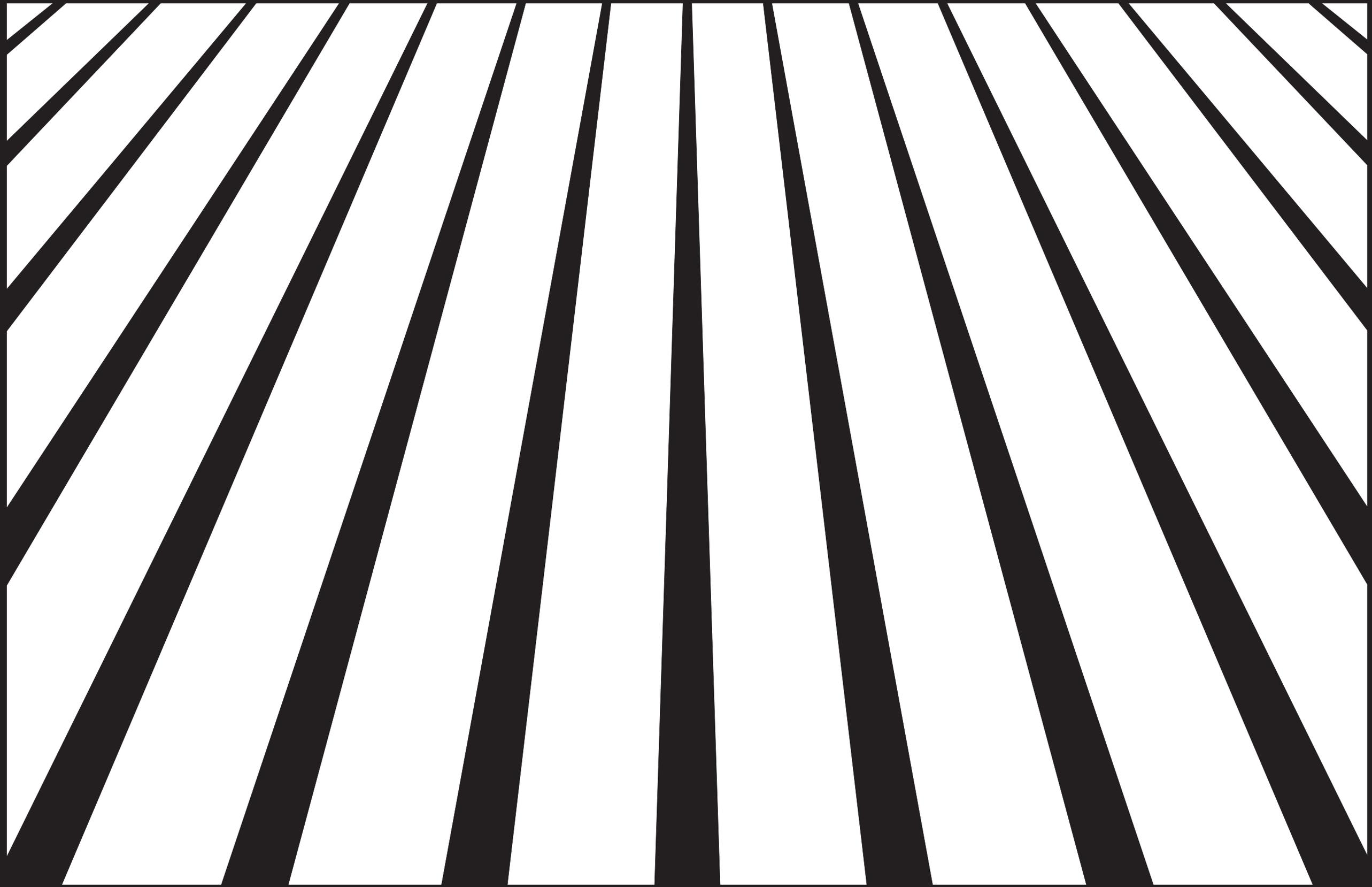


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# Foreword

Fang Lihua

Artist Qiu Anxiong has focused on the relationship between man and animal for some time, touching upon this theme in earlier works including *Let Me Forget it All* and *New Classic of the Mountains and Seas*, among others. In the large-scale body of mixed media work developed in 2010, the artist discovered a new point of entry for a more profound discussion of the topic: the zoo, which marks a significant point of juncture between man and animal.

Perhaps Qiu Anxiong's interrogation of the relationship between man and animal and skepticism toward the given nature of this relationship have played a major role in his production of the work *Zoo*. He believes that "The theory of evolution would seem to have achieved an overpowering voice, but I still find it to be an originary conjecture no different, in essence, from the idea of creation derived from the Bible." For him, "The question of origin is one of faith, not of knowledge. The boundary between man and animal is a puzzle that remains impossible to confirm." Here the term "zoo" is used in its broadest sense, referring not only to places in which animals are kept in cages but also the territories within and methods by which man and animal exist together. But the basic principle of the zoo is imprisonment, constituting a paradox with the important human concept of freedom: mankind constructs his society on such models of freedom, but in fact these are the most despotic and furthest from freedom. The zoo marks the truest vision of the human situation. No matter how closely its design approaches the natural environment, the basic fact of the imprisonment and restraint of the animals remains unaltered.

In *Zoo*, Qiu Anxiong attempts to investigate the following three questions: The animality of man. 2. The boundary between man and animal. 3. The mutual entanglement and coexistence of civilization and wildness in human history. As the "OCAT Program for Emerging Art Practitioners" for 2011, "Zoo: Qiu Anxiong Solo Exhibition" is comprised of four parts. The first consists of oil on canvas works depicting the animals and environments of the zoo through figurative techniques—the most direct method of returning to the scenes of the actual zoo and the minimal condition for intervention into personal concepts. The second is a series of sketched copies of other works, the images of which are drawn from the painting and photography of eras spanning ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, and the modern age, and which reveal the varying attitudes toward animals, relationships between man and beast, and roles played by animals in human life throughout different periods. The third is a series of installations related to various historical references, the protagonists of which are the personified forms of animals including a chimpanzee, rabbits, a white rooster, and a pig; all of these allude to certain scenes with a

touch of dark humor while effectively revealing the problems hidden behind the relationship between man and animal. The fourth is a video related to animals.

On the conceptual basis of the original *Zoo* project and according to the exhibition conditions at OCAT, two additional installation works have been added to the exhibition: *Surplus Value* and *Anatomy*. In parallel with the exhibition, OCAT will edit and publish a book in the "OCAT Program for Emerging Art Practitioners' Series" related to the zoo, which will approach and discuss the question of the relationship between man and animal through dimensions of literature, philosophy, religion, and law.

# Seeing the Cage in the World

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On the occasion of  
a solo exhibition  
of new work  
by Qiu Anxiong, 2010

Xu Sheng

Viewing the cubic globe Qiu Anxiong produced for the exhibition Utopia (part of the Beijing Get it Louder festival in 2010), we find that utopia, for the artist, is not an ideal so much as a set of substantive structures of the imagination that cannot be further simplified on a conceptual level. For Qiu Anxiong, utopia lies in unknown images to be discovered rather than in existing ideas to be explained. He has discovered here a rectilinear world for his utopia, a model on which he has rearranged every line of latitude and longitude—taking great delight in comparing the lengths of the equator and other major markers as if this new rectangular world were his own territory. In fact, his practice has always tended towards the creation of a lively new world rather than the coordination of logic and idea.

