

1668

The Year of the Animal in France

Peter Sahlins

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INTRODUCTION

The Wondrous Year of the Animal

In and around 1668, in Louis XIV's newly planted gardens of Versailles, in the Royal Library in Paris, in the city's literary salons, and in print and visual culture, animals made a dramatic entrance onto the stage of French history. Not that "animals"—a capacious category of nonhuman beings—had been previously absent or invisible at the courts of French kings or among the cultural elite of Paris. Diverse species of animals had long participated in ritual expressions of sovereignty in early modern France and elsewhere in Europe. Kings hunted regularly with birds of prey and dogs; deer, stags, badgers, wild boars, and foxes were agents and victims of a symbolic enactment of sovereignty over nature and the naturalized expression of the king's control of the court. Renaissance princes, kings, and emperors kept exotic and ferocious beasts—lions, panthers, tigers, and bears, among others—in or near their palaces as living symbols and icons of the violence (and its monopoly) that lay at the heart of the ambitions of a strong prince, a tradition that continued into the seventeenth century (although not, as we will see, in France itself). Meanwhile, domestic companion species, cats and dogs, especially, but also songbirds of all kinds, even sapajous and guenons, were to be found at royal and princely courts, delicately chained to the walls, or housed—like their masters, metaphorically—in lavish gilded cages.

Beyond the court, animals played a wide variety of roles in the daily lives of Parisian men and women of the learned and ruling classes: their bodies produced food, clothing, and medicine; horses (and carriages) were the principal means of transport; animals were central to recreational practices, from hunting to cock fighting; and they were omnipresent as household pets and domestic companions. If their live bodies were ubiquitous, so, too, were the representations

of animals in mid-seventeenth-century Paris and at court. They could be found in decorative tapestries or painted tableaux, in heraldic coats of arms or devices emblazoned on buildings, carriages, or dinnerware. They appeared as figures sculpted into architectural ornaments, as subjects of poetry and fable, as objects of scientific inquiry. Travel narratives and naturalist writing described exotic (“foreign”) animals; domestic and familiar ones appeared in moralist writing and theological sermons. They were central to literary culture of the seventeenth century. In short, animals and their representations were part of the fabric of everyday life, learned culture, and the court in the seventeenth century.

The year 1668—*annus mirabilis animalium*, the wondrous year of animals—was nonetheless exceptional. The English poet John Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis* of 1667 commemorated 1665–1666, the “Year of Miracles” in the city, which included the salvation of London from the Great Fire and God’s blessing of the English who defeated the Dutch in three important battles. In France, during the *annus mirabilis animalium* of 1668 (or so), a sudden and salient—and historically overlooked—manifestation of animals took place within a wide range of visual, literary, and naturalist endeavors in the gardens of Versailles, at the Royal Library in Paris, and in the aristocratic and bourgeois salons of the capital city. (See “A Partial Chronology of the Year of the Animal, 1661–1669.”) Louis XIV ordered and oversaw the construction of the Royal Menagerie of Versailles, a new collection of live animals in the courtyards of the first garden pavilion at Versailles, built in 1664 and populated by 1668 (discussed below). The presence of this animal palace and the novel display of its denizens (dominated by birds) sparked a lively engagement of authors, artists, philosophers, but also physicians, anatomists, and fountain engineers (Chapter 1). In 1668, Jean de La Fontaine published his *Fables choisies, mises en vers*, admittedly not about the animals of Versailles, but the next year, he offered one of the first literary accounts of the Royal Menagerie, as did the *salonnière* and novelist Madeleine de Scudéry and the less famous fountain engineer and would-be heroic poet Claude Denis (Chapter 2). In 1668, the Flemish animal painter Pieter Boel sketched, drew, and painted the animals of the Royal Menagerie that were to serve as models for the unusual use of animal figures in a major tapestry project of the Royal Manufactory of the Gobelins, under the supervision of First Painter Charles Le Brun in 1668

