

“The Animal Outside.” Animal Ingenuity and Human Prudence in French Renaissance Political Thoughtⁱ

In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben calls for a reinvestigation of “the question of man and of ‘humanism’” which, he says, “must be posed in a new way.”ⁱⁱ This reinvestigation is required in order to understand the emergence of State biopolitics, made possible “only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate places.”ⁱⁱⁱ He has just explained that these separations and measurements are to be found in the history of the Aristotelian division and categorization of life, which distinguishes between “the animal inside” (a set of blind, unconscious and organic functions, such as breathing, assimilation and excretion) and the “animal outside,” involved in a series of relations with its environment.^{iv} Man, the rational animal, crowns these divisions with a further one: “In our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. We must ... investigate not the metaphysical mystery of conjunction, but rather the practical and political mystery of separation.”^v The practical (or ethical) and *political* function of such dualism is central to a certain strand of Renaissance rationalist political theory; its discursive emergence foreshadows what Agamben as a reader of Foucault defines as the biopolitics of the modern state in the seventeenth century, namely the State’s attention to the “animal inside,” the life expectancy and health of its population. But what of the politics of the “animal outside” preceding that period? In line with Agamben’s program, this essay questions the dualist account of man by focusing on the ways in which a second strand of political thought, stemming from the Renaissance reception of Plutarch, has acknowledged the importance of such animality in political life. At stake here is the notion of animal ingenuity as *sollertia*—the rapid assessment of and response to the environment, which the early moderns often identified as a form of prudence. One of its most fitting emblems in early modern political discourse is that of the fox established by Machiavelli as a model for the prince, as distinct from that of the lion. This chapter thus sketches the history of the discursive handling of “the animal outside” through the early modern French reception of that precept and its classical precursors.^{vi} In so doing it revisits some of the constitutive divisions identified by Agamben as foundational discursive structures of humanist political theories.

I.

Everyone realizes how praiseworthy it is for a prince to honour his word and to be straightforward rather than crafty in his dealings; none the less contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles. You must understand, therefore, that there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second. So a prince must understand how to make a nice use of the beast and the man. The ancient writers taught princes about this by an allegory, when they described how Achilles and many other princes of the ancient world were sent to be brought up by Chiron, the centaur, so that he might train them his way. All the allegory means, in making the teacher half beast and half man, is that a prince must know how to act according to the nature of both, and that he cannot survive otherwise. So, as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast, he must learn from the fox and the lion; because the lion is defenceless against traps and a fox is defenceless against wolves. Therefore one must be a fox in order to recognize traps, and a lion to frighten off wolves. Those who simply act like lions are stupid.^{vii}

In these opening lines of the advice urging the prince to resemble both the lion and the fox, Machiavelli quickly dismisses the possibility of a lawful, truly human or rational way of retaining power, which implies upholding one's word faithfully. He focuses instead on the "beastly way": this involves both the leonine display of force capable of prompting fear in the prince's subject and potential opponent, but also the fox-like use of cunning and deceit. Machiavelli's analogy between the prince as both lion and fox appears to be just another example in a longstanding tradition of moralist teaching through fables—a perception further strengthened by the allusion to the "veil of fables," that of the Centaur Chiron preceptor to Achilles, in which the Ancients clothed the lesson that heroes must acknowledge the beast within in order to rule well.^{viii} This tradition has a very long history which stretches from the fables of Aesop to those of La Fontaine; it pervades the biblical tropological symbolism one finds in patristic commentaries, medieval bestiaries, humanist natural histories, Jesuit emblems, or Huguenot sermons and poems.^{ix} In this tradition, the "beast within" often stands for immoderate passions. One finds in Aristotelian, scholastic psychology the philosophical underpinnings of these analogies: men and beasts alike have a sensitive, animal soul, that is,

an intrinsic and organic principle of motion prompted by sensations and their related appetites.^x These are in turn processed by the imagination, a site of primary, pre-reflective cognition in *all* animals.

Passions as appetites therefore also featured in the cognitive economy of humans: they deserved special attention because they could trigger motion *without* the intervention of the rational will, but with that of the imagination instead. The early moderns were acutely aware of the cognitive importance of the imagination in processing the passions and in gearing the human animal towards ethical ends. For a whole Western pedagogical tradition, the moral exemplarity of fables resided precisely in their supposed ability to affect the imagination and to provide a vicarious experience of the passions and of their consequences: this vicarious, imaginative experience provided raw material from which ethics could be taught and on which the rational will could exercise its ability to moderate or arouse, in short, to manage, those appetites. The beast within that loomed so large in animal parables and fables was there precisely so that students might learn to tame it.

And yet, while the Machiavellian fox-and-lion analogy does indeed belong in that tradition, its didactic content did *not* aim at the individual, moral disciplining of the passions, but at political education and the mental agility it requires. Imagination was not only the faculty involved in processing sensations and appetites in beasts and men alike; it was also the very site of a “thinking with images” which allowed for rapid responses to the elusive and sometimes deceptive demands of particular circumstances encountered in social—or political—life. This was where early modern accounts of cognition located the “animal outside.” In contrast with the rational, moral imperative of steadfastness and trustworthiness expected of the prince—a man whose clear, rational nature should mean that he sticks to his word—Machiavelli highlights in his simile the need for cognitive flexibility that the conservation and exercise of power demands. The ideal prince should be a hybrid: that of Chiron the centaur, combining the strength of the lion and the cunning of the fox. The curt, final sentence which concludes this analogy makes it clear that being “foxy” is more effective than being “leonine.”