## Accumulation and discovery

In the earlier work of Qiu Anxiong, including the animation “In the Sky” (2005) and the installation “Sealed Cabin” (2005), we not already the emergence of whimsy. In the period marked by the animations “Jiangnan Poem” (2005), “Flying South” (2005), and the “New Classic of Mountains and Seas” (2005), he discovered within his own work a new relationship between beast and civilization. Afterwards, the animation “Minguo Landscape” (2007) offers a condensed image of nostalgia, while the train in the installation “Staring into Amnesia” (2007) displays the relationship between memory and oblivion in both history and the life of the individual. On the other hand, the more recent installations “Cicada Shell” (2008) and “Crust House” (2008), as well as the animation “Sound of Chiaroscuro” (2009), display a certain sensitivity throughout the stable creative state. Such work avoids abrupt symbolism and explicit didacticism, remaining open and crisp with profound processes of thought. This new solo exhibition, entitled Zoo, emerges in the wake of the wake of this trajectory of accumulated reflection and consideration.

Significantly, though Zoo focuses thematically on the relationships between human beings and other creatures, this exhibition aims neither for innovation within art—an ideology of revolution that has become trite enough to act as fetters on creativity—nor for the effects of irony or critique; this work is born of mercy and charity towards the world. Qiu locates visually all of the phenomena presented in his work with his own eyes, discovering them in the exterior world, so to speak, and exhibiting them directly. As a result, the forms in his work do not speak to our senses of aesthetics or ethics, but rather lead us to rediscover anew the human imagination in communication with nature as one of its many creatures.

## Talking with animals

Artists have been speaking with animals for a long time: Joseph Beuys once described pictures to a dead hare in the performance “How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare” (1965). This tradition dates

backs to the sermons St. Francis delivered to flocks of birds in the Middle Ages. Qiu Anxiong, however, is no preacher, and does not believe that animals need salvation at the hands of man. Instead, he prefers listening quietly and reflecting on himself.

In this exhibition, Qiu Anxiong has copied classic drawings and paintings related on some way to animals, all the while preserving the original styles of the work. These copies are objective and elaborate, neither full reproduction nor cynical kitsch. On the one hand, these drawings do not suppress the creative impulse, but, on the other hand, they also do not convey the direct expression of the artist.

These copies position the audience within the status shared by the artist in his own process of viewing and then copying the original paintings. As a result, these copies do not deliver any transcendent experience, but the viewer can produce and experience elevated emotion from his own or own perspective. On this point, these works differ from the phenomenon of Ming and Qing dynasty imitation, because here Qiu Anxiong maintains a neutral position as he concentrates on the objects copied—animals and the attendant legends—rather than the intent of the original painter. By drawing copies, he presents again a certain moment of communication between artist and animal that first occurred far in the distant past. From this point of view, he is here similar to a conservator of old paintings, but his task is actually the restoration of this communication between human and animal. In the 20th century, several French thinkers transformed art into a game of language and concept. Since then, aesthetics has largely become a competition of intellect, while sensibility within art has been on the decline. It is now high time to restore communication with the animals, a process that can only begin with the legends illustrated in the classical paintings copied in this work. Those legends, ranging from conversations between man and the birds and beasts to the battle between Wu Song and the tiger, suggest a natural equality, symbiotic existence, and mutual awe between man and animal.

There exists certain spirituality in the forms of these paintings, just as artists have resigned themselves to canvas and paint as the forms of eternity. When representation in painting came under attack, many forgot what it was originally intended to do. By again representing classical paintings, Qiu Anxiong forces us to recall our memories of the objects represented here—painting. Gerhard Richter has engaged in similar efforts in the representation of photographs, but it seems that, for some time now, the natural and essential object of painting has been blocked by a more commercially stimulating play of signs. In a world constantly renewed by the logic of capitalism, even animals have been transformed into landscapes for stimulation in the site of the zoo.

In his paintings of the zoo, Qiu Anxiong replaced the powerful encounters between man and animal depicted in the classical paintings with cages and bars. The images are full of the traces of photography:

the marks of the viewfinder, alongside rigid artificial lights and colors. Animals appear as psychopathic entities or disappear as unnecessary shadows. The triptych concerned with temporality, the vivid green of the depiction of a tiger, and the summary portrayal of a landscape of rocks all emit an ambiance of the desolate and the withered. The dignified animals of the ancient legends have all disappeared, while only physical specimens remain in our contemporary images.

## Seeing through the cage

We see a dead orangutan with copies of the Holy Bible and the Origin of Species to its side, a scene that suggests a primate suicide. The title of the work is "Skeptic," suggesting that both animal and image express a certain skepticism of the two books. On the other hand, the gestures of the work resemble those of Marat in the famous painting "The Death of Marat" (1793) by Jacques-Louis David: Marat had been assassinated, and the weapon used by his assailant had been dropped on the ground. This parallel suggests that the orangutan may have been murdered. The only concession to the sense of humor associated with the orangutan is the replacement of the bathtub of Marat with a toilet. If it was a suicide, the orangutan has expressed its position publicly: for an animal that appears so often on the programs of the Discovery Channel, the chance to speak its mind is precious, necessitating an extreme declaration of opposition to both human science and theology. If it was an assassination, on the other hand, the two books could have been deliberately planted by the murderer, who has eliminated a witness to the truth of the real world. Either way, the death of orangutan stands as a moment of dark humor, arousing hidden emotions of self-esteem and antipathy within the human viewer, himself long promoted from the world of animals.

In the second cage, three objects forbidden to the followers of the ancient Greek thinker Pythagoras are collected: a white rooster, which they were not allowed to touch; beans, which they were not allowed to eat; and bread, which they were not allowed to break or consume<sup>1</sup>. Squares superposed over the image, nested such that the diagonal of one functions as the side of the next, are similarly derived from the deduction of the Pythagorean theorem. The title of the piece, "The Right to Heresy," refers to a book of the same title authored by Stefan Zweig in 1936. The content of these references could allow for a full interpretation of the work, but the form of the work in its own right may be more valuable for our discussion here. Formally, the image implicates two other works: "The Seven Liberal Arts" (ca. 1180) of Herrad von Landsberg, in which God appears in the center, surrounded by the figures of

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<sup>1</sup> On taboo and the story of the inspiration for the deduction of Pythagorean Theorem, see *A History of Western Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell, translated into Chinese by He Zhaowu and Li Yuese and published by the Commercial Printing House in 1963.

the liberal arts as defined in the Middle Ages in a representation of the purity of perfect order; and "Peasants' Column" (1525) by Albrecht Dürer, in which a peasant at the top of the composition sits deep in contemplation with a sword in his back, representing the desertion and betrayal he has suffered<sup>2</sup>. The annular structure of "The Seven Liberal Arts" places the sublime at the center, while "Peasants' Column" positions the excluded at the top of the totem. Sublime or exclusionary, both methods ensure the integrity of the boundaries of order and civilization.

The structure of Qiu Anxiong's take on the "Right to Heresy" resembles the classical ring. However, the cursed and excluded, represented by the white rooster, is positioned at the top and surrounded with the beloved order of Pythagoras, who once sentenced one of his followers to death for the discovery of irrational numbers, which subverted his theory of rational order. Where heresy should be excluded, the terror of the white rooster stands surprisingly on top of this order. The rooster is thus no longer a scapegoat of society like the peasant for Dürer, but rather the destroyer of the order of wisdom<sup>3</sup>. Should wisdom lead to order or to the unknown? It is a question that must be posed. The orangutan died because of the human order, while the white rooster stands out in order that it might take umbrage with the order imposed. It should be noted that the argument of the rooster, however, is achieved by form rather than concept. The comprehensive symbolic logic of Pythagoras cannot halt the magic worked by the artist.