(Chapter 3). In 1667, the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences began to dissect the corpses of animals from the Royal Menagerie, supervised by the physician and architect Claude Perrault, eventually leading to the sumptuously produced royal monument, the *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire naturelle des animaux* (Memoirs to serve for the natural history of animals). The first volume appeared in 1671 as part of the concerted effort to glorify Louis XIV in the print culture of absolutism, and it was reissued with a second volume, in two editions, five years later (Chapter 4). In late 1668, Charles Le Brun delivered a long-lost lecture on physiognomy to the Royal Academy of Arts and Sculpture that used Pieter Boel's drawings of animals to illustrate the identities and differences between animals and humans and the dangers of certain representational techniques in the expressions of the passions, especially about sight (Chapter 5).

Not all the nonhuman beings of the Year of the Animal in 1668 came from the Royal Menagerie: Jean de La Fontaine's bestiary, of course, was purely fictional, but the ordinary dogs, lambs, and calves at the center of the "Transfusion Affair" in 1667–1668 were the very real victims of the Cartesian physician Jean Denis's experimentation with animal-to-human blood transfusions in an effort to cure madness and prolong life (Chapter 6). In September 1668, the physician and anatomist Claude Perrault dissected a chameleon, and five years later, the poet Madeleine de Scudéry observed and recorded her own scientific experiments with two other chameleons: their exchanges of bodies and of texts about the chameleons blurred the boundaries of science and literature, but also of animal and human (Chapter 7). Then, between 1672 and 1674, as a structurally opposed and historical pendant to the Royal Menagerie, Louis XIV ordered the statuary for his Royal Labyrinth, the maze of which was first planted at the same time as the Royal Menagerie, in 1664. Hundreds of sculpted birds and mammals "drawn from life" (many from the menagerie) populated the thirty-nine fountains dispersed in a labyrinth of high tree hedges, where they illustrated largely violent stories of fabled animals "taken from Aesop" (Chapter 8). Finally, in late 1668, the ambitious playwright and tragedian Jean Racine produced his only comedy, *Les Plaideurs* (The litigants) which, reworking Aristophanes's *The Wasps*, and drawing on the legal prosecutions of animals that were coming to an end in 1668, used the trial of a dog to satirize the madness of a magistrate and its containment (Conclusion).

Such were the principal cultural products of this seventeenth-century French “animal moment.” Not unlike the animal moment of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, animals were suddenly everywhere, in art and philosophy, in literature and science, in academic writing and political movements.¹ But in 1668, unlike today, the vogue for the literary, scientific, medical, and decorative uses of animals in France all took place within a year or so—the Year of the Animal. Moreover, the human authors of these animal spectacles and representations were a handful of socially connected individuals who were friends, allies, occasional enemies, and sometimes kinsmen at Versailles and in Paris. The wealthy Parisian Perrault brothers, the poet Charles (1628–1703) and the physician and architect Claude (1613–1688), attached to the court of Louis XIV, were at the center of the Year of the Animal. Jean Denis (1643–1704), the experimental transfusionist, was the son of Claude Denis (1596–1680), the waterworks engineer employed to build the fountains at the Versailles menagerie and later, in 1672, at the famed Versailles labyrinth (and who also, we will see in Chapters 2 and 8, wrote “epic” gallant poetry about the animal collections in the gardens). Louis XIV (1638–1715) sponsored most of the human actors of the Year of the Animal, a stable of advisors, artists, scholars, historians, and publicists working under the watchful supervision of the king’s trusted collaborator, the finance minister and superintendent of the king’s buildings, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683). Among them, the architect Louis Le Vau (1612–1670) designed the Royal Menagerie in 1664; the garden architect André Le Nôtre (1613–1700) began planning the gardens and oversaw the first plantings, including the labyrinth, in 1664; the master painter Charles Le Brun (1619–1690) directed the Gobelins Manufactory at its founding in 1663 and oversaw the Royal Academy of Art and Sculpture in 1668; and the historian and publicist André Félibien (1619–1695), like all of them part of the patronage network of Colbert, produced the first guides and extensive commentary on the gardens and installations of Versailles. These men socialized and conversed with others, not only at “court” (*la cour* of Louis XIV), but also in “town” (*la ville*, in the polite society centered in the Paris salons). There they came in contact with the high society of Paris, where they participated in the “polished” world of the salons, especially those of Mademoiselle Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701) and Madame de Sévigné (1626–1696), crossing paths with luminaries including the

