaic Greek calf bearers, still persists in the conventional reference to congregations as flocks. Again, three of the four evangelists are represented symbolically in Medieval art as animals; the ox stands for St. Luke, the eagle for St. Matthew, and the lion for St. Mark (Clark, p. 86). This conventional representation may also have its roots in the pagan, Greek association of god and beast. Whatever the case, it has endured in the Christian tradition, as any casual visitor who has seen the innumerable lions of St. Mark in Venice can attest. It may be an error, though, to make too much of these animal images in Christian art. They may be purely symbolic or conventional and imply no deeply held respect or compassion toward animals. Indeed, one suspects that St. Francis, who instructed us to love brother wolf, is the exception and not the rule.

The Biblical tradition may very well be a fundamental root of the past disregard for animals. But Matthew Arnold has taught us that Western civilization has at least two basic roots, one Hebraic, and the other Hel-

lenic. Some claim that the Hebraic contribution is primarily moral and religious, while the Hellenic is intellectual. But it would be a gross oversimplification to discount the ancient Greek influence on traditional moral values. Even in regard to the animal kingdom, it could and will be argued that the Greeks have had a profound effect on our attitudes. To gain insight into this Hellenic influence, the philosophers of antiquity may not be the best source. Their ideas are usually carefully considered and reasoned; they are abstracted, cleansed, even purified of the strong emotional undercurrents that pervade traditional values. Thus, it may be more helpful to turn to myth, to that legacy of powerful, graphic images which have, unreflectively and subconsciously, shaped our ideas about animals.

In the myths, the ancient Greeks were at times rather positive toward animals. The Olympian gods were often represented as wild animals, usually symbolizing some divine attribute. Zeus was associated with the eagle, a reference to his dominance as sky god and, perhaps, also to his epithet as "Far Seeing." Ares' fierceness was symbolized by the wild boar, Aphrodite's lecherousness by the dove or sparrow (Morford and Lenardon, p. 69). Oddly, Athena's wisdom was symbolized by the owl, a bird not known for its brightness. The Olympians could also acquire animal associations by their roles as cult figures. Artemis was associated with bears because of the Brauron cult in central Attica, in which little girls involved in the festival were dressed up as bears (Kirk, p. 233). Apollo Lyceus has been interpreted as a wolf god, and Dionysus Bromius, as depicted in The Bacchae, appears as a roaring bull (Kirk, p. 130).

But, as in the case of the three evangelists and their symbolic animals, it may be rash to draw any hard conclusions from these Hellenic eagles, owls, or bears. The association of god and beast may be more a matter of literary convention than anything else. Or, in the case of Apollo Delphinios, the connection may be etymological, an attempt to explain the origin of names. Or, the epithet may be ambiguous, e.g., Apollo Lyceus may refer to "wolf" or "light" or to Lycia, one of the prophetic god's supposed places of origin (Burkert, p. 21). In any event, there is enough ambiguity here to impede any firm conclusions.