The Prince prompted fierce debate among humanists regarding the nature of political life. The cognitive features which testified to specific forms of ingenuity at work in animal and human prudence alike, as well as their asserted or denied relevance to political life, thus played an important role in the humanist reception of Machiavelli’s political theory. How, more particularly, was man to be understood as a political animal after Machiavelli? In the specific case of France, Renaissance debates about the “animal outside” disclosed the political and practical stakes of the “mystery of separation” between man and animal, between pure reason

and embodied cognition during the French wars of religion, in the Plutarchan response with which Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) countered the Huguenot lawyer Innocent Gentillet (1535-1588), a scathing critic of the Prince. But before coming to the case of France, it will be necessary to set out the earlier European contexts, in which we see Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) and Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540) pitting Plutarch against Aristotle.

II.

Renaissance debates about the cognitive continuum between beasts and humans in general, and with regard to political—or social—organization in particular, were fuelled by the humanist reception of the differing Aristotelian and Plutarchian views on the matter.

Aristotle's History of Animals, On the Soul (De anima), and Politics are the main source of this debate. In his famous definition of man as a “political animal in a greater measure than any bee or gregarious animal,” what separates men from beasts is the human ability to use speech in order to communicate the set of moral values—right or wrong—on which political (or social) organizations depend, from the family to the city state. By contrast, animals apprehend through the sensations of pleasure and pain what is to be sought and what is to be avoided and communicate these to others through a purely expressive use of their voice.^{xi} Humanist readings of Aristotle's Politics were very sensitive to this distinction and singled out the inherent rationality and morality of the human polis whose aim was the common good enshrined in law rather than personal gratification. This polis was contrasted with animal forms of sociability reliant only on the personal experience of pleasure and pain.

Yet the Aristotelian corpus itself bristles with analogies between human and animal cognition. The History of Animals attempts to explain the nature of this analogy:

In the great majority of animals there are traces of psychical qualities which are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings. For just as we pointed out resemblances in the physical organs, so in a number of animals we observe gentleness or fierceness,... high spirit or low cunning, and, with regard to intelligence, something equivalent to sagacity.^{xii}

According to this account, animal understanding is to human understanding what a bird's wings are to human arms; men and birds are different species, but their wings and arms display the same functional and anatomical relations to their respective species. “Prudence” seems at first to be one such analogy of proportion. Thus beasts that are “long-lived and more developed”

display different degrees of “intelligence and stupidity” (περί τε φρόνησιν καὶ εὐήθειαν).^{xiii} The term which denotes “intelligence” here is φρόνησις, that is, practical reason or prudence, translated as prudentia by the early moderns. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle distinguishes between the highest form of human prudence as abstract knowledge of first principles and rational deduction from them, and its lowest form as “capacity for forethought as regards their own lives” in lower animals. The term “prudent” applied to both is, at least in this instance, only analogical in that it refers to different concepts. However, Aristotle *also* provides a general, minimal definition of prudence valid for all beings: “for each kind of being will describe as prudent, and will entrust itself to, one who can discern its own particular welfare.”^{xiv} This *general* virtue of prudence—“discerning its own particular welfare”—offers cognitive common ground for men and beast alike, *prior* to specification. In ascertaining the aim of action and directing their appetite (understood as the psychological source of dynamism and motion in animated beings) men and beasts alike process perceptions in the imagination.^{xv} A perception thus produces appetite in beasts who immediately sense in the imagination that what they have perceived should be pursued or shunned. Perception thus becomes the trigger of a rapid response mediated by the imagination. The ability to react swiftly, on the spot, to particular circumstances is also one of the parts and lowest forms of human prudence (distinguished from its highest form, deliberative excellence) identified in the Nicomachean Ethics as ευστοχία, or “skill in conjecture ... which operates without conscious calculation, and rapidly.”^{xvi} Yet even at the lower level of imaginative prudence, Aristotle soon reinstates the division between animals and humans. Imagination can also “combine[s] several perceptions into a single image” used to devise the course of action towards the satisfaction of such an appetite. This “deliberative” or “calculative” inference (συλλογισμός) carried out by the imagination is, for Aristotle, a human prerogative.^{xvii}

While Aristotle’s acknowledgement of animal sollertia is real, it nevertheless remains constrained by one of Agamben’s foundational divisions: animal sollertia either operates as a simile where the social behavior of the animal runs parallel to, but remains radically different from, human political organization grounded in reason, or it can be found in a minimal cognitive common ground of prudence (a quick processing of images geared towards action) from which human prudence immediately distinguishes itself by appealing to a more complex, combinatorial use of the imagination, or by involving rational, deliberative judgement.