poet Jean de La Fontaine (1621–1695), the traveler and Gassendist philosopher François Bernier (1620–1688), and the anti-Cartesian writer Catherine Descartes (1637–1706), niece of the philosopher, all increasingly obsessed with animals.

The convergent interest in animals around 1668 within a small, but powerful generational cohort (most were born between 1607 and 1620) has not escaped the attention of scholars, including literary historians Patrick Dandrey and Aurélie Gaillard, historian of science Anita Guerrini, cultural historian Marc Fumaroli, art historian Madeleine Pinault Sørensen, and others.² Yet none has sought to connect the actors (including the nonhuman ones), the “events,” and the cultural products of the Year of the Animal, to understand in some depth the simultaneous and convergent uses of animals in and around 1668.

In more general historiographical terms, the decade of the 1660s has long been seen as an important historical transition: the French critics Jean-Marie Apostolides and Louis Marin considered the advent of Louis XIV in 1661 and the elaboration of what Marc Fumaroli called the “glory machine” of absolutism a new modality of political representation.³ As part of the “new science,” historian of science and culture Harcourt Brown saw the year 1667 as a “turning point in the intellectual life of Paris,” identifying a group of thinkers who sought out experience as the basis of knowledge, breaking with the intellectual authority of the university. Others have noted the “diffusion of mechanism,” backing up the turning point to the 1650s. And for philosopher Michel Foucault, the 1650s and 1660s marked the birth of a new form of linguistic representation, a break with the Renaissance episteme of similitude, establishing a new epistemological relation between language and the world. In the history of knowledge, especially natural history (the birth of which he dates to 1657), and in the history of madness as well (and the movement toward modern disciplinarity), the late 1650s and early 1660s were for Foucault the epistemic transition to the Classical age.⁴

In aesthetic terms, the 1660s is often underscored as the end of the Baroque and the beginning of the Classical (or neoclassical). In literature, the decade marks the end of “long form” writing and the explosion of the short genres, including stories (*contes*) and fables—which Jean de La Fontaine announced in his *Contes et nouvelles en vers* (Stories and novellas in verse, 1665) were now “the taste of my century”—but

also promenades, portraits, letters, and later fairy tales. Claire Goldstein has studied this “change in season” (to borrow La Fontaine’s phrase) as, more broadly, an aesthetic revolution with deeply political roots. For as we will see, the appearance of a distinctive French style, which she fails to see was built in part with animals, took shape in the transfer of personnel and material culture from the Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte built by the ex-superintendent of finance Nicolas Fouquet (1615–1680) in the 1660s to Louis XIV’s Versailles.⁵

In this book, “1668” and “the Year of the Animal” speak to many of these changes in the 1660s, but especially to the advent of absolutism at the beginning of the long reign of Louis XIV (r. 1661–1715; fig. 0.1), and to the diffusion of mechanistic theories of the heavenly and the human bodies—the “new science”—among Parisian elites, especially the version of René Descartes (1596–1650; fig. 0.2). These transformations are studied through the lens of animals in a decade-long transition from the founding of the Royal Menagerie in 1664 to the completion of the Royal Labyrinth in 1674 in the gardens of Versailles, the two pendants of this book. The eight essays in this book explore different episodes in the Year of the Animal in prose and poetry, tapestry and the decorative arts, natural history, medicine, and garden architecture, suggesting new ways to think about “absolutism” and mechanism in the context of Louis XIV and Descartes, but also the new ways of thinking about animals themselves that took shape in and around 1668.