In the next work, entitled "Revolution," the conversation is over and the pig—the counterrevolutionary—has been hung. The ham on the ground calls to mind the dinner party, or everything that revolution is not (as Mao Zedong once said: "A revolution is not a dinner party"). The pig has been depicted as prey since the cave murals of the stone age, but here it is a sacrifice not for the stomach or for the gods, but rather for revolution. There is no metaphor: this is a hung pig and nothing else. Only after being hung can it attract out attention; perhaps the the problem lies not with the pig, but with the audience. Would we feel shocked or frightened if we were to see a pig being hung? No. We have seen real human corpses in exhibitions—nothing can really shock us. But our perspective makes us feel uneasy, not simply because of what we see, but because our own role has shifted: viewing the hanging pig, we

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<sup>2</sup> Rene Girard has described in detail the system of the scapegoat. In general, a group assures its identity through difference. An individual within the group can assume pressure and harm on behalf of the whole group, acting as a victim in order to ensure the identity of the group. This process then reestablishes the consistency of the group through the exclusion of such a scapegoat. System of myth (as with the role of Jesus in Christianity) and public institutions (as with the social role of prison) are all constructed in terms of the scapegoat. In this way, we can say that animals have become scapegoats for the identity of human civilization.

<sup>3</sup> In the Middle Ages, the seven liberal arts consisted of grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, astronomy, music, and geometry, differing from both those defined at the end of the Roman Empire and those of today.

suddenly discover our capacity as humans and realize that the pig has been deprived of life. This has been ignored because the pig has been treated as a lifeless element of the food production chain (distinct from the food chain). Qiu Anxiong offers us not a sign or concept that represents this point, but rather an objective way of seeing, like a virus that changes our experience of seeing and reveals our true role in such processes of production. Our perceptions have been injected with the experiences accumulated through the processes of human history, going far beyond the scale of the individual. After wave after wave of revolution, we are able to see neither the real pig nor the true self.

The family of rabbits, on the other hand, need not offend the sages of the past or put themselves to death; they live a civilized, smooth, and steady existence. The first three works are all scenes of stopped time, existing as monuments. "Indescribable Happiness," however, depicts a scene moving forward through time in an imagined but self-contained realm—it is as if change is always about to arrive. The cage no longer divides the real space of the exhibition hall; instead, it represents another level of reality, a fragile reality nevertheless able to sustain the life of the rabbit family, which requires a sense of security. The cage offers them a life of comfort free from anxiety—just like what consumer society brings us. The rabbits live in another dimension of our own civilization. In front of the cage, we suddenly find ourselves removed from our own world. We shake with fear, facing an uncannily tangible alternative existence, but we also become dangerous creatures peek into the space of another. A certain desire for destruction rises within us.

## Distance

Throughout the exhibition as a whole, the cage brings separation but also functions as a mirror that allows no absolute vision from either side. We are unable to know whether we are inside or outside. This mirror delivers us a new sense of perspective and consciousness of our own status.

There will be, on the opening day of the exhibition, an actual caged animal in the space, providing an ever more direct level of reality. Before the appearance of zoo, a mutual respect and distance existed between man and beast in which contact was only established through natural relationships. Today, animals are put into cages, and contact has been replaced with devices of security.

On another level, we might say that the boredom inspired by such devices of security belongs to the habits developed by civilization. For Qiu Anxiong, such habits are impelled by the forces of ignorance, a Buddhist notion that drives the cycle of samsara. The work "Ball" is positioned at the center of the exhibition space, inside of which we can see the transmigration of the soul. Everything, from single ideas to the world itself, constantly grows and perishes. It is ignorance that pushes us forward, even as we

walk through the exhibition hall saying hello to friends. Ultimately, the works of Qiu Anxiong attempts to create a distance by which we might see the existence of samsara.

In this exhibition, Qiu Anxiong continues his work on the broad and expanding topic of civilization, creating space for discussions on the nature of civilization itself. The exhibition places the concept of distance at the center, positioning it as the key to perception, possession, desire, and war. Distance is the impetus of civilization. In a more abstract way, we might also say that distance is the origin of all destruction and evil<sup>4</sup>. In this exhibition, works waver between real existence and fictive reality as the audience alters its perspective by viewing from positions of varying distance. When we are permitted to be aware of such cages of perception, these structures lose their validity completely.

From the classical era to the modern, and particularly in the last century, artists have continually attempted to shorten the distance between art and the real world; art becomes ever more real, but eternity moves ever further away. This could be one reason for the profound desperation of contemporary art. It would seem that another work of Qiu Anxiong, "New Classic of Mountains and Seas, Part II," has been beset with worry and complaint for the same reason. In this exhibition, we see that the artist is no longer limited to formulaic concepts, instead recreating a sense of distance in order to produce new relationships. In this case, we all discover the necessity of a new way to see the world with fresh and quiet eyes.

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<sup>4</sup> We owe a large portion of this idea to Daniel Richter, who discusses the relationship between distance, war, and evil. See *Die Palette 1995-2007*, published by Dumont in 2007, page 171.

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**The Zoo  
and the  
Caged Spirit**  
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**Qiu Anxiong**

The Bible says that God created the world, created man, and created animals: in terms of creation, man is not superior to beast. The God that created man is not a wiser god but rather the same God, even if man later received favorable treatment. Man then rebelled against God, saddening and angering him, while the animals of the Garden of Eden, aside from the snake, did nothing wrong—but God did nothing to reward these rule-abiding living things. Perhaps the ways of God are mysterious and unpredictable, but man has continued to receive favorable treatment despite his betrayal, greed, selfishness, and ingratitude; he is punished time and again in an unending cycle. Animals, created also by God, have been enslaved, flogged, massacred, and devoured by man. This seems unfair.

Animals have, for a long time, been granted a spiritual nature, because they are, in many ways superior to man: birds soar through the air, horses and deer gallop at speed, tigers and leopards are agile, snakes and scorpions are deadly poisonous. All of these extraordinary abilities inspire awe. Hunting was originally a contest on equal terms in which man sometimes found himself in a position of weakness. The victor would pray over the vanquished, hoping that his soul might rest in peace by returning to nature, thanking the spirits for their gift, and feeling pride in his own courage and strength. At that time the animal was free, as was man, and the struggle was fair.

Man calls himself the soul of the world, and even if other living things cannot raise their hand to vote in support of this decision he insists on retaining all things of the world for his own use without ceremony. Strength determines such power. Even though civilization is already considerably advanced, this principle remains unchanged through the ages such that the very foundations of civilization appear frail and useless. Man and animal retain an inseverable bond and commonality as an animal strength remains latent within the body of man: despite the taming restraints of civilization, this animal strength returns at certain moments with a roar, like the beast locked up in the zoo that raises its head to howl at twilight.

Can animals think? Today it is commonly agreed that animals possess a certain degree of cognitive ability, albeit one that is extremely limited compared to human thought. Scientific experiments, for instance, contend that the most intelligent animals, like the chimpanzee, have the knowledge of a four or five year old child. We might say that, in terms of knowledge, we are superior to all animals. This is obviously an illustration of human superiority. Marxism defines the fundamental distinction between man and animal as the ability to produce tools, a hypothesis that emerges from the theoretical models of Darwinian evolution, but today observation has proved that many animals, in fact, create tools to fulfill their basic needs. Just as Marx could not believe in the existence of the platypus, an egg-laying mammal, his approval of evolution was, to a large degree, an act of resistance against the religious view of creation and in support of materialism, preventing him from accepting

the facts discovered through evolutionary theory. Man is never sufficiently aware of the limits of his own wisdom, and only a minority ever detect and admit their own idiocy and ignorance.

Natural selection is the answer at which Darwin arrived after extensive observation and consideration of the habits and characteristics of animals, which is to say that whoever best fits a certain environment will continue to survive. On this count man far surpasses other animals, and human existence today has actually caused the gradual disappearance of a number of other species. Man has achieved absolute precedence for survival on the earth, simultaneously also delivering a paradoxical result: human existence itself is now in a precarious situation.