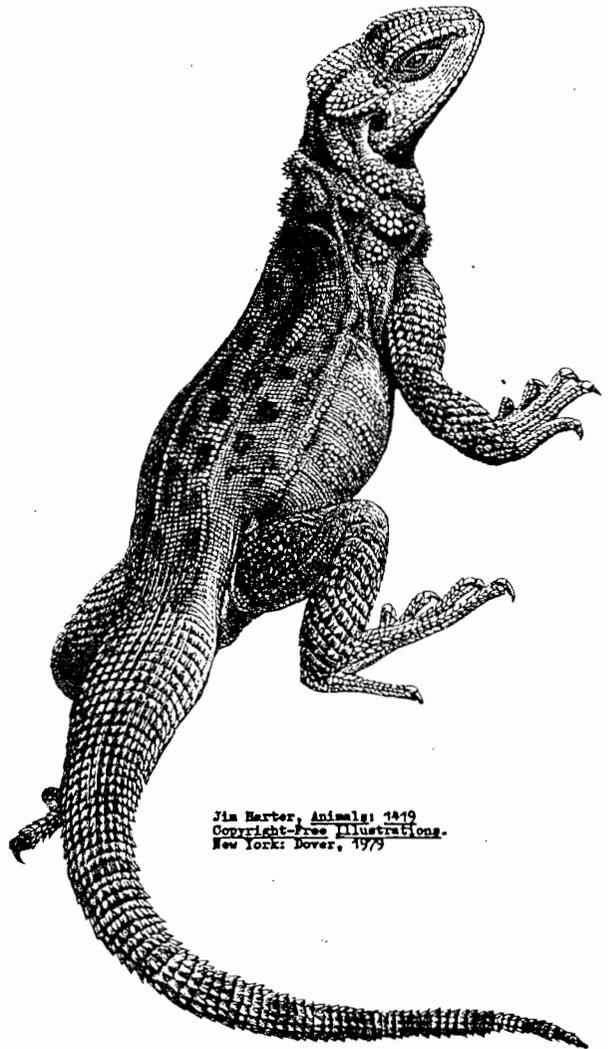
A stronger case can be made for the

presence in Greek myths of what may be called "friendly animals," animals who befriend, instruct, protect, or somehow aid humans. Foremost among these animals is a creature who is actually half animal and half human but deserves to be mentioned in this context. Cheiron the Centaur was renowned as a teacher, "the greatest educator of his day," who instructed Jason and Aesclepius (Kirk, p. 208). The winged horse Pegasus, although born from the blood of Medusa, was a great aid to Bellerophon in his exploits. Hesiod tells us that Pegasus was even favored by the gods; he was brought to Olympus, where he carries the thunder and lightning of Zeus (Hesiod, p. 140). Ario, a horse born from the union of Poseidon and Demeter, who had coupled in the form of horses, rescued King Adrastus from Thebes (Kirk, p. 225). Even non-mythical animals are presented at times with sympathy. When Odysseus returns to Ithaca in disguise after an absence of twenty years, one of the few creatures who recognizes him is his faithful dog:

But when he knew he heard Odysseus' voice nearby, he did his best to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears, having no strength to move nearer his master. And the man looked away, wiping a salt tear from his cheek. (Homer, p. 320)

This touching scene, a parallel in reverse of the famous stele of the dog lamenting his dead master, shows a profound sympathy between human and beast. Clearly, there are instances in Greek myth when animals are viewed with compassion, respect, and, at times, companionable friendship.

But there seem to be many more instances in the myths when animals are not depicted in such favorable light. Rather than clever horses or trustworthy dogs, one is more likely to encounter fierce and savage beasts, often in monstrous and grotesque form. It is to that disparaging, often terrible, portrayal of animal life that we must turn. In very broad terms, one can distinguish various kinds of mythic animals. Some are monstrous abnormalities and freaks of nature; others are more ordinary but possess great strength and/or size. Some are part human and part animal; others are wholly animal. And some are cruel and vicious, while others are merely lustful and uncontrollable. Taken all together, they form an unsavory collection. They represent everything that is terrifying



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and hateful in the animal kingdom, everything that should be feared and avoided by humans.

Hesiod presents a powerful picture of these bizarre, mythical animals, monstrous in the sense of being hideous or grotesque. The terrible aspect of these monsters is that they are abnormal; they deviate from what is normal or natural. Echidna, a progenitor of many of these monsters, is herself half nymph and half snake. She mates, somehow, the "lawless and violent" Typhoeus, who possesses one hundred "inhuman" snake-like heads, from which issue the sounds of bulls, lions, and dogs, as well as whistles, hisses, and speech comprehensible to the gods (Hesiod, p. 141). One offspring of this union is the vicious, fifty-headed dog, Cerberus; another is the hydra, a many-headed serpent who, in turn, gives birth to Chimera, a monster with a lion head, a goat head, and a snake head. Echidna also gives birth to the dog Orthus, with whom she mates in typical animalistic fashion to produce the sphinx and the Nemean lion (Hesiod, p. 142). Echidna's relative Thau-

(the word "uncle" seems inappropriate) sires the harpies "of the lovely hair," says Hesiod, while Ovid quaintly refers to them as "girl-faced vultures" (Ovid, p. 187). But it is not necessary to mention all the monstrous animals in Hesiod's menagerie; the bizarre contrast with the wise Cheiron or the faithful dog of Odysseus is apparent.