Absolutism and Mechanism

“Absolutism” and “mechanism” are, of course, abstractions, symbolically charged and unstable reifications of seventeenth-century processes and phenomena, misleading “isms” long debated by historians. In histories of Louis XIV and the later seventeenth century, they are too often linked in a determinant fashion. On the one hand, scholars have long noted the close identification of mechanism, including its stereotypical expression in Cartesian thinking, with the governing idioms of absolutism under Louis XIV, including in the spatial organization of nature in the gardens of Versailles and its optical mathematics of an infinite universe. Cartesian rationality, it used to be argued without much elaboration, informed the mechanics of order established by the young Louis XIV and the detail-obsessed Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Meanwhile, the older commonplace that

the literary style of French classicism embodied a Cartesian aesthetic has persisted, while more recent studies suggest how Cartesian skepticism and reason—in the widely reprinted *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (Discourse on the method of rightly conducting one's reason and seeking truth in the sciences, 1637)—became part of an elite worldview of women and guests of their salons.⁶ But it has also been argued, to the contrary, that Louis XIV's notorious dislike and interdiction of Descartes's writings, at least in the 1660s and early 1670s, was grounded in the link between mechanism and republicanism, a connection often underscored in what used to be called the history of the Scientific Revolution, with “Cartesians” specifically excluded from the lists of pensioners and membership in the royal academies.⁷

Yet the relations between absolutism and mechanism remain indeterminate, in part because each of these terms contained many different tendencies. The “mechanistic philosophy”—and the “Mechanistic Age”—in the later seventeenth century had many iterations, of which the diffusion of the radical writings of the philosopher René Descartes were only one expression.⁸ More broadly, the machine metaphor had deep resonance in the symbolic construction of absolutism, as Jean-Marie Apostolides long ago pointed out, as well as in neoclassical aesthetics (the popularity of the “machine plays” in the 1640s and 1650s) and in the scientific debates (especially about anatomy) of the seventeenth century.⁹ Mechanism resonated in many ways with Louis XIV's symbolic construction of authority—including the mechanism of natural historian and anatomist Claude Perrault (Chapter 4), the mechanism that informed the aesthetic doctrine of Charles Le Brun on the passions (Chapter 5), and the mechanism experienced in the invention of the first roller coaster, described by Mademoiselle de Scudéry in her literary promenade in the gardens of Versailles (Chapter 2). And from the beginning of his reign, despite official bans, the French king relied on a number of Cartesian thinkers at the heart of the royal cultural and scientific projects. Christian Huygens (1629–1695), first brought in to consult on the establishment of a Royal Academy of Sciences and then a key founding member, was perhaps not fully a Cartesian, but certainly a sympathizer, and Charles Le Brun, the “first artist” of the kingdom, was more than just a fellow traveler (Chapter 8).¹⁰



Figure 0.1. Charles Le Brun, *Louis XIV* (1668).

Le Brun, “first painter” of the king as of 1664, here turns Louis XIV into a scarlet-robed Roman general (or perhaps, to follow Marc Fumaroli’s suggestion, a rooster) as he underscores young Louis XIV’s rigid and controlled mastery of his unruly horse. Note the bloody hide where the king has whipped the horse into submission. Le Brun directed the Royal Manufactory of the Gobelins after 1663 and played a central role in the development of a distinctively French Classical aesthetic at Versailles. But he was also well known as an animal painter whose searing portraits of horses in battle represent metaphorically the violence of war. Here, Le Brun brings out the wildness and fear of the horse through its face and eyes, but also its frothing mouth, an inflamed contrast with Louis’s own passivity. *Pace* Derrida, the sovereign is not the beast.