The zoo is a consequence of the lust for possession. The drive to possess is the strongest human desire, a form of desire that arises external and additional to instinctual drives. We might say that this is a desire for desire itself, something that does not bring further pleasure in its own right but rather the opposite: only trouble and displeasure. Possession only allows desire a temporary satisfaction that nourishes an even greater desire. Possession of an animal requires its imprisonment. Imprisonment is, for man, a method of punishment, because when man is imprisoned he loses his freedom, but the zoo is not intended as a punishment for animals. It is meant only to possess them, and to take care of them, but the animal loses its freedom all the same. Ample food and a safe environment do not constitute a happy or comfortable position for animals, and those in the zoo become depressed and psychologically ill due to their loss of the freedom of movement. Animals that have lost their freedom lose also their spiritual nature, appearing as nothing but living specimens. Possession implies a loss of freedom, not only for the possessed but also for the possessor. Man and animals, without freedom, appear equally dingy and degenerate.

Enlightenment signals that the light of reason has allowed man to escape ignorance and enter civilization, as with the case of ancient Greece. The school of Pythagoras advocated reason in a way that manifested itself as a reverence for numbers, assigning certain values to all things and interpreting the order of the universe as a numbered order. This order was disrupted when Hippasus, a disciple of the Pythagorean school, discovered irrational numbers, a spiritual activity that nearly destroyed his bodily existence. Animals hunt simply to eat and survive; the notion of being killed for violating a social prohibition was born only after human thinking emerged. Man entered civilization because of his enlightenment, and civilization makes such slaughter appear less brutal. Louis XVI devoted himself to researching the improvement of the guillotine, making the blade fall cleanly and more swiftly, but a massacre is still a massacre, and its reasons are ever more abundant and less discernible.

The French Revolution marked the end of the age of Enlightenment, when Marat was stabbed by a beautiful young woman. He signed many orders for executions during the Jacobin Reign of Terror, and if he had not died many more heads would have rolled. So was written the epitaph of Robespierre: "Who'er thou art who passest, pray / Don't grieve that I am dead; For had I been alive this day, / Thoud'st been here in my stead!" This is precisely why Marat was stabbed by the young Charlotte Corday: "I killed one man to save one hundred thousand." Revolution after enlightenment remained bloody, the word itself implying that millions must die: Russia in the October Revolution, Germany in the Third Reich, China from the Xinhai Revolution to the Cultural Revolution, Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba, and even the Maoists in Nepal today—all navigate on rivers of blood. Since the 18th century we have called upon the departed spirits of utopia, but lost in this idealist dream we have been able to kill and sacrifice others or ourselves in the name of the construction of some future prosperity. They truly believe that fresh blood can be traded for the arrival of a future paradise, but this is a deal with the devil—there can be no redemption after selling one's soul, while all that is won is a ticket to hell. The road lit by the light of enlightenment is strewn with corpses.

Behind every wild animal purchased by a zoo there are several or even several dozen that died in capture or transport, just as for every black slave sold in the Americas an untold number were killed upon capture or thrown into the Atlantic to feed the fish.

Kafka wrote that man was floating in the air and connected to two ropes, one of which dropped down from the sky and pulled him upward while the other pulled him down toward the ground. We might understand this as the simultaneous or parallel forces of redemption and corruption, or perhaps as a test of strength between angels and demons, or even a struggle between reason and animality. It is a classical sentiment. Ours is a mediocre era of middling happiness and predictable pain: your prosperity today is to fill your cart with products at the supermarket or step on the clutch and leave the public bus behind. Struggle and pain mean little more than paying the bill, or the powerlessness of reading your receipt.

This world has inflated to such a point that we can no longer conceive of it, and the vast majority of people believe in letting it all go, because none of their actions matter. So they let the world rot and ferment, buying a stack of instant noodles, yogurt, and chocolate, throwing the trash outside, and closing the door—the troubles of the world have nothing to do with me.

A sun bear sits still in the corner of its cage. There are openings in the walls to both sides. It is pitch black. The yellow and green tracks on the ground are its urine and feces. The bear is like a third hole in the wall.

The television announces that Bin Laden has been killed by the United States. This makes him very cool, willing to fight with America. The Americans are also impressive, having killed him at last, but a piece of paint chipped off of my car today—this is the most annoying thing, and now I have to go take care of this, to the 4S office to meet the insurance company girl. Her face is very white but the dark circle around her mouth always seems like she didn't wash properly. She works in a cramped plastic cube, almost buried amongst piles of A4 car insurance documents. Will most of her life be passed in this cube with these A4 insurance documents? Perhaps in a different job her face would be cleaner, but what else could she do?

Do we need another revolution? No, there is no need, we need only \$10 million U.S. dollars, or maybe that won't be enough, \$20 million, \$30 million, and then emigrate to Canada or Australia or something, and buy a villa, looking at polar bears or sun tan and surf the web. Watching the revolution here is interesting.

When the light from a star in some distant nebula crosses the vastness of space and reaches the earth, will humanity still exist?

The koala and sloth may be satisfied with their lives in the zoo, because they are, after all, sleeping for much of the time, only to awaken, eat some leaves, and go back to sleep.

In an age without homesickness, we can only regret that we cannot return to the way things were before.

More than a million African zebras and wildebeest join a large migration each year. Every February they start their trek in the Serengeti and Ngorongoro plains in the south of Tanzania, the precise date determined by the progress of the calving season, during which some 500000 new lives are born. In early March, more than 500000 zebras, almost two million wildebeests, and around 100000 other grazing animals join in this large-scale migration, crossing the Maasai Mara border area in Kenya and heading for the water and pasture or forested areas of the western Serengeti. The last obstacle this army of animals must face: the Mara River, the greatest challenge of all. Having experienced the arid and barren expanses of the tropical grasslands for weeks of scarce food and water, their physical strength has been sapped to the point of exhaustion just as they must cross this rushing river filled with starving crocodiles lying hidden in wait—only on the other side can they reach their Garden of Eden. Over the course of 1800 miles (2896.76 kilometers), 250000 wildebeests will have died, and yet they all embark on the journey without hesitation.

# Philosophical Notes on Animals

Qiu Anxiong

On January 3, 1889, at the piazza Carignano, Nietzsche saw a carriage driver whipping a horse. He cried out, ran over and threw his arms around the horse's neck, before promptly falling unconscious. A month later, he was diagnosed as insane. This philosopher's declaration of the death of God also implied that humanity had completely rebelled and sunk into degeneracy.

Among all the creatures of God's creation, God loved man the most, but because people had gained knowledge and fallen, they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. This is a strange paradox, as the greatest difference between man and animals is not in the characteristics of the body. To the contrary, man's physical traits attest to his similarity to animals. The greatest difference between man and animals is that man's intellect and spirit are greater than those of animals. So before man was cast out of the Garden of Eden, he had no intellectual advantage over animals, and no awareness of existence, just like all other things in the world. To exist without being aware of it is paradise. Man's intellect forms his absolute advantage in the world, but it is also the cause of his fall. Without God's tender loving care, man must face the mysteries of the universe alone. That is why Nietzsche called for the emergence of superman, but the replacement of God with superman does not liberate mankind from its state of slavery; it only changes the means of slavery, with people going from being servants of God to being slaves of themselves. Man must depend on his own awareness of existence to find meaning. Once mankind's thinking about the world lost the crutch that was God, the awareness of existence became a key indicator that philosophers use to distinguish man from animal. Therefore, one can say that only man can fall. Animals cannot fall because they have a low level of intellect, and most importantly, they lack man's awareness of existence. This awareness of existence is perhaps the reason that God left.