There are other animal monstrosities in Greek myth, but only two more will be added to this ghastly catalog. They are important not only as enduring images in art or speech but also because, like Orthus and Cerberus, they are domesticated rather than purely wild animals. The most famous of the two is the Minotaur, half man and half bull, whose image readily comes to mind from Picasso's drawings. The Minotaur, born of the unnatural union of Pasiphae and the Cretan bull, is cruel enough to be included in Hesiod's collection, particularly since he regularly feasts on Athenian youths (Ovid, p. 220). The other monster, whose name has become a literary catchword, is so bizarre that she has evaded any Picasso: poor Scylla, driven mad by Circe's witchcraft. Upon entering a pool enchanted by Circe, a belt of vicious snarling dogs sprouted around her belly:

And there she sat, half naked girl,
half monster,
With mad dogs barking round her
lower regions. (Ovid, p. 385).

This is a strange catalog, found in Hesiod and other writers of antiquity, of monstrous animals. If we are not adequately repelled by the gruesome description of these monsters, Hesiod instructs us on how to respond by his use of adjectives. These monsters are "furious," "cruel," "inhuman," "unmanageable," "lawless," "violent," "voracious," "terrible," and "savagely." Insofar as Hesiod has any effect on our unthinking subconscious attitudes toward animals, it is a most negative one. These animal monsters are vicious and unrestrainably violent. They are repellent and terrifying. We would be doing all of creation a favor, if we could rid the earth of them. And this is in fact what heroes like Heracles actually do.

But is the image of animals drawn from this horrendous catalog really a picture of animals as we know them? Or are they merely literary creations that no one takes seriously? After all, some of Hesiod's monsters are humanoid. The three-headed Geryon, the one-

eyed Cyclopes, and the one hundred-armed, fifty-headed brothers Cottus, Briareus, and Gyes are also abnormal monsters. Of course, some of Hesiod's humanoid monsters aren't as savage and cruel as his animals. The one hundred-armed brothers are clever enough to form an alliance with Zeus, and the Cyclopes are craftsmen, gifted enough to produce the thunderbolt for Zeus. Echidna and her offspring apparently lack such human attributes. Furthermore, Hesiod lumps together both domesticated and wild animals. Perhaps fear, terror, or repulsion is appropriate for snakes, vultures, and lions, but such responses seem peculiar when applied to the dog, the goat, and the bull. Evidently, the loyal dog of Odysseus can also appear in myth as the fifty-headed (or three-headed, if you will) Cerberus.

There is a possible explanation for the peculiarities found in Hesiod's catalog of monstrous animals. It is conceivable that what is terrible or repelling about these creatures is not their animal traits but, rather, their abnormalities. They are repugnant because they are unnatural monstrosities, not because they are more or less animals. This at least is the view of H. J. Rose, who would prefer to believe that the Greek imagination could never generate such unclassical images. He regards these monsters as the product of a non-Greek mind. The origins of Echidna, Cerberus, Chimera, and the Sphinx are to be found in Assyria, or India, or in the Levant. Hesiod's "hideous brood," Rose claims, is alien to the Greek mind because his brood is filled with abnormal and unnatural creatures:

It is not surprising, considering how little the Greeks like monstrosities, that these products of an imagination not their own are represented as living in the lower world. (Rose, p. 31)

In reply to Rose, it should be pointed out that even though the Greeks may not have created these pre-Olympian animal monstrosities, they nonetheless retained them in their myths. They evidently served a purpose in the myths, and, perhaps, in the Greek psyche. As such, they influenced, consciously and subconsciously, subsequent generations of readers of the myths.

But if one is really to answer Rose fully, one must abstract the monstrous ele-

ment from the image of animals in myth. If it is only abnormality or unnaturalness that causes a negative response, then non-monstrous animals should appear in myth as benign and friendly, like Pegasus, or they should at least be ordinary or neutral. If, on the other hand, non-monstrous animals still are depicted as savage and vicious, then there may be grounds for concluding that it is not just abnormality but also "beastliness" that is disparaged. Thus, it is necessary to turn to those animals who are not hideous, grotesque, abnormal, or unnatural. These animals may be inhuman, brutish, cruel, stupid, or violent, but they are not monstrous. Rather, they are merely bestial.