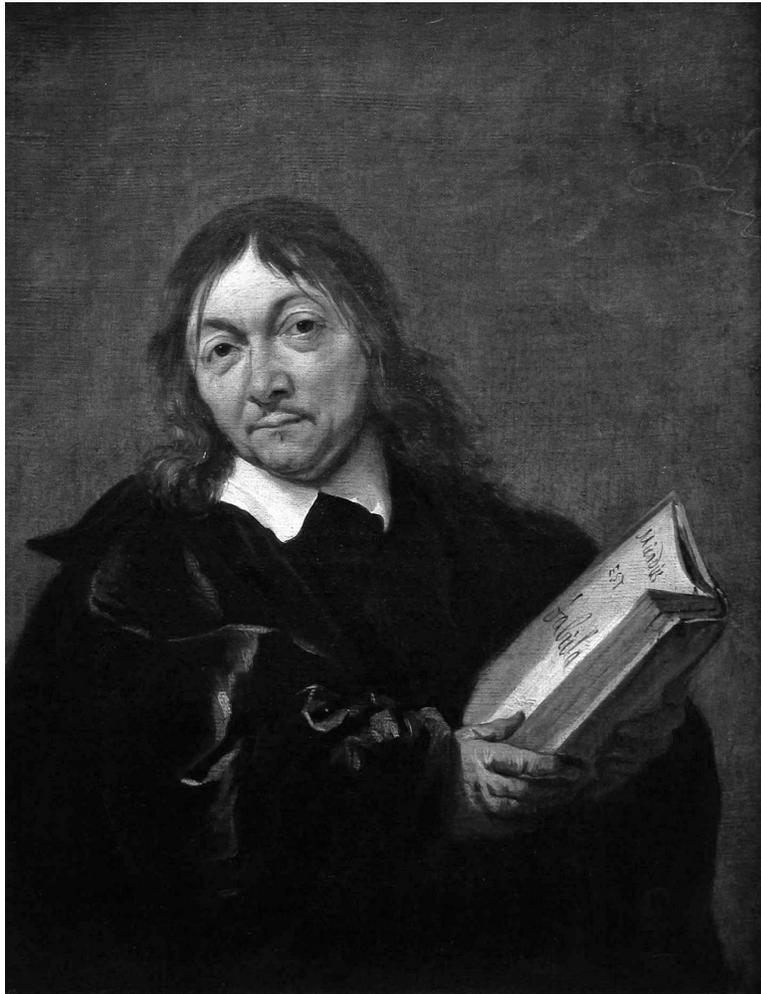


Figure 0.2. Jan Baptist Weenix, *René Descartes* (1649).

Weenix painted this portrait of a not altogether healthy Descartes the year before the philosopher's death in Stockholm. The inscription in the book in Descartes's hands, "Mundus Est Fabula" (The world is a fable), was an ancient adage about the division of body and soul that Descartes revived and that was widely disseminated in his writings, especially the *Discourse on the Method* (1637), influencing even Jean de La Fontaine in his *Fables* (1668). Descartes himself used the fable, not as a literary ornament, but as an exemplary narrative to expose the truth about the *cogito* and the material world. In Part 4 of the *Discourse*, Descartes first brought up what can only be called the "fable" of the animal-machine, a figure that was to trouble deeply the inherited worldview of Renaissance humanism.

The simultaneous construction of absolutism in the gardens of Versailles in the years following Louis XIV's seizure of power in 1661 and the diffusion and resistance to mechanistic philosophies (especially that of Descartes) in the late 1660s in the salons and polite society of Paris converged significantly around the bodies of animals and their representations. In 1668, animals were seen as not only good to eat—although they were seen as that, especially in the decade that marks the culinary revolution launched by François Pierre de la Varenne and his *Le cuisinier français* (The French chef), first published in 1651. But animals were especially, in the well-rehearsed phrase of the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, “good to think” with.¹¹

I am well aware of the indignant response of Donna Haraway about those who make the animal “an alibi for other themes” or “surrogates for theory; they are not just here to think with,” and I acknowledge Laurie Shannon's redirection of the question toward the possibilities of thinking *about* animals. I propose to think closely here, not about “the” animal—a formulation that Jacques Derrida famously denounced as “one of the greatest asinities [sic] of those who call themselves human,” but about the animals—a heterogeneous, but specific set of individual birds, mammals, and reptiles—at Versailles and in Paris during the “long decade” of the 1660s (1664–1674), with 1668 at its center.¹² I wish to consider, following Christopher Pearson, Helen Steward, and others of a posthumanist inclination, these animals as agents in the making of early modern France, even as their agency extended to their dead bodies and painted representations. In a series of interrelated case studies, I will consider how the live bodies and representations of the Versailles menagerie's animals and others, especially their symbolic afterlives, were themselves used to think about the central dimensions of early French modernity in the seventeenth century.