## Parsing "Awareness of Existence"

Heidegger says, "*Ek-sistence can be said only of the essence of the human being, that is, only of the human way 'to be.' For as far as our experience shows, only the human being is admitted to the destiny of ek-sistence. Therefore ek-sistence can also never be thought of as a specific kind of living creature among others... Thus even what we attribute to the human being as animalitas on the basis of the comparison with 'beasts' is itself grounded in the essence of ek-sistence. The human body is something essentially other than an animal organism.*"<sup>1</sup>

*"Because plants and animals are lodged in their respective environments but are never placed freely into the clearing of being which alone is 'world,' they lack language. But in being denied language, they are not thereby suspended worldlessly in their environment. Still, in this word 'environment' converges all that is puzzling about living creatures."*<sup>2</sup>

*"Of all the beings that are, presumably the most difficult to think about are living creatures, because on the one hand they are in a certain way most closely akin to us, and on the other they are at the same time separated from our ek-sistent essence by an abyss."*<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger used awareness of existence and language as the uniqueness of being that separates man from the animals. He used an experiment with bees as an example, showing that their harvesting of honey is driven by instinct rather than as a free choice. Instinct is a passive behavior forced by the state of existence, rather than a state of freedom, and the bee is unable to detect its own existence. Even when the bee's abdomen is removed, it will continue to drink nectar. In this way, it is shown that animals are 'world poor' (weltarm). Heidegger established three categories: the stone (material object) is 'worldless' (weltlos); the animal is 'poor in world' (weltarm); man is 'world-forming' (weltbildend). According to Heidegger's three classifications, lifeless materials are worldless, in that they cannot perceive the world, so for the stone, the world does not exist. Therefore, all inanimate objects belong to this category. In the second category, that of all living animals (not plants, but Heidegger's paucity of language lumped all plants and animals together, which is ridiculous because anyone can see the vast difference between a dog and a tree). Their perception and knowledge of the world is impoverished, limited, passive and instinctual. In the third category, man's perception and knowledge of the world is active and rich, and man can go out and actively form the world. The first

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<sup>1</sup> Calarco, Matthew, Heidegger's Animal Philosophy (Heidegger de Dongwu Zhaxue), published in Production (Volume Three), Guangxi Normal University Publishing House, January, 2006; 1st edition, p.15

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.16

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 15

category's distinction from the second and third is clear. Lifeless objects are unable to perceive the external world, let alone sense their own existence, but the distinction between the second and third categories is coarse. It is just like the term 'animals,' which is a broad generalization, nowhere near as clear as the term 'man.' Of course different animals all have their own names, i.e. horse, pig, bee, but they have been given the blanket term 'animals.' Furthermore, his bee experiment is special. A pig would certainly not continue eating without noticing if its abdomen were removed. Without considering this issue, Heidegger broadly summed up the 'world poverty' of all animals through the actions of bees. This clearly doesn't stand up to much scrutiny. Of course, man's superiority in intellect goes without saying, but this is the result of training in human civilization; a man raised by wolves will not possess this intellectual superiority, instead resembling the wolves in capabilities and traits. This example shows that becoming a man requires, beyond biological conditions, acquired education. On the other hand, animals that live among people, such as dogs, are unable to understand man's complex thinking and language. This explains the physiological shortcomings of animals compared to humans, but one cannot deny that upon training, a dog can be made to understand simple linguistic commands from humans, and can interact with humans, even though that interaction is not carried out purely through language but includes language, movements and bodily expressions. That is to say, animals have a certain ability to learn. Anyone who has seen the circus knows this. Those horses, elephants, dogs, tigers, lions, even parrots can learn complex behaviors that go far beyond their instincts. Animals do not rely solely on their instincts to survive. If they survived only through instincts, they would never be able to learn anything beyond them. The survival skills of wild animals must also be learned. Such skills are often taught by the mothers. If a captive-raised tiger is released in the wild, it will starve to death, because it has not learned the skill of hunting in the wild. High level animals also have emotional expression. They have feelings of happiness, sadness, suffering, anger and fear, and from the emotional interactions between animals and humans it can be clearly seen that animals have self-awareness. Though this self-awareness does not allow them to ponder such questions as "why do I exist," it does allow them to understand and differentiate between familiar and unfamiliar people for its own benefit. In addition, clear social structures exist among social animals. In groups of monkeys, each monkey is aware of its own social status. They act not only out of such physical instincts as gender differences, but also according to their social status, as well as actions according to one's own ability, such as challenging the dominant leader. It would be rash to attribute such complex behavior methods to mere instinct. It is difficult to clearly determine whether or not animals have a sense of morality. For instance, is a dog loyal to its master out of a sense of morality? "Loyalty" is clearly a moral judgment term, and its antithesis is "betrayal." Man's choice between loyalty and betrayal is a free one, and few dogs are not loyal, but is the dog's loyalty innate or instinctual? It is very difficult to say if a dog's loyalty is innate or instinctual. If a dog has no experience living among men, then it will not be loyal to men. Animals also engage in

deceitful behavior, and deceit is also a term with moral connotations. Of course, animals engage in deceit to gain food for survival or to protect themselves. We would be hard pressed to say that a crow's deceitful actions are immoral. The mother's actions towards its children are often protective and nurturing, to the point that a mother animal will often fight with much more powerful animals when its children are in danger. We say that this is the mother's nature or the mother's instinct, but some mothers do not like their own children, refusing to nourish them and allowing them to starve. The reasons behind such action are unknown, but it clearly goes against instinct. Language is a unique invention of man, and the clearest marker of highly intelligent activity, but does language exist between animals? In observational research of animals, it has been shown that animals do have their own languages, with different calls having different meanings and movements of the body also conveying meanings. Compared to the complex sounds and abstract thinking of human language, animal language is much simpler, but perhaps our understanding of their language is poor. Heidegger states that language is man's unique habitat; even existence itself (sein) depends on language. In German, the word "sein" means "to be." It is the subject's act of naming an object. "To be" is also to exist; without "being" there is no existence. That is to say, only by becoming aware of the opposition between subject and object, of the difference between the self and the world, can there be an awareness of existence. We do not know if animals, like man, can also give a name to the outside world. Based on our current understanding and a comparison with man, we can say for the time being that animals cannot name subjects, but that is not enough to determine whether or not animals are aware of existence. Though animals cannot name the world, this does not lead to the deduction that animals have no self-awareness or ability to distinguish the objective world. The term 'animal' is too broad. We can easily ascertain that a paramecium or a garden slug has little or no self-awareness, but we cannot so easily determine that a dog or a primate is not self-aware. We can see the self-awareness of the higher animals through their reactions to the outside world. They can clearly distinguish between different things, and can learn to tell which things are beneficial or harmful to them, which things they like and don't like. Like men, they also have companions that they like and dislike. We would be hard pressed to say that this is not an act of self-awareness, or that these animals are entirely unaware of their own existence. The philosophical "abyss" that Heidegger proposed between man and animal is not so much the result of thinking in the scientific sense as it is classification in the religious sense. That is to say, he first established the existence of the "abyss" and then set out to verify it. The world in which peasants dwell is open and clear, but the world in which animals dwell is obscured, because animals survive for survival itself, rather than pondering the goal of survival; only humans ponder the goal of survival. Awareness of existence and the pondering of existence are two different ways of thought. The peasant is aware of his existence, but has no need to ponder the question of existence like a philosopher. Using awareness of existence to distinguish between man and animal would appear to be a judgment from the realm of philosophy.

Heidegger's absolute separation of man and animal, though not explained in religious terms, is clearly in disagreement with the conclusion of evolutionary theory that man evolved from animals. This use of existential philosophy to prove the uniqueness of man is quite close to a religious definition of man. Animals and men are clearly different, but whether or not the difference between the second and third categories is as great as the gulf between the first and second (i.e. whether the difference between a stone and a living animal is equal to the difference between animals and men) clearly warrants further discussion.