Some humanist readings of Aristotle took good note of this foundational distinction in order to exclude the “animal outside” from the realm of truly human, and therefore rational, political organization. This humanist rebuttal was also, in part, a response to the craze for

Plutarch's Moralia. In France, this craze was the result of the widely disseminated 1572 Oeuvres morales et meslées, Jacques Amyot's translation of Plutarch's Moralia.^{xviii} Machiavelli himself had borrowed his lion and fox simile from Plutarch's life of Lysander.^{xix} In the witty table talk entitled "Quels animaux sont les plus advisez, ceux de la terre ou ceulx de l'eau" [Which, of the animals of the land or those of the sea, are the cleverest],^{xx} Autobolus, the character who champions animal intelligence, first argues against the Porphyrian divisions of life (inanimate / animate, vegetative / sensitive, and finally, sensitive / intellectual) that sensory perception as such necessarily involves not only the imagination, but also some form of intellectual attention for sensations to be genuinely perceived, processed, and acted upon. The fact that animals do perceive, then act on these perceptions by making choices, then remember them in future occurrences, testifies to their ability to judge (discretion), to remember (mémoire) and to infer: all of which Autobolus identifies as a form of rationality (discours) which is not grounded in a separate intellect, but emergent from the sensitive soul.^{xxi} The fox features twice in this argument, in an anecdote and a proverb. The anecdote depicts the human use of animal reasoning: in order to decide whether or not a frozen river is safe to cross on foot, Thracian peasants let a fox loose across it. The fox steps on cautiously, listening for moving water under the ice in order to assess its solidity: if solid enough, it will run through. Autobolus denies that merely good hearing is at stake, and states that an inference determines the fox's decision:

Or ne scaurions nous dire que cela soit seulement une vivacité du sentiment de l'ouye, sans aucun discours de raison: car c'est une ratiocination & consequence tiree du sens naturel en ceste sorte, Ce qui fait bruit se remue, ce qui se remue n'est pas gelé, ce qui n'est pas gelé est liquide, ce qui est liquide plie sous le faix, & ne tient pas ferme. [We cannot say that this is merely the result of a sharp sense of hearing, without any rational process: for it is a reasoning and consequence drawn from natural common sense in this way: what makes noise moves, what moves is not frozen, what is not frozen is liquid, what is liquid gives way under a weight, and does not hold firm].^{xxii}

As for the proverb, it contrasts the description of the hedgehog's single, but excellent trick with the multifaceted cunning of the fox:

Le regnard sçait de bons tours un millier,
Le herisson un seul, mais singulier.

[The fox knows many a good trick// the hedgehog just one, but quite specific]

The fox therefore exemplifies versatile intelligence, in particular the ability to draw good inferences on the spot from sensory perception.

Evidence of animal reasoning has Autobolus suggest that animals should not be excluded from the political sphere. Among the animal behaviors that Autobolus singles out as examples of the social and even political natures of animals—their care for their old and their young, their power structures—two instances demonstrate their ability to ascribe intentions to others by inferring from, or manipulating, the outwards displays or signs of other animals: that of the lion and of the partridge.^{xxiii} The merciful lion demonstrates its ability to infer from external signs the state of his opponent: lions no longer fight those who *display* humility (“ils ne combattent plus ceulx ... qui *monstrent semblant* de s’humilier”); as for the cunning or astute partridge, it is able to generate such an inference in its predators (to have them believe, “pour faire penser”) by feigning an injury in order to draw them away from her young. Her “astuce et ruse”(cunning and trick) in Amyot translates the Greek term *πᾶνουργία* in Plutarch’s original text. In Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, *πᾶνουργία* is a sub-genre of the same practical cleverness (*δαινότης*) exercised in prudence: only, *πᾶνουργία* is geared towards the ignoble ends of a knave, prudence towards noble ones.^{xxiv} Plutarch elides this distinction according to the morality of ends, because his emphasis is on the cognitive process at stake, namely, the quick, clever response to circumstances, whose end is self-preservation. The Moralia acknowledges a form of animal intelligence emergent from sensation, and able to structure a social and political animal life by generating and manipulating outwards signs from which other animals might draw inferences. This politics of the “animal outside” thus challenges the rationalist, Aristotelian model and offers an alternative to the foundational, Aristotelian distinction between men and beasts.

The early moderns returned time and again to the Aristotelian view of politics as a purely human because rationalist construct, and to its Plutarchan critique. Juan Luis Vives felt Plutarch’s view deserved a full-blown refutation in his own psychological treatise, the 1538 *De anima et vita*: yet Vives also acknowledges some of Plutarch’s conclusions and extended the scope of animal prudence beyond its Aristotelian remit. As for Erasmus, he implicitly rebuffs Machiavelli by teaching the prince to keep the “animal outside” on a steadfast leash and to exclude its cunning from politics: if let loose, it instantiates the passionate side of politics, and is symptomatic of its degradation. Both Montaigne and Gentillet return to the question within the context of this degraded politics, namely the Wars of Religion: siding with

Erasmus, Gentillet articulates a forceful rationalist and legalist critique of princely “foxiness,” whereas Montaigne offers a more pragmatic diagnosis of the politics of his time, grounded in a more holistic anthropology of the human animal.

III.