Animals and the Advent of Absolutism

Louis XIV's early iteration of absolutism—his successful assumption of personal rule in 1661, the sudden quiescence of the nobility, and his early efforts to invent a new symbolic language of absolute authority—has long been the bane of French historians, who can never quite agree on a definition. Indeed, “absolutism” is a term that has fallen out of fashion among historians and other scholars of early modern France, even if the reign of Louis XIV has produced a fertile

revisionist scholarship that sees the regime as far more collaborative socially (between king and aristocracy) than it had previously appeared.¹³ Over the last thirty years, another vein of scholarship has focused on the early decades of Louis XIV's personal rule, taking seriously the cultural frames in which power and authority were symbolized. In this moment of what the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz had identified as a ceremonial and symbolic act of "taking possession" of the realm, Louis XIV broke with prior modes of representing royal authority.¹⁴ Louis Marin, Jean-Marie Apostolides, and Peter Burke were among the first to theorize, each differently, the ordering principles behind the systematic invention and political uses of architecture, decoration, medals, painting, history, and portraiture to constitute the sovereignty of the king.¹⁵ Since then, scholars have examined the cultural production of absolute authority in the early years of Louis XIV's reign, interpreting royal spectacles and marriage rituals, music, dance, and the king's body in the representation (and the making) of absolutism.¹⁶

Most recently, work on the early reign of Louis XIV has taken an environmental turn, as Chandra Mukerji, Pierre-André Lablaude, Elizabeth Hyde, and Michel Baridon have focused our attention on the garden architecture, the *bosquets* (groves), waterworks, and flowers of the Petit Parc de Versailles as early expressions of absolutism.¹⁷ Long before the conversion of his father's hunting lodge into a magnificent royal palace, and decades before moving the court from Paris in 1682, Louis XIV ordered his master gardener and landscape architect André Le Nôtre to design and oversee the production of the Royal Gardens of Versailles. In 1668, what is often called the *premier Versailles* (the first Versailles) was complete, including the outdoor sculpture and a half dozen *bosquets*. In Pierre Patel's painting of that year, the outline and planting of the gardens, with a "perspective onto infinity," took shape, with the Royal Menagerie and the Trianon appearing as pendants of the Grand Canal, itself begun in 1668 (fig. 0.3).

Louis XIV formed the Petite Académie (later the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres) in February 1663, under the direction of Colbert, aided by the poet Charles Perrault, who served as secretary, to establish the inscriptions, devices, and other material and festive representations of Louis XIV. The model was at once cosmological, organized around the king's device of the sun, adopted in