## Animality

In his essay *Animality*, Georges Bataille analyzes the characteristics of animals. Looking at the example of one animal eating another, he describes the immanence of the animal: when one animal eats another, it does not distinguish it as a separate object, the way a human does. In this action, there is no differentiation, and there is no experience of the duration of time, so there is no essential difference between eater and eaten. He uses the term 'subordination' to distinguish between man and animal. Man's relationship with things includes 'subordination.' Objects are subordinate to man, possessed by man, but this relationship of possession does not exist between animals. Eating is done merely as a survival necessity, with no added relationship of possession, and therefore nothing is posed outside of the present moment. Bataille describes the immanence of animals with the metaphor, "*an animal is in the world like water in water.*"<sup>4</sup> This concept of 'subordination' is an important definition distinguishing man from animal. Man's perception of the world is clear, his perception of self is definite, and he desires to possess the world – the world is subordinated to him. This relationship of subordination establishes the way in which human and animal existence differs. If man's possession of the world includes everything he sees and knows, then it naturally includes animals. That is to say, there are no subordinate relationships between animals, while some animals have subordinate relationships with man. This is quite obvious; the history of man keeping animals is almost as long as human history itself. Kept animals are subordinate to man, controlled by man and slaughtered by man. The animal's immanence is therefore lost, as the animal becomes one of man's things and enters into man's 'world.' The animal's survival is no longer marked by immediacy. Once the relationship with man is established, the animal enters a state of waiting. Pastoral animals have not yet been completely objectified. They are still on the margins of time. But confinement destroys the animal's animality in a real sense. From birth to death, the confined animal is possessed as a useful object, and being possessed is a 'subordinate' relationship. I would like to analyze this

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<sup>4</sup> Bataille, Georges, *Animality* [Dongwuxing], published in *Production* (Volume Three), Guangxi Normal University Publishing House, January, 2006; 1st edition, p.36

relationship through animals in zoos. Confinement in zoos is unlike farm raising, where an animal is fed with the goal of being butchered. Instead, such animals exist solely for appreciation. The zoo has its origins in possession, and possession is the essence of the zoo. The possessed animal no longer exists in the now, yet it has not entered into the duration of time, rather, it is in a state of waiting, or an empty state of existence. The animal's immanence exists within the captive instincts, but even these captive instincts have been seized from the zoo animal. Animals instinctually want to travel, to live in different environments according to the seasons. Even non-migratory animals have large ranges. The cages of the zoo can only contain the body. The animal's inclinations to hunt, to forage, to build nests and nurture young, all of these survival activities, which we call instincts, their immanence or instincts (what humans call captive instincts) are not allowed to unfold. If such 'captive' instincts constitute an animal's open state, then this captivity seizes this openness. The animals we observe at the zoo, especially the higher animals, often sleep out of boredom, pace about in their cages, endlessly repeat meaningless tasks or inexplicably fly into rage. Such behavior is quite similar to the behavior of patients in an insane asylum. Compared to sane people, the existence of the mental patient is a blank state of existence. They are even incapable of understanding their own state of existence and incapable of understanding the outside world. They are controlled by unconnected memories, making only mechanical responses to outside stimulus. Insanity, in the field of philosophical research, is a state of existence, and it is of course human insanity, but the person observing an animal in a cage is oblivious to whether that animal is insane or normal, because that person only wishes to see the animal's external physical traits. Of course, the animal must be alive, but nothing else matters to the people outside of the cage. Their observation is brief, and when they see a listless animal, they will shout, clap, make frightening noises, and throw food. What they want to see is an animal that responds. For the animal, the people outside of the cage do not really exist. They are shadows moving back and forth. They are nothing but bluff, never breaking the cage. So they rarely respond. Only the lure of food will arouse their attention, because this is the only goal they have in this existence. Captive animals do not need to forage, so they have no need for foraging skills. They can do nothing, and the food will appear at the appropriate time. Eating (not hunting or foraging, which are completely different) is the most important activity, and is the essence here. They have been raised to be looked at, but this is not their goal in existence. They are not interested in looking at people either. They just want to be like water in water, dwelling in their existence, but they have been put in cages, serving as living specimens in the zoo. Their immanence as animals has already died. They are water out of water, soon to evaporate. In human society, confinement is a form of punishment. People are confined, their freedoms stripped from them, because they committed a crime, but the animals confined in zoos have committed no crimes. We could say that animals are incapable of committing crimes. When an animal eats another animal, it doesn't see any difference. They are all just animals it has eaten. The wolf has been depicted as a cruel animal, but cruelty

is a moralistic judgment attached from the perspective of man, and the wolf is just surviving the way wolves do. Hunting is the wolf's basic survival skill. The wolf hunts to obtain food, otherwise it will starve. Of course, there are special circumstances where animals take out revenge. If animals consciously take out revenge, can we judge such animals according to human ethical standards? This is a dilemma. People confine animals not because they committed crimes, but just to observe them. We can say that this is mankind's crime against animals, invading and perpetrating violence against innocent animals. Can animals then engage in judgment and punishment for mankind's crimes? The Bible says that god created the animals and men, and that man is to tend the animals. Animals exist for man to enslave and utilize. In that case, everything man does to animals is natural, and though evolutionary theory has taken issue with this view of creation, philosophers or people in general are still willing to retain these special privileges for man. Though god has left, man has not discarded the special right to rule that god bestowed on man. Instead, he exercises this right even more than before. Man's possession and use of animals has reached an unprecedented level. All animals that fall under man's control have become man's accessories, including even the wild animals in the nature preserve, which is just a larger area of confinement, a larger zoo.

## Gazes, Nakedness, Shame and the Limits of Humanity

In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida talks about the gaze of a cat. He is caught under the gaze of a cat, naked no less, and it produces feelings of unease and shame. He is puzzled, wondering what could cause such feelings.

*"Ashamed of what and before whom? Ashamed of being naked as a beast. It is generally thought, although none of the philosophers I am about to examine actually mentions it, that the property unique to animals, what in the last instance distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it. Not being naked, therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short, without consciousness of good and evil."*<sup>5</sup>

*"Clothing would be proper to man, one of the "properties" of man. "Dressing oneself" would be inseparable from all the other figures of what is "proper to man," even if one talks about it less than speech or reason, the logos, history, laughing, mourning, burial, the gift, etc."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida, Jacques, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* ["Gu Wo Zai" de Dongwu], published in *Production* (Volume Three), Guangxi Normal University Publishing House, January, 2006; 1st edition, p.73

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73-74

Here, Derrida touches on a very fundamental problem. When Adam and Eve went against god's will and ate the fruit of knowledge, their first reaction was shame at their nakedness. That is to say, they were unaware of their nakedness before, and just like animals, had no sense of shame. One could say that mankind's birth began with shame, that self-awareness began with shame. On the other hand, this is the original sin. The production of self-awareness and shame was the original sin. Did god hope for man and animal to be the same? Was the unknowing mankind the only mankind that satisfied god? In this light, mankind's sins are incorrigible. Man wishes to know everything, even everything that god knows, and such arrogance is sinful, but at the same time it is trivial, because all that man knows, as far as the world is concerned, is like a tiny grain of sand in a vast sea. Socrates said that no matter how erudite man became, he would still be unknowing. So what, then, is man's sin? When matched with his ignorance, man's sins take on a different weight.

Years ago, I was at the Berlin zoo, and I saw a massive orangutan at the monkey house. It had its back turned to the glass, ignoring the visitors outside as it stroked its own fur. It would sometimes cast a glance towards the glass, as if it was waiting for something. An old woman entered the monkey house, and went straight to the orangutan. The orangutan jumped, as if hit by an electric shock. It turned around and put its forehead against the glass, and so did the old woman. They stared at each other through the glass as the old woman said something under her breath. The orangutan was transfixed, oblivious to everything around it, focused only on that old lady's low chant. They both seemed to forget the world around them, entering into a world of just the two of them, separated by the glass. I was puzzled, and even came to view the orangutan as a human. The emotions in its eyes were simple yet complex. I figured that the old woman often came to see it, and they knew each other quite well, sharing some sort of unspoken connection. This moment was a shared secret friendship or deeper affection, though purely spiritual. They could only interact through their gaze. I can still see it clearly now, after so many years. Their shared gaze was clearly not the same as the gaze of the cat at Derrida's nakedness. That cat's gaze was like an empty abyss, and Derrida's unease was the confusion of standing on the edge of that abyss. The orangutan's gaze was clearly a response to the person's gaze, rather than some empty abyss. There was no shame or unease in their gaze. This left me perplexed. Where is the boundary between man and animal? Of course, we can say that this was the kind of affection one has towards a pet, mutual affection, or a relationship of taming, or perhaps that it is just animal emotion, but regardless, that gaze crossed the boundary, and where is that boundary?