Juan Luis Vives tackles the question of animal intelligence in the chapter dedicated to “Reason” in his De anima et vita. Vives first dismissed Plutarch’s text as mere entertainment, popular banter unworthy of philosophy; this was satirical jest calling for more probity and calling out bad mores, not a treatise on the intellect.^{xxv} All the same, Vives then argues at length against the possibility of rational inference (discursus) in animals. If inference involves the cognitive passage from one thing to another via a middle term, then there is no doubt that beasts do infer; if however, inference means the collection of “lesser known” particulars leading to “more known” universals by means of the identification of a causal relation, then animals do not infer, because their ability to judge only operates at the level of particulars.^{xxvi} This second definition of inference, which equates it with the Aristotelian, scientific demonstration as general, causal knowledge, excludes the animal from the realm of rationality; yet it also acknowledges in great detail the cognitive work of an animal intelligence capable of manipulating collections of particulars in the imagination and adjudicating on that basis the best course of action. There might not be animal reason in Vives’ De anima, but there remains a detailed account of a form of animal prudence which is already combinatorial and deliberative, two features which were human prerogatives in the “low-level” imaginative prudence defined in Aristotle’s De anima. Teaching prudence was Vives’ great enterprise, and led him to place emphatic value on experience and usage: in this project the imaginative intelligence which attends to particulars and which was common to all animals was a force to be reckoned with.^{xxvii}

The intelligence of the “animal outside” also features in Erasmus’s discussion of Plutarch’s proverbial comparison between the hedgehog and the fox in the *Adages*, which expands on the versatile ingenuity of the fox by adducing yet another of Plutarch’s ‘fables’:

The fox is crafty, and knows a great many tricks, as many fables relate, especially this one, which is told by Plutarch in his Moralia. Once, when the leopard was making a scornful comparison between himself and the fox, claiming that he had a coat of varying and many-coloured spots, the fox replied that while the leopard’s ornamentation was on his skin, his own was in the mind. And truly it was much better to be endowed with cunning brains than with a party-coloured skin....^{xxviii}

The fox's repartee is a pleasing witticism, which promotes animal cunning as the hidden ornament of a beautifully versatile intelligence, contrasted with the gaudy display of the leopard's skin. Yet this Erasmian acknowledgment of animal wit ultimately gives way to a condemnation of its shortcomings when it comes to its practical use: Erasmus finally concludes, like Plutarch, that "it is sometimes worth more to have one good plan, if it is realistic and efficacious, than several wiles and trivial schemes," and turns his witty fox into Aristotle's knave: "it is not right to play the fox."^{xxix}

In Erasmus's own advice to the prince, The Institution of a Christian Prince, animals feature in didactic parables about the danger of deceitful, passionate governance: animal behaviours always function as similes, along Aristotelian lines. The tyrant thus instantiates the beastly degradation of politics: rather than the collective, rational pursuit of the commonwealth enshrined in law, tyranny means the violent or cunning abuse of the many at the hands of the one intent on satisfying his own pleasure. It means the dissolution of human civility replaced by the fear of the one that he himself may fall prey to hateful predation by the many:

Now if you are looking for what corresponds to the tyrant, think of the lion, the bear, the wolf, or the eagle, who live by mutilation and plundering, and since they realize that they are vulnerable to the hatred of all and that everyone seeks to ambush them, confine themselves to steep crags ... ^{xxx}

A tyrant governs by fear, deceit, and evil cunning. ^{xxxi}

For Erasmus, animal intelligence, when geared towards social or even political organization, remains a mere comparison, intended to warn against the degradation of human political rationality by beastly, passionate drives; unleashing the "beast within" would mean undoing the very fabric of human sociability and political life. Cunning as dissimulation is, in this context, yet another vice. Rather than hiding the ornament of a versatile wit, the cunning prince hides his vile nature by means of pompous displays and petty trickery: "it is not right to play the fox," and the prince who does not have the genuine character of his function is, once again, a mere knave:

The poorer the prince's character is, the more alert you must be that he does not become the sort we read about as having been numerous in the past—and would that there were

none to be seen today! If you take away their regal ornaments and strip them to the skin ... you will find nothing left except an expert dice-player, a champion tippler, a ruthless destroyer of decency, a most cunning deceiver, an insatiable plunderer...^{xxxii}

Would that there were none to be seen today: Erasmus knows that his tirade against cunning princes is also an accurate representation of a present state of affairs. If his Institution is so prescriptive about the distinction between human rationalist politics and the cunning politics of the “animal outside,” it is because the latter are so much in evidence in early modern Europe. Innocent Gentillet and Montaigne, both contemporaries of the Wars of Religion and the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre, are aware that they are witnessing the demise of human, rationalist politics and the rise of a Machiavellian alternative which capitalizes on the ingenuity of the “animal outside.” Their respective responses to it are, however, radically different.

IV.

Innocent Gentillet, a Protestant lawyer, published the most copious Renaissance commentary and critique of Machiavelli’s Prince, the Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner et maintenir en bonne paix un Royaume ou autre Principauté...Contre Nicolas Machiavel published in 1576. As Victoria Kahn has shown, Gentillet carefully unpicks Machiavelli’s rhetorical method, which he rightly sees as integral to his political theory.^{xxxiii} Indeed, cunning and dissimulation, erected as political foundations, promote a sort of prudence rooted in the sensitive soul and the imagination: the prince must at best persuade his subjects by appealing to their passions, at worst, trick them; and language and its misuses play no small part in such trickery. Gentillet’s core chapter is therefore an indignant defense of the paramount legal importance of oaths.^{xxxiv} His Discours epitomizes the lawyer’s reply to the Machiavellian deceit perpetrated in the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre: in agreeing to it, Catherine de Medicis broke the oath sworn by Charles IX’s to guarantee the safety of the Protestant Princes at the Louvre. The political model with which Gentillet counters Machiavelli is, by contrast, entirely predicated on a rationalist politics codified by laws. Commenting on Machiavelli’s lion and fox simile, Gentillet interprets it in such a way as to make lawful cunning a human prerogative, which he renames “military prudence.” Cunning can be the expression of human, rationalist politics as long as it does not contravene the laws of war or break sworn oaths:

Quant à l’astuce, je diray semblablement qu’on peut licitement user de ruse contre son ennemy, pourveu que la foy ny le droit de guerre n’y soyent point violez, & cela ne

s'appelle point renardise ny tromperie, ains se doit appeler prudence militaire. Et partant en usant de ruse, finesse, astuce ou prudence militaire (car tous ces noms se peuvent prendre en bien) ce n'est pas contrefaire la beste, ny user de renardise.^{xxxv} [As for cunning, I will say accordingly that one can use cunning lawfully against one's enemies, as long as it does not violate oaths and the laws of war; and this is not called fox-like tricks or deceit, but must be called military prudence. Therefore, when one uses cunning, subtlety, shrewdness or military prudence (for all these names can be taken positively), one is not mimicking beasts, or using fox-like tricks].

For Gentillet the fox, that is, animal ingenuity, is categorically excluded from the political sphere characterized by the overarching presence of the rule of law as the very expression of a collective, human rationality which always holds, even in conflicts. Gentillet illustrates this claim with a series of Roman examples: according to Livy, the Senate castigated his legates who had simulated friendship to King Perseus in order to wage a surprise war against him; they also sent back to King Pyrrhus his treacherous physician, intent on poisoning him for Rome's gain. Gentillet concludes:

Tels traits sont vrayment Romains, non pas d'user des ruses et finesses Puniques, ny de l'astuce des Grecs, qui estiment plus honorables de tromper leur ennemy que de le vaincre jamais l'ennemy vaincu par ruses ne se tient pour vaincu, ains celuy seulement qui se reconoit avoir esté guerroyé & surmonté par la vraye vertu, sans dol ny astuce. [Such characteristics are truly Roman, namely not to use Cathaginian tricks and subtleties, or the cunning of the Greeks, who deemed it more honorable to deceive their enemies than to vanquish them Enemies defeated by means of tricks will never consider themselves truly defeated; those who will are only those who acknowledge that war was waged against them and that they lost to true virtue, without deceit or trickery].^{xxxvi}

This strident, dogmatic rationalism against Machiavellianism and the "animal outside" did not sit well with Montaigne. In the *Essais* Gentillet features in one of many skeptical condemnations of the human inability to assert and stabilize truth, especially of the political kind.^{xxxvii} He is also the target of Montaigne's irony in essay I.5, entitled "Si le chef d'une place assiégée doit sortir pour parlementer" [Whether or not the captain of a city under siege should leave it to negotiate]. Montaigne silently quotes Gentillet, invoking the same collection of

examples about the virtues of Roman, lawful, open war, contrasted with Carthaginian and Greek recourse to deceit.^{xxxviii} Yet Montaigne introduces a first, discordant note, which is struck with a quotation from Virgil, the father of the national Roman epic—“Fraud or courage, what does it matter among enemies?” So much for Roman virtue. Livy’s old Senate, but also the principled and self-professedly learned Gentillet, are simple folk (“ces bonnes gens”), and they did not know of this saying, which is a more accurate depiction of the experience of politics. Military and political prudence sits once again neatly within the realm of the “animal outside,” as the very source of the Machiavellian lion and fox simile then enters the stage of this essai:

Quant à nous ... qui avec Lysander disons que où la peau du lion ne peut suffire, il y faut coudre un lopin de celle du renard, les plus ordinaires occasions de surprise se tirent de cette pratique ... Et pour cette cause c’est une reigle en la bouche de tous les hommes de guerre de notre temps, qu’il ne faut jamais que le gouverneur en une place assiegée sorte luy mesme pour parlementer. [As for us ... we state with Lysander that where the lion’s skin isn’t enough, one ought to patch it up with a bit of the fox’s: the most common opportunities to take the enemy by surprise stem from this practice ... For this reason, it is a rule among all men of war in our times that the governor of a city under siege should never leave in person to negotiate.]^{xxxix}

Montaigne rebuts Gentillet’s rationalist defense of the “rightful” war, led by an honorable prince, with a Machiavellian account more attuned to the political and military practices of his time, and ultimately grounded in his acute, skeptical awareness of the importance of contingency (or fortune) in human affairs: “nos lois, non plus que nos vestemens, ne peuvent prendre aucune forme arrestée” [our laws, just like our clothes, are never cut into a definite shape].^{xl} The laws so dearly upheld as the very expression of human rationality by Gentillet, are just a more elaborate means than lion and fox skins of clothing one’s actions in war: the latter, however, are more suited to the violence and cunning that war involves in actual practice.