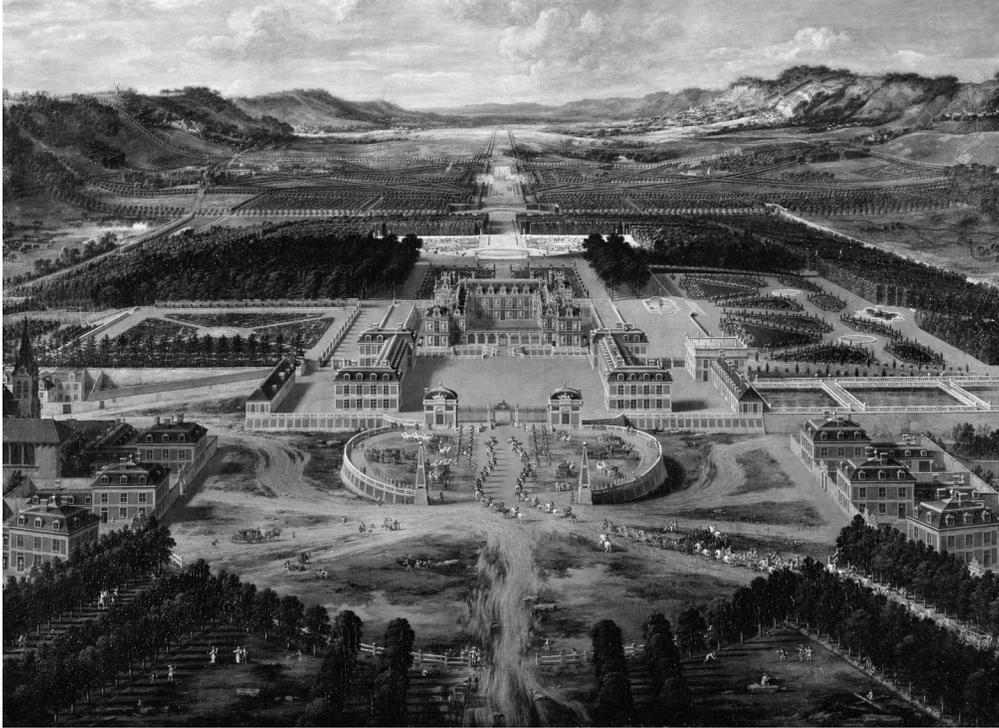


Figure 0.3. Pierre Patel, *Palace of Versailles* (1668).

Patel's oil painting offers a "bird's-eye view" that depicts, as it anticipates, the emerging garden state of Louis XIV's absolutism. The Grand Canal appears traced in the background, with its (Cartesian) optical perspective onto infinity. On the upper left (the southwest corner) can be seen, indistinctly, the Royal Menagerie; on the upper right, the first buildings of the Trianon make their appearance. These two "garden ornaments" were to be enlarged, then joined in 1671 by the north-south Petit Canal, later called the Bras de la Ménagerie and the Bras de Trianon. (See also the engraved map of the Versailles park, fig. 1.7.)

1662, and mythological, populated by the gods, heroes, and monsters of antiquity, under the aegis of the sun god Apollo. The increasingly ambitious project of the king's gardens at Versailles, the first phase of which was completed by 1668, was more than just a royal pleasure garden. Indeed, the cultural metaphor of absolutism enacted in Versailles began not so much with the "theater state" made famous in Clifford Geertz's account of nineteenth-century Bali, but with a "garden state," where the king's military and civil engineering of nature and his perfection of nature in the artifice and ornamentation of the gardens were both the material manifestation and symbolic legitimation of royal majesty and its absolute powers.¹⁸

The court itself did not move to Versailles until 1682, near the end of the third building campaign, begun in 1678 by Jules Hardouin-Mansart (1646–1708). But from the beginning of his personal reign in 1661, Louis XIV oversaw the planting of the gardens of Versailles and used them for formal guided tours of ambassadors and the gallant court festivals of the 1660s, especially the week-long festivities (*divertissements*), *Les plaisirs de l'île enchantée* (The pleasures of the enchanted isle, 6–13 May 1664), and the festivities commemorating the king's victories over Holland in the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle (18 July 1668).¹⁹ Louis XIV also permitted courtiers and others to wander the garden groves in aristocratic "promenades," although permission was required in the early years.

Within the first two years of his personal reign, following the birth of his son in early 1662, Louis XIV's first garden project was to build a viewing palace and animal collection—the Royal Menagerie of Versailles. The royal architect, Louis Le Vau, who went on to design and complete the first building campaign of the palace of Versailles in 1668, began by constructing a modest viewing pavilion and seven courtyards in 1664 that four years later contained a huge variety and number of birds and other animals enclosed in a site initially only several acres large (fig. 0.4).

Strangely, in the new environmental history of Versailles, animals have been left out of the garden; the story of animals has been incidental in the accounts of the natural world and cultural politics at Versailles. Of course, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in his last seminar, turned his attention precisely to the relations of the beast and the sovereign, but his was not a story about the animals of Versailles. Meanwhile, art historians have long studied the