Greek myths do contain a number of animals who are bestial rather than monstrous. They often differ from ordinary animals in that they are larger or much stronger, but usually this powerfulness is invested in them by the gods, whose will they serve. These bestial animals lack the cosmic power of Typhoeus, but they don't lack the vicious, lawless, violent nature. The Calydonian boar described by Ovid does not seem grotesquely unnatural as wild boars do. Although inspired by divine power from Diana, he is not a hideous, abnormal monster. But he is vicious:

Both blood and fire wheeled in his
great eyes;
His neck was iron; his bristles
rose like spears . . . and
streams of lightning
Poured from his wide lips, and when
he smiled or sighed
All vines and grasses burnt beneath
his breath. (Ovid, p. 224)

The "she-dragon" killed by Apollo the Far Shooter in the *Hymn to Apollo* may very well have been a monstrous dragon, but the reference to her "rapidly thrusting" coils and the use of the name "Pytho," now applied to the python, suggest that this creature may have been a gigantic, blood-thirsty snake (Athassakis, p. 27). Ovid is less ambiguous in his depiction of "Mars' serpent," a "sea blue snake" who emerges from his cave to destroy Cadmus' men. Ovid's serpent is distinctly python-like; he kills by crushing the Phoenicians with his tail, i.e., by constriction. Others die, however, by his forked tongue, rather than by biting, and some even are killed by his bad breath (Ovid, p. 86). Ovid's description of this snake is gory and

monstrous, but the snake itself, however terrifying, does not seem to be an unnatural monstrosity. His only abnormality is his fire-flashing eyes, but this fire-generating power Ovid also attributes to boars and bulls (see above and below) and may very well be symbolic of the beasts' power and savageness. Or it may be a symbol of the divine power infused in the beasts by the gods. The bulls encountered by Jason have a similar fire-snorting capacity. In his quest for the golden fleece, Jason must harness these ferocious bulls for King Aetes:

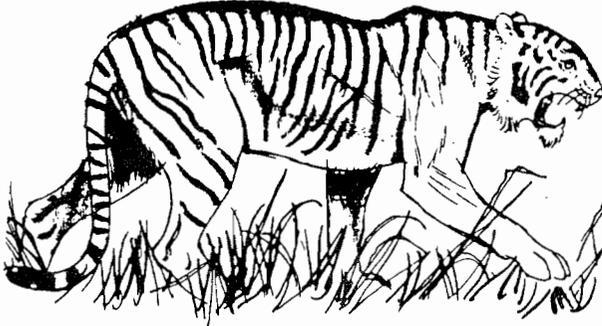
Look! Now bronze-footed bulls
charged the field,
Whose steel ringed nostrils poured
forth a blast of fire;
Grass withered at their feet.
(Ovid, p. 91)

The various bestial animals encountered by Heracles in his twelve labors should be added to this catalog. The boar of Erymanthus, the Cretan bull, and the human flesh-eating horses of Diomedes are, presumably, fierce and dangerous. If they were not, they would not be a challenge to Heracles' valor and might. But they are not monsters. Yet, they appear in the same context as Hesiod's monstrosities, viz., the Hydra, the Nemean lion, and Cerberus (Rose, pp. 211-5). Clearly, both monstrous and bestial animals in the legend of Heracles' labors share vicious and savage behaviors.

This catalog of monstrous and bestial creatures should be indicative of the role played by animals in many Greek myths. Such creatures are often forbidding, threatening, savage, cruel, and violent. The presence of friendly or even neutral animals in myth, a minor strain, cannot offset the powerful impression made by these ferocious beasts. They are part of our artistic and literary heritage, in which they re-appear, transformed into Grendel or St. George's dragon. (Of course, the Greek myths are not the only source of our traditional disparagement of animals. Snakes are not beloved in the Biblical tradition, either, where they are divested of their positive, Greek association with rebirth and regeneration.)

Animals, when they are not presented as savage and cruel in Greek myth, often appear as merely sub-human; they are, not surprisingly, merely "animalistic" or "brutish." This characteristic is found in the many

transformations described in myth, e.g., Odysseus' men transformed into pigs by Circe. The violence is missing here, but the poet provides a vivid picture of a groveling, swinish existence (Homer, p. 172). It gives concreteness to J. S. Mill's remark that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. In Ovid's many transformations, this same theme of trading a civilized, human life for a brutish, bestial one is repeated ad nauseam. Poor Acteon, seeing Diana naked by accident, is transformed into a stag and killed by his own hounds. Symbol-



ically, he loses his most human attribute, the power of articulate speech, and is unable to call off his hounds (Ovid, p. 91). Calisto, who had the misfortune of kindling the lust of Zeus, is transformed into a bear:

Her gift of speech was ripped away
and from her throat
Came guttural noises horrible to
hear;
Though her emotions were of a human
kind,
She was a bear . . . (Ovid, p. 70)

Cadmus is transformed into a snake in the midst of speech, as his tongue splits and his words become hisses (Ovid, p. 128). And Lycaon is reduced to a "terror which words cannot utter." Symbolic of his own tyranny, he is transformed into a savage and inhuman wolf, "his foaming lips and jaws quick with thoughts of blood" (Ovid, p. 37).

Even the gods can transform themselves into beasts, usually as a matter of convenience. In the Hymn to Dionysus, the effeminate god of wine cannot intimidate the pirates by his gentle appearance, so he transforms himself into a terrible roaring lion (Athanasakis, p. 53). Most often, the gods become beasts in order to satisfy their lusts and, when necessary, commit the violence of rape. Zeus assumes the shape of a dove, a swan, and a bull for these purposes. Demeter becomes a

mare to escape the attentions of Poseidon, but is foiled when the earthshaker in turn transforms himself into a lusty stallion. So, even the anthropomorphic gods, with all their human traits, take on animal form in order to engage in bestial behaviors.

In these transformations, a basic pattern emerges. A rational, civilized life is exchanged for an animalistic, sub-human life. The human or the god still retains human consciousness, but his/her behavior becomes bestial. Symbolically, the humans are deprived of articulate speech, human society, and the amenities of civilization. Not being gods, they illustrate Aristotle's famous comment that a man without a city state is either a beast or a god.

There is one species of mythical beast which clearly embodies this rigid distinction between the human and the bestial, viz., the centaurs. Centaurs share with Pan and the satyrs a mixed nature, in which the animal parts symbolize baser or "animalistic" passions. But unlike the satyrs, who are driven by perpetual lust, the centaurs seem to be of a higher sort, since they are capable of a superficial degree of civilization. The wise Cheiron, in particular, is supremely civilized; he is the "paradigm of Culture" (Kirk, p. 85). But Cheiron is, evidently, exceptional. Only he remains aloof when the rowdy centaurs, drunken and violent, break up the marriage of the Lapith princess, Hippodamia. Civilized restraint in centaurs is very fragile; it quickly disintegrates when they are exposed to wine, allowing their beastly, uncontrollable natures to emerge. Plato, in discussing the conflict of reason and desire in the human psyche, uses the example of the charioteer and his horses. But he could have readily used centaurs as examples, who are human in their civilized, albeit rare restraint, but animal in their lack of it. Kirk has this distinction in mind when, following Levi-Strauss, he sees the centaurs as symbolic of the conflict between nature and culture (Kirk, p. 85). Cheiron, the humanized centaur, is civilized and restrained. The other centaurs, wild and uncontrollable, are brutish and bestial; as Kirk says, they act like "animals" or "beasts" (Kirk, p. 208).

This second, pervasive image of animals is a familiar common-place in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, but it has strong roots in myth, as well. It is this

Hellenic, rather than the Hebraic, tradition which has associated being human with reason and restraint and "beastliness" with passion, violence, lack of control, and brutishness. It is not surprising that the humanistic Greeks, who saw their gods anthropomorphically, would see the non-human, living creatures as inferior and brutish. Although St. Thomas would never have done such a thing, he could have easily cited a number of Greek myths, instead of Aristotle, to illustrate his belief that animals are lower on the chain of being and, therefore, unworthy of respect.