Montaigne was a careful reader of Amyot’s Plutarch. Entire sections of Plutarch’s dialogue on animal intelligence—including the fox who infers its way across the icy river—are lifted more or less verbatim in the anti-rationalist argument of the “Apologie de Raimond Sebond.”^{xli} True, animal intelligence does feature in that specific chapter as a skeptical counterblast to rationalist presumption. Yet time and again in the Essais, Montaigne also pays attention—with Plutarch—to that “lower” form or prudence common to men and beasts, emerging from the sensitive soul and involving the imagination. This focus is notable in II.17,

“De la praesumption” (On presumption). Reflecting on the vice of presumption as “thinking that one is greater than one is, or that others are worse than they are,” Montaigne launches into a virtuosic self-portrait and examination of conscience.^{xlii} The chapter is also an investigation of presumption as a mental habit—*praesumere* also means to picture, to imagine, and to anticipate on the basis of such imaginative work. These cognitive operations are very close to those at stake in the very processes of inference from bodily disposition which are central to the social and political behaviors of the animals singled out in Plutarch. Montaigne is particularly interested in these for what they reveal of the “animal outside” in each and every one of us. Thus our bodily countenance betrays us unaware: it is a certain corporeal mode of being in the world which is testament to our nature yet escapes our own self-consciousness, while being readily readable to others:

de ma plus tendre enfance, on remarquoit en moy je ne scay quel port de corps et de gestes tesmoignants quelque vaine et sottte fierté. Il n'est pas inconvenient d'avoir des conditions et des propensions si incorporées en nous, que nous n'ayons pas moyen de les sentir et de les reconnoistre. Et de telles inclinations naturelles, le corps en retient volontiers quelque pli sans nostre sçeu et consentement ... Julius Caesar se grattoit la teste d'un doigt, qui est la contenance d'un homme remply de pensemens penibles [from an early age, I was noted for a certain countenance in body and gesture which testified to some vain, silly pride. It is not inappropriate that we should have tendencies so deeply embodied in us that we have no means of feeling and recognising them. The body willfully retains some crease of such natural bends, without us being aware of or agreeing to them ... Julius Caesar used to scratch his head with one finger, which is the attitude of a man filled with heavy thoughts].^{xliii}

Montaigne's own introspective judgment, however, leads him to deny any self-conscious trace of pride in his own mind. He might well display the bodily disposition of a presumptuous “animal outside,” yet those who infer from it (presume) that he is guilty of the human vice of intentional presumption would be wrong:

S'il y a de la gloire, elle est infuse en moy superficiellement par la trahison de ma complexion, et n'a point de corps qui comparoisse à la veue de mon jugement. J'en suis arrosé, mais non pas teint. [if there is any self-glory in me, it is only superficially infused

in me by my treacherous bodily make; yet is has no body of its own that stands the sight of my judgement. I am sprinkled with it, not dyed in it].^{xliv}

In II.17, he returns repeatedly to such discrepancies between the “animal outside” and the mind inside: the misreadings, the wrong inferences that they fuel, and the social and political dynamics they prompt are of particular interest to him, not least because they highlight the imbrication between body and mind, the animal and the human in man. Envisaged from this perspective, the question of dissimulation proves a particularly rich topic in II.17.

Montaigne consistently denounces deceit adopted as a constant rule of political conduct, that is, the result of a self-conscious exercise of judgement. Against Machiavelli, he contends that systematic deceit undermines the very possibility of human sociability by preventing any inferential work:

Ce seroit une grande simplesse à qui se lairroit amuser ny au visage ny au parolles de celuy qui faict estat d'estre tousjours autre au dehors qu'il n'est au dedans, comme faisoit Tibere; et ne sçay quelle part telles gens peuvent avoir aux commerce des hommes, ne produisans rien qui soit reçu pour contant. [it would be greatly naïve of anyone to let themselves be fooled either by the face or the words of a man who professes to be always another one outside than he is inside, like Tiberius. I do not know what part people of that kind, who never bring forth anything that can be taken at face value, can take in the commerce of men].^{xlv}

As for himself, his own professed franchise as both freedom and frankness is central to his project. Yet again a self-conscious choice and exercise of judgment, such franchise is upheld as the virtue of being truly, courageously human:

Quant à cette nouvelle vertu de faintise et de dissimulation qui est à cet heure si fort en credit, je la hay capitallement ... C'est une humeur couarde et servile de s'aller desguiser et cacher sous un masque, et de n'oser se faire veoir tel qu'on est Un coeur genereux ne doit desmentir ses pensées: il se veut faire voir jusques au dedans. Ou tout y est bon, ou au moins tout y est humein ... Mon ame de sa complexion, refuit la menterie et hait mesme à la penser. [as for this new virtue of deceit and dissimulation, which is so valued in our times, I hate it utterly ... It is a servile and cowardly humour which has a man dress himself up, hiding behind a mask, and not daring to show himself

for what he is. ... A generous heart should not belie its thoughts, and wants to be seen even in its innermost parts. Either all is good there, or at least all is humanMy soul, by its very make-up, shuns lying and even hates to think of it.]^{xlvi}

Such conscious deceit—a decision made by the mind inside— should however be distinguished from the dissimulation of the “animal outside.” Dissimulation as an immediate response to—potentially dangerous—social circumstances (the partridge feigning an injury to draw the predator away from her young) is, as we have seen, another expression of animal ingenuity as prudence. It is that very form of dissimulation, a rapid reaction demanded by the occasion which pre-empts the self-conscious choices of judgement, that Montaigne notes in himself when he lies:

Mon ame de sa complexion, refuit la menterie et hait mesme à la penser.

J’ay une interne vergongne et un remors piquant, si par fois, elle m’eschappe, comme parfois elle m’eschappe, les occasions me surprenant et agitant imprémeditément.

[my soul, by its very make-up, shuns lying and even hates to think of it.