Back to man's original sin, shame, it is the origin of mankind. Animals have no shame. Their behavior has no moral component. Whether it is hunting or mating, there are no barriers of self-judgment impeding these actions. Like water in water, animals are not moral or immoral. They just exist and

act in this way. Is morality rooted in shame? When Adam and Eve felt ashamed upon discovering their nakedness, they used leaves to cover their reproductive organs. When god created them, he did not intend for them to have children, but as a punishment for their sin, he made them feel the pain of childbirth. If that is the case, then when god created man, did he also create their reproductive system? Did he anticipate man's sin? Or did he give them the power to reproduce after they sinned? When they ate the forbidden fruit, their shame was at their nakedness, especially the nakedness of their reproductive organs. Clearly, they were not added after the fact. We do not feel ashamed about naked faces or naked limbs. We are only ashamed of naked reproductive organs. Is this shame at the punishment for this sin? The core of our moral taboos is the control of our impulse to reproduce. Both Eastern and Western religion are in agreement on this. Eastern religion views reproductive power as a form of Kama, a root of suffering in the cycle of life. Animals also reproduce, but god did not give them reproduction as a punishment. Did god perhaps use animal reproduction as a punishment against man, forever marking him with inescapable animality? Man is a naked being, but animals are not. Animals have no concept of nakedness. The concept of nakedness only exists in comparison to being clothed. Animal bodies are like water in water. Animals have no sense of sin with regards to their bodies, and do not resist any of their physical functions. They are neither ashamed nor proud. Man is ashamed of most of his bodily functions, eating, drinking, defecation... man is ashamed of eating and drinking like animals, and has cultivated complex rules and etiquette for these acts, giving us a sense of shame in eating and drinking. Defecation is perhaps the most difficult bodily function for man to identify with. We have such distaste for it that we build special places to conceal this shameful yet inescapable physiological behavior. The elegance of the toilet and the fragrance of potpourri are both rooted in this sense of shame. Of course, reproduction is the core of shame. Shame regarding reproductive behavior has led to the embellishment of emotions, with various descriptions of affection making unusual, even laughable efforts to conceal and avoid direct mention of reproductive activity. People are also more obsessed with their own bodies, and the various characteristics of those bodies, than animals are, to the point of developing precise and complex ways of viewing and presenting their own bodies. Animals have no sense of shame, and they never conceal their own physiological reactions. The greatest characteristic of animality is possibly this lack of a sense of shame, while humans are the very image of shame. The sense of shame is the cornerstone of morality, as well as the origin of original sin. Mankind's goodness and evil all stem from this. The distinction between good and evil is the unique purview of man, so they say that "man is the moral animal." Under the judgment of morals, man is distinguished from beasts. On the one hand, man's morality sets him above the other animals, but morality also leads to his fall. Moral prohibitions are like the walls around the garden, always drawing man towards the tempting forbidden fruit. We call the fallen man "below the beasts," as if beasts are the model of moral corruption, but the tacit meaning is this: that beasts have no sense of shame, and man should have a sense of shame, so those who know what

is wrong and still fall are even worse than the beasts who know no shame. Some people affix moral attributes to certain animal behavior. For instance, the crow taking care of its elderly parents is seen as an act of filial piety. Such judgment views natural animals as a measuring rod for morality. It is rather absurd, because animals exist outside of morality. None of their actions can be considered in terms of morality. For some animals that live close to humans, it is hard to determine whether or not morality is a factor in their behavior, as with a dog's faithfulness to its master. The dog may have no sense of shame regarding its body, but faithfulness is a moral property. Though dogs have the moral of faithfulness, they lack man's sense of shame. This is a strange situation. Here, the line between man and animal grows murky. Man, with his sense of shame, can have a spiritual connection and interaction with animals who lack it. As soon as man focuses affection on an animal, they will have a certain level of spiritual connection.

Man's thoughts are built upon the foundation of language. Language is a powerful tool that sets man above animals. The cognitive system and vocal system upon which human language is built are much more complex than those of animals. We cannot know to what extent animals are able to perceive the world, but we can be sure that overall, the realm of man's cognition far surpasses that of any animal. Language constructs a system of signs for describing the world, and this system is man's most important method of interaction. Without language, people would be virtually unable to coexist. Animalistic interactive methods continue to exist on some hidden level, with lingering animality encapsulated in various ceremonies and behavioral norms. Among animals, the struggle between males is virtually universal, from high level mammals such as lions, elephants and primates to low level animals such as fish and beetles. Mankind is no exception. Struggles between men are often about women or potential women, about the order in choices for reproduction. Whether the struggle takes the form of barbaric clashes of the flesh, or refined debate, the aggression in these struggles is the same as that of animals. Is there perhaps some latent connection between the lowest signs of meaning in human language and the basic behavior patterns of animals?

## **Animal and Man in the Karmic Cycle**

A core concept of the Buddhist worldview is that of cause and effect, or karma. The chain begins with emptiness; ignorance leads to action; action leads to consciousness; consciousness leads to name and form; name and form lead to the six sense-bases; the six sense-bases lead to contact; contact leads to sensation; sensation leads to desire; desire leads to attachment; attachment leads to becoming; becoming leads to birth; birth leads to aging and death. The twelve nidanas (the chain of dependent origination) describe the process of the cycle of life. All life is brought about through karma, and through the actions of this life, the world is formed. The world consists of three realms,

the desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm. These are further split into six domains, of which the god domain, the human domain and the Asura domain are the three higher domains, while the beast domain, the hungry ghost domain and the hell domain are the three lower domains. Of the six domains, only the human and beast domains are within the realm of human perception, while we cannot confirm or know the others. The human and beast domains are higher and lower domains, respectively. Beings born within the six domains are not eternally in one single domain, but can shift between them depending on their actions. Perhaps a being is a human in this life, but in the next may be reborn as an animal, or fall into hell, or rise up to become a deva, or demigod. This view of life differs from the materialistic view that life disappears upon death, but in the Buddhist view, this cycle is not a good existence. To the contrary, the cyclical existence is fraught with eternal suffering and chaos. The goal of Buddhist cultivation is to escape from this cycle of death and rebirth. The difference between man and animal is in terms of intelligence. Animals also differ in intelligence between the higher and lower animals. The perceptions of the higher animals approach those of man. Man's intellect allows for abstract thinking on the relationship between time and space. There is no way to verify whether or not the higher animals are capable of such thinking, but in terms of perceptivity and intuition, many higher animals such as pigs, dogs, cows, sheep, horses, lions, tigers and primates are not so far removed from humans. In some such aspects, man is not as adept as animals. For instance, animals such as dogs and cats have much stronger senses of smell and hearing than humans. Much of man's superior abilities come from training and learning, though of course man is physiologically endowed with the ability to learn – a highly developed brain and superior intellect, but in the Buddhist view, animals, though not as intelligent as humans, have bodily perceptions and self-awareness. They can perceive temperature, colors, smells, flavors and pain, and are aware enough to avoid danger and suffering and to seek comfort and safety. A hunted animal will feel fear, suffering and anguish. Of course, higher mammals will perceive things differently than lower animals such as insects, shellfish or jellyfish, but all animals have a self-preservation instinct, and the fear, suffering and anguish caused by killing creates a force that drives living beings into a constant state of mutual harm and killing. On the other hand, actions that bring other beings pleasure or benefit create a force that forms a cycle of mutual pleasure and benefit. This is the relationship of living things as described in the karmic cycle of life. Among animals, most relationships are those of hunter and hunted. Whether it is lions and tigers hunting gazelles and deer, or a mantis hunting a cicada, most animals live either hunting other animals for food or being hunted as another animal's food. Herbivorous animals do not kill other animals, but they constantly face the danger of being hunted, and even apex predators such as lions and tigers are not safe, because they may be hunted by humans or other carnivorous animals, and also face starvation if they do not hunt successfully. Beings in the beast domain face the suffering of being eaten and the suffering of lack of knowledge. There are many stories about the relationship between man and animal in the Buddhist cannon. *In*