After distinguishing between animals who are monstrous or bestial and between those who are primarily violent or lustful, we have arrived at two conclusions. First, animals are more commonly portrayed in Greek myth as savage and violent than as friendly and peaceful. Second, animals are generally, but not always, depicted as lawless, undisciplined, and uncontrollable, thus serving as a symbol for unrestrained, human passions. Of course, many humans and gods in the myths fit this description as well, but at least they are capable of civilization. Animals, being part of nature, are not. It is these two disparaging views that have contributed to our traditional, negative attitude toward the animal kingdom.

But, one last criticism must be dealt with. It concerns a question which thus far has been scrupulously avoided in this paper: the attitudes of the Greeks themselves toward animals. It could be argued that too much significance has been read into myths, which have, it must be admitted, been subject to much literary revision. It could be possible that Greek attitudes toward animals may not be as negative as their myths seem to suggest. Insight into these attitudes is more readily obtainable from the study of ritual than from myths. But, the precise relationship between myth and ritual is one of controversy; it is a dispute which is, at best, tangential to the issues under discussion. In hopes of avoiding this scholarly Scylla and Charybdis, only one myth and its corresponding ritual will be discussed in order to gain some insight into Greek attitudes toward the animal kingdom.

There is some degree of agreement that the myth of Prometheus is an aetiological myth which explains why the gods receive only fat, bones, and savor during animal sacrifices. But the myth can also be read as a

charter myth, in the sense that it sanctions overtly the custom of ritual sacrifice. Zeus may not be delighted with his share of the sacrifice, and he may be angered at Prometheus' trickery, but the fact that a god performs a sacrifice in this manner expresses approval for the ritual killing of animals. It suggests that the gods are pleased by such sacrifice and can be propitiated by it. This idea is clearly stated in the Fragment of the Hymn to Dionysus. In that fragment, Zeus assures Dionysus that "men will always sacrifice to you unblemished hecatombs," probably as a sign of recognition of his divinity (Athanasakis, p. 1). And in the Hymn to Apollo, the sun god assures his Cretan princes, who worry about how they shall eat in stoney Delphi, that

With a knife in his right hand let each of you slaughter sheep forever, and there will be an abundance of them brought to me by the glorious races of men. (Athanasakis, p. 30)

If Burkert is correct, this is one prophecy of Apollo which can be tested by evidence. "The site of the oracle, the place of pronouncements and liberating purifications," he claims, "was first and foremost a place of sacrifice" (Burkert, p. 118). In fact, Burkert describes the custom of the Delphic priests to steal and devour the sacrificial meat. "Thus, man searches for god in the wilderness . . . and there encounters the god's wild servants, a group of greedy gluttons" (Burkert, p. 120).

The pervasiveness of animal sacrifice in the Greek world is described by Kirk. He speaks of

ubiquitous altars, reeking with fresh blood, the constant throat-slitting of bulls, cows, sheep, goats, pigs and occasionally dogs. Priests were butchers, hacking up animal corpses, tearing out thigh bones and wrapping them in fat to be burned for the god. (Kirk, p. 27).

Olympia is described as "a great heap of ashes" and Delphi and Delos as having "towering heaps of horns, a concrete record of piety by slaughter" (*ibid.*). Martin Nilsson reports that excavations at Delphi revealed "the earth fat with organic remains mixed

with ash and burnt bones" (Burkert, p. 118).

Animal sacrifice was seen by the ancient Greeks as an act of piety. If one wishes to get closer to the gods, he/she must burn many thigh bones; he/she must in all piousness perform the ritual act of bloodshed, slaughter, and eating (Burkert, 2). Ritual sacrifice could be an act of propitiation, as well, by which the gods could be appeased and their wrath allayed. In extreme cases, even the slaughter of animals might not be adequate to propitiate the gods, and human sacrifice was used. Thus, in the *Agamemnon*, Iphigenia must die instead of an ox or sheep.

Of course, there were some critics of ritual sacrifice in antiquity. Burkert notes that, for various reasons, the Orphics, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Theophrastus, and Seneca objected to the practice (Burkert, p. 8). One of the most moving denunciations of animal sacrifice is found in Book XV of the *Metamorphoses*, when Ovid comments on the person who would sacrifice an ox:

Who, as he lifts the burden of the
plough
From his companion's back, then
murders him,
Raises an axe to strike across his
shoulders,
Raw with the labor of the plow.
(Ovid, p. 417)

Some writers attempted to mitigate the practice of sacrifice by claiming that such practices caused guilt and uneasiness in the minds of the practitioners. The Athenian festival of Diopolieia, which honored Zeus, is often cited as a case in point. A most curious part of the festival was the "Buphonia" or ox murder. Corn or barley was placed on the altar. When an unwitting ox innocently ate the grain (an act of sacrilege), he/she was killed by priests who quickly fled. Since all who remained at the scene denied responsibility for the act, the axe or, sometimes, the knife was found guilty (Burkert, p. 140). Andrew Burn claims that this curious ceremony demonstrates the "sensitiveness of Athenian feeling" about animal sacrifice; he says that it functioned as a means by which the "humane man feverishly tries to set his mind at ease" (Burn, p. 70). And Kirk asserts that the Buphonia may have been intended to allay guilt about the slaughter of tame and docile animals (Kirk, p. 234). In its inception, the ritual may have been an act of

contrition. And if it had persisted in antiquity as an act of piety and sincere regret, these claims about sensitiveness and guilt might have been justified. But Burkert makes it clear that the Buphonia referred to "a guilt laden crime --but one which could not be taken seriously, so [it] became a farce." By the time of Aristophanes, phrases like "full of Buphonia" and "Dipolieda-like" meant "old fashioned nonsense" (Burkert, p. 137). Kirk, in turn, refers to the Buphonia as a "charade" (Kirk, p. 233). This hardly sounds like the response of a sensitive and guilty people trying to set their minds at ease. The fact remains that ritual animal sacrifice was a grisly and bloody affair, a gruesome public spectacle that is hard, if not impossible, to reconcile with respect and compassion for animals.

Perhaps the greatest mitigation of animal sacrifice is not to be found in antiquity but, rather, in the modern age. The ancients may have performed many sacrifices, but it must be remembered that in the Greek economy of scarcity, the eating of meat could not be common, and the sacrifice of needed domestic animals would be beyond the means of most ordinary people. When the myths tell of the sacrifice of hecatombs, when, for example, we read that King Minos sacrificed one hundred bulls to Zeus upon reaching the Cretan coast, one wonders if we are dealing with historical truth or poetic exaggeration (Ovid, p. 219). And even if hecatombs were indeed sacrificed, they would be miniscule compared to the sheer numbers of animals killed today in slaughter houses and experiments. For, we moderns are the true "homo necans," who slaughter animals not as an act of piety but, rather, out of habit, greed, or indifference. Clearly, it is not the slaughter of animals that disturbs us; if it did, we would all be, like Pythagoras, vegetarians. What upsets us about Greek ritual sacrifice is its association with religion. It is a cruel and grisly, public ritual performed in honor of the gods. If the same practices are carried out in the confines of slaughter houses for profit, many of us would find nothing appalling about them. At best, we may, like the reader addressed by Ovid in Book XV, feel a vague uneasiness as we devour our "joints of lamb and beef" (Ovid, p. 418).

In spite of these mitigations, the brute reality of ritual sacrifice in the ancient Greek world cannot be denied. The sacrifice of animals, in both myth and ritual, was

regarded as a positive act of piety and propitiation. Since the distinction between nature and culture, i.e., between the bestial and the human, was so clearly drawn in philosophy and myth, it was evident that animals could be used for human purposes. They could be killed in great numbers, in order to please or to propitiate the gods, to foretell the future, or to insure greater fertility. This attitude is not very far from St. Thomas' belief that God created animals for human use. Nor is it an idea alien to us in the twentieth century, which demonstrates how both the Hellenic and the Hebraic traditions still pervade our fundamental beliefs.

One last mitigation remains. One could argue that Greek attitudes toward animals, in myth and in ritual, were really no different from those of the rest of the ancient world. In fact, Burkert informs us that "animal sacrifice was an all-pervasive reality of the ancient world" (Burkert, p. 9). If this was so, why should we expect the Greeks to be different?