I experience inner shame and a sharp pang of remorse if, at times, a lie slips out of me, as it sometimes does when accidents take me by surprise and move me unpremeditatedly.]^{xlvii}

This new development marks a repentir: the penitential confession of lying as much as the premeditated work of the “mind inside” exercising a posteriori judgement on the “animal outside.” The pang of remorse acknowledges the lie-as-sollertia, that is, Montaigne’s immediate response to unforeseen social circumstances, the reaction of the “animal outside”, which, let loose (“elle m’eschappe”), overrides on the spot the self-conscious exercise of the mind inside (“imprémeditément”).

Conclusion

Addressing the question of whether or not the prince should keep his word, Machiavelli advised that he should be both the lion and the fox, able to rely on open force but also on ingenuity. The rhetorical simile of the animal in the Prince thus called for a reconfiguration of the Aristotelian definition of man as a political animal and for a reassessment of the foundational divide between human rationality and animal life whose history Agamben traces in *The Open*.

That divide was shifting in early modern Europe and particularly France: its intellectual history does indeed reveal aspects of “the political and practical mystery” of both separation and conjunction. Close readers of Plutarch and keen observers or actors in the turbulent politics of their times, Erasmus, Gentillet and Montaigne acknowledged that men could be irrational yet ingenious political animals. They proposed that the collective life of “the animal outside” emerged from the sensitive realm of an imagination geared towards self-preservation for men and beasts alike, that sociability and politics could play out as immediate responses to the environment, as rapid inferences from bodily signs. The Prince provided the amoral systematization of such a politics and sociability. This realization was a bitter one for Erasmus and Gentillet, who championed vehemently the ideal of a purely human polis, whose rationality was enshrined in the omnipotence of the law and demanded truthful speech against Machiavellian dissimulation. Montaigne, for his part, tracked the complexion of the “animal outside” in that of his very soul. “It lied in me before I came to judge,” he seems to say; “circumstances demanded as much. But I have now laid it all open for you to see”: “au moins tout y est humain”. That humanity fully integrates animal ingenuity.

ⁱ I wish to thank Tim Chesters for correcting my English, and Sarah Kay and Nicolette Zeeman for inviting me to contribute to this special edition and for editing this piece with much care. All translations of early modern French texts are mine.

ⁱⁱ Giorgio Agamben, The Open: Man and Animal, ed. Werner Hamacher, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ Agamben, The Open, 16.

^{iv} Agamben sketches the longue durée trajectory of these divisions and the resulting distinction between “the animal within” and the “animal outside” from Aristotle to Bichat: see Giorgio Agamben, The Open, 13-19.

^v Agamben, The Open, 16.

^{vi} On the early modern reception of Machiavelli, see Sydney Anglo, Machiavelli—The First Century: Studies in Enthusiasm, Hostility and Irrelevance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), especially 272-324 and 417-33, on Gentillet.

^{vii} Niccolò Machiavelli, “How Princes Should Honour their Word” chapt. 18 in The Prince, ed. and trans. George Bull, intr. Anthony Grafton (London: Penguins classics, 2004), 73-4.

^{viii} There is no identifiable precedent for this allegorical reading of Chiron—Machiavelli was the first to suggest it, and it became a textual as well as visual commonplace of European Renaissance culture. See Rosso Fiorentino and assistants, Education of Achilles, fresco and stucco, ca. 1539-40, Château de Fontainebleau, Galerie François Premier. This allegorical mode of reading, which claims to uncover the natural-philosophical lesson hidden by the Ancients in their fables, is typical of early modern mythography. See Natale Conti, Mythographia (Venice, 1562).

^{ix} For biblical tropology in medieval bestiaries, humanist natural histories, Jesuit emblematics and Huguenot sermons and poetry, see for example the Pelican as a Christic figure of sacrifice in Anonymous, Physiologos, le bestiaire des bestiaires, ed. and trans. Arnaud Zucker (Grenoble : Jérôme Million, 2004), 69-73; in Pierre Belons du Mans, Histoire de la nature des oiseaux (Paris, 1555), 153-54; Nicolas Caussin, De symbolica Aegyptorum sapientia (Cologne, 1623), 69; on the Pelican as a “charitable bird,” Simon Goulart, Commentaires et annotations sur la Sepmaine de la création du monde (Paris, 1583), 258v-259r, and in Guillaume de Saluste du Bartas, “Cinquième jour,” La Sepmaine ou la creation du monde (1581), ed. Yvonne Bellenger (Paris: Textes Littéraires Français, 1981), p.237, v.765-778.

^x Aristotle, De an., III.10-12, 433.a.10-435.a.10. All translations from Aristotle, *The Complete works of Aristotle—The Revised Oxford Edition*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1984).

^{xi} Aristotle, Pol., I.1, 1253.a.10-11. For the early modern views on that question, see Richard Serjeantson, “The Passions and Animal Language, 1540-1700,” Journal of the History of Ideas, 62.3 (2001): 425-44.

^{xii} Aristotle, Hist. an., VII (VIII), 588.a.16-588.b.3.

^{xiii} Aristotle, Hist. an., VIII (IX), 608.a.17.