*the Sutra of Golden Light*, Senior Flowing Water saw a pond that was drying up, with thousands of fish about to die in it. Out of compassion, he borrowed several dozen elephants from the king and used them to transport water for the fish. Having been saved, the fish followed Senior Flowing Water around in the pond, and when they died, they were reborn as demigods. Senior Flowing Water later became the Sakyamuni Buddha, and many people, upon hearing the telling of this sutra, found enlightenment. This story is one of the foundations for the practice of releasing captive animals. *In the Dirgha Agama Sutra*, King Virudhaka vanquishes the Shakya clan, despite the Buddha's attempts to stop them. According to the Buddha, the karmic cause for the Shakya clan's fall is that in a past life, the Shakya clan were fishermen, and the Buddha was a small child. Though this child never ate fish, he once struck a fish three times with a wooden stick. The soldiers led by King Virudhaka were all reincarnations of the fish that had been killed, and this was karmic revenge. The Shakya clan could not escape their fate, and the Buddha's own punishment was a headache that lasted three days. These two stories describe the karmic relationships between man and animal. In the cycle, if you kill in one life, you will be reincarnated into a lower domain, and feel the suffering of being an animal that is killed as a result. But if you release a life, then you will enjoy longevity or be reincarnated into a higher realm. To a great extent, this view on karmic cause and effect is a set of moral teachings used to limit the actions of men. Most people do not believe that these events really took place. Few people believe in reincarnation, let alone reincarnation as a dog or a parrot. It sounds quite ridiculous. Evolutionary theory tells us that man evolved from amoebas. Most people believe this is real, just as three hundred years ago, the Chinese people firmly believed in reincarnation and judgment by the King of Hell, but didn't believe that the world was round. To a great extent, many of our views on things are not so much known as believed. As a way of understanding existence in the world, the views of Buddhism are difficult to verify from a scientific perspective. The scientific path for understanding the world focuses much more on exploring material things, and when it comes to life and death, it is mostly still fumbling in the dark. The view of the equality of all life found in the Buddhist view is today mostly understood in humanist terms. It was a revolutionary idea aimed at the Indian caste system, and is roughly equivalent to the humanist idea of equality. The Buddhist view, however, views all life in the three realms as being equal, with humanity only being a small component of that. *In the Diamond Sutra*, we find the following passage: "Buddha said: Subhuti, all the Bodhisattva-Heroes should discipline their thoughts as follows: All living creatures of whatever class, born from eggs, from wombs, from moisture, or by transformation whether with form or without form, whether in a state of thinking or exempt from thought-necessity, or wholly beyond all thought realms -- all these are caused by me to attain unbounded liberation nirvana. Yet when vast, uncountable, immeasurable numbers of beings have thus been liberated, verily no being has been liberated. Why is this, Subhuti? It is because no Bodhisattva who is a real Bodhisattva cherishes the idea of an ego-entity, a personality, a being, or a separated individuality." The beings born from eggs,

from wombs, from moisture or from transformation are all animal life, including humans. Those with form, without form, in a state of thinking or exempt from thought necessity are beings in the realms of form and formlessness. Looking at the phenomena, the equality of all life is impossible. The cyclical view of life separates between the realms of heaven and earth, of joy and suffering, and this is at odds with the idea of the equality of life. Could this be nothing more than a campaign slogan? If we merely look at the lives in the midst of the six realm cycle, there is still equality to speak of. If we look at the myriad beings rising and falling through the six domains, there are no differences, according to secular truth. But if we look at equality through the lens of absolute truth, it is like the Buddha exclaimed upon his enlightenment, "How wonderful! All beings have the wisdom to attain enlightenment, but cannot realize it because of attachments and delusion. If we cast off these attachments, we will gain this wisdom naturally" (from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*). Buddha is saying that in essence, all living things are equal, and the differences arise from attachment and delusion, which leads to cycles through life and death. If one can escape from these attachments, he can attain enlightenment. According to Buddhist doctrine among the six domains, people are the most suited to finding enlightenment through cultivation. The lives in the god domain are too peaceful and free of suffering, so they do not think of escape from the cycle. The lives in the hell and hungry ghost domains suffer constantly, so much that they cannot think about anything. Animals have difficulty seeking enlightenment, occupied as they are by survival and hampered by a lack of intellect. Human suffering produces a desire to escape the cycle, while humans also possess the peace, leisure and intellect to engage in cultivation. The Buddha says that the chance to live a human lifetime is exceedingly rare, like finding a needle in a haystack, or like a blind turtle in the ocean sticking its head through a hole in a piece of driftwood. It takes many lives for the chance to live one as a person. (In the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha uses the simile of a blind tortoise, eons old, who sticks its head out of the water only once a century. There is a floating log with a hole in it. The story likens the chances of enlightenment to the chances of that turtle sticking its head through the hole in a log to show that enlightenment is very difficult to attain.) *In the Buddhist view, the life of a person is very dear, while the life of the beast is not so difficult. In a Buddhist story recorded in the Compendium of Five Lamps, Tang dynasty Zen master Bai Zhang held classes every day, and an old man would always come to listen. One day, he stayed behind after the others had left. Bai Zhang asked if he needed any assistance, and the old man responded, 'Five hundred lives ago I was a master, and one of my students asked me whether a Mahayana adept was subject to the laws of karma, to which I responded no. As a result, I have been constantly reincarnated as a fox ever since.' He asked Bai Zhang the same question, to which the monk responded, 'do not ignore karma.' The old man was suddenly enlightened. He told Bai Zhang that he had escaped his fox body, and asked him to send people up the mountain the next day to retrieve his body and dispose of it as a monk's body. The next day, Bai Zhang led his monks up the mountain, where they found the body of a massive fox. They cremated it as if it*

*were a deceased monk. This is the wild fox Zen story. Even those who seek cultivation can fall into the beast domain because of their actions, and when they do, they will spend five hundred lives as beasts. The Buddha has said that if all the souls living as animals are like the grains of sand in the sea, then the souls living as humans are like the dust under a fingernail. Though there are now seven billion people, the lives found in a small pond can easily outnumber the humans alive on earth. There is also a counterexample. The Buddha once had a disciple who was very dimwitted, and could not recite any of the texts. The other disciples, thinking that he had no karmic connection to the Buddha in hundreds of lives, tried to convince him to give up his studies. The Buddha told his disciples that long ago, this person was a dog, and was once eating near a pagoda. When he defecated, he was struck by a person, and in his fear, accidentally knocked his feces onto the pagoda, and with this, created a karmic connection with the Buddha, and as a result was born as this disciple. The Buddha told him to constantly recite the words 'sweep and clean.' When he remembered the word sweep, he would forget the word clean, and vice versa. It took him a long time to remember the two words, but when he did, he became an arhat (from the *Ekottara Agama*). Another story is quite funny. A pig was chased by a dog, and in fleeing, ran a ring around a stupa, sowing the seeds of enlightenment in both of them (from *Words of my Perfect Teacher*). This can also be seen as an example of the equality of all living things. The suffering of the cycle and karma are the same to all living things, and all find confusion or enlightenment in their choices. Confusion arises from life, from stubborn attachment to the joy and suffering of the cycle, while those who find enlightenment become Buddhas, finding release from the three realms.*





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