Such an argument would not be unreasonable, were there not a notable exception in antiquity to the traditional disregard of animals. This exception, of course, was Egypt. But the Egyptian attitude toward animals was so contrary to that of the rest of the ancient world that it left many bewildered. Herodotus clearly was amazed by the Egyptian love of animals. He claims that an Egyptian would rather save a cat from a burning house than save the house itself. If the cat died, his/her owner went into mourning. He reports that Egyptians even worshipped the crocodile, "putting rings made of gold and glass into its ears, and bracelets around its feet" (Herodotus, p. 129). Kirk, on the other hand, shows contempt, rather than amazement, toward the Egyptians:

the Proto-Greeks started on that long process of humanism . . . that distinguished them from the Egyptians with their interminable tradition of weary crocodile gods. (Kirk, p. 52)

Even Frankfort feels the need to apologize for the Egyptians' strange notions, claiming that "there is something altogether peculiar about the meaning which animals possessed for the Egyptians" (Frankfort, p. 9). What is in fact so peculiar is that they saw animals as sacred, even to the point of mummifying cats,

dogs, falcons, and other creatures. It is not that these animals were sacred to the gods or symbolized the gods; rather, these animals were the gods. The ibis was Toth in one of his many manifestations; the hawk was Horus (Frankfort, p. 11). Thus, in art Horus could be represented as a hawk, or as a hawk-headed man, or as the pharaoh with a hawk, since the pharaoh was Horus on earth. To the anthropomorphic Greeks, this idea could only seem bizarre. And so also to the modern mind, whose cultural legacy is in part Hellenic, these strange animal gods seem alien and peculiar. But they shouldn't. The Egyptians were expressing in religious form an idea that we have only begun to grasp fully with the development of the science of ecology, viz., humans are not above or different from nature but, rather, are intimately and vitally related to it. The distinction of nature and culture, or of bestial and human, was not important to Egyptians; rather, through religion they espoused a reverence for life, a respect for living things. Had history been otherwise, and had Egypt influenced Western civilization as much as Greece, a profound difference would have occurred in our cultural life. But one suspects that the difference would have been even more profound for the animals of this earth.

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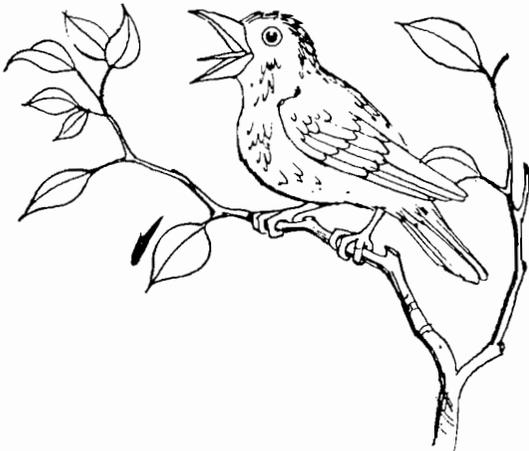
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Death of a Rain Forest

ANN COTTRELL FREE

Warbler on a bun?

Certainly,
The connection can be dim
For the fast-food cattle
Grazing where once
You wintered
In a tropical rain forest
Warm and safe
After the long flight South
With your young,
Fluttery, foolish,
Bird watchers' delight:
Prothonotary
Swainsons
Vireos, too.



Your home quite gone,
Now, of course,
Many of you.

Don't blame the cattle
For taking your home;
They don't eat hamburgers
Any more than you.
Only offer the ingredients
For those who do.

CALL FOR PAPERS

SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF
ETHICS AND ANIMALS

Pacific Division Meeting
San Francisco, California
March 26, 1987

According to Peter Singer:

It is not arbitrary to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities. (Animal Liberation, pp. 21-22)

According to Tom Regan:

One cannot suppose that moral agents [or patients] have varying degrees of inherent value depending on the extent to which they possess some favored virtues. Inherent value is a categorical concept. One either has it, or one does not. There are no in-betweens. Moreover, all those who have it, have it equally. (The Case for Animal Rights, pp. 246-7)

Papers on the topic of assessing the value of moral agents and patients are welcome for this program. (Papers need not be concerned with the work of Singer or Regan; the above quotations are offered only as ostensive clarifications of the topic of this call for papers.)

Those interested in contributing papers or in serving as commentators for this program should contact Steve Sapontzis at their earliest convenience:

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