^{xiv} Aristotle, Eth. Nic., VI, 1141.a.27-28

^{xv} Aristotle, De an., III.10, 433.a.29-32: “as the living creature is capable of appetite it is capable of self-movement: but it is not capable of appetite without imagination, and all imagination involves either calculation or sensation. This latter all other living creatures share besides man.”

^{xvi} Aristotle, Eth. Nic., VII, 1142.b.4-6.

^{xvii} Aristotle, De an., III.11, 433.a.6-9, and III.10, 433.a.10-13

^{xviii} On the early modern reception of Plutarch, see Olivier Guerrie (ed.), “Moralia” et “Oeuvres morales” à la Renaissance (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2008). In France specifically, see Robert Aulotte, Amyot et Plutarque: la tradition des Moralia au XVIe siècle (Geneva: Droz, 1965).

^{xix} Plutarch, “Life of Lysander,” in Lives, Volume IV: Alcibiades and Coriolanus. Lysander and Sulla, trans. Bernadotte Perrin LCL 80 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1916), VIII.4: “Lysander ... seemed to be unscrupulous and subtle, a man who tricked out most of what he did in war with the varied hues of deceit ... not considering truth as inherently better than falsehood, but bounding his estimate of either by the needs of the hour. Those who demanded that the descendants of Heracles should not wage war by deceit he held up to ridicule, saying that “where the lion’s skin will not reach, it must be patched out with the fox’s.””

^{xx} Plutarch, “Quels animaux sont les plus advisez, ceulx de la terre, ou ceulx de l’eaux’ in Oeuvres morales et meslées, trans. Jacques Amyot (Paris: Michel de Vascosan, 1572), 508r.

^{xxi} Plutarch, “Quels animaux,” 509r.

^{xxii} Plutarch, “Quels animaux,” 513r.

^{xxiii} Plutarch, “Quels animaux,” 514v, 515r.

^{xxiv} Aristotle, Eth. Nic., VI, 1144.b.27.

^{xxv} “non enim validis ullis nititur argumentis, ac dignis scholae philosophiae, sed populari tantummodo elusione: magisque de probitate ac viciositate morum cavillatur, quam de ratione.” Juan Luis Vives, “Ratio” in De anima et vita libri tres (Basel, 1538), 62-74.

^{xxvi} “Si discursus est transitus aliquis ab aliquo in aliud, dubitandum non est, quin discurrant muta: sin per collationem a minus notis progressus ad magis nota, vel ab uno ad aliud, ex illo dependens aut sequens,

manifestum est non discurrere, a notis enim non proficiscuntur ad ignota, quorum omnia iudicia sunt de singularibus: non ut a generalibus ad specialia descendant, inde ad singularia, vel ascendant rursus hinc ad illa, ad exculpandum verum,” Vives, De anima et vita, 69.

^{xxvii} See Valerio di Nero, “A Philosophical Treatise on the Soul: De anima et vita in the Context of Vives’ Opus,” in A Companion to Juan Luis Vives, ed. Charles Fantazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 177-226.

^{xxviii} Desiderius Erasmus, “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog one big thing,” I.v.18, in Adages, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, trans. Margaret Mann Philips, in The Collected Works of Erasmus, vol. 31 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 1982), 399.

^{xxix} Quotation from Aristophanes’ Wasps in Erasmus, “To play the fox with the fox,” I.ii.28 in Adages, 172.

^{xxx} Desiderius Erasmus, Institution of the Christian Prince, ed. A.H.T. Levi, in The Collected Works of Erasmus, vol. 28 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1986), 226.

^{xxxi} Desiderius Erasmus, Institution, 224.

^{xxxii} Desiderius Erasmus, Institution, 216.

^{xxxiii} Victoria Kahn, “Reading Machiavelli: Innocent Gentillet’s Discourse on the Method,” Political Theory, 22.4 (1994), 539-60.

^{xxxiv} Innocent Gentillet, “XII. Maxime”, Discours sur les moyens de bien gouverner et de maintenir en bonne paix un royaume ou une autre principauté (n.p: 1576), 384-93.

^{xxxv} Gentillet, Discours, 387-8.

^{xxxvi} Gentillet, Discours, 390.

^{xxxvii} Michel de Montaigne, “De la praesumption,” II.1 in Essais, ed. Pierre Villey and Verdun Saulnier, 4th edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), 655.

^{xxxviii} Montaigne, “Si le chef d’une place assiégée doit sortir pour parlementer,” I.5 in Essais, 25: “C’estoient les formes vrayment Romaines, non de la Grecque subtilité et astuce Punique, où le vaincre par force est moins glorieux que par fraude. Le tromper peut servir pour le coup; mais celuy seul se tient pour surmonté, qui sçait l’avoir esté ny par ruse ny de sort, mais par vaillance, de troupe à troupe, en une loyalle et juste guerre. Il appert bien par le langage de ces bonnes gens qu’ils n’avoient encore receu cette belle sentence: dolus an virtus quis in hoste requirat...”

^{xxxix} Montaigne, “Si le chef,” I.5 in Essais, 26.

^{xl} Montaigne, “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 656.

^{xli} Montaigne, “Apologie de Raimond Sebond,” II.12 in Essais, 460-61.

^{xlii} Montaigne, “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 631-32.

^{xliii} Montaigne, “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 632-33.

^{xliv} “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 635.

^{xlv} “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 648.

^{xlvi} “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 647.

^{xlvii} “De la praesumption,” II.17 in Essais, 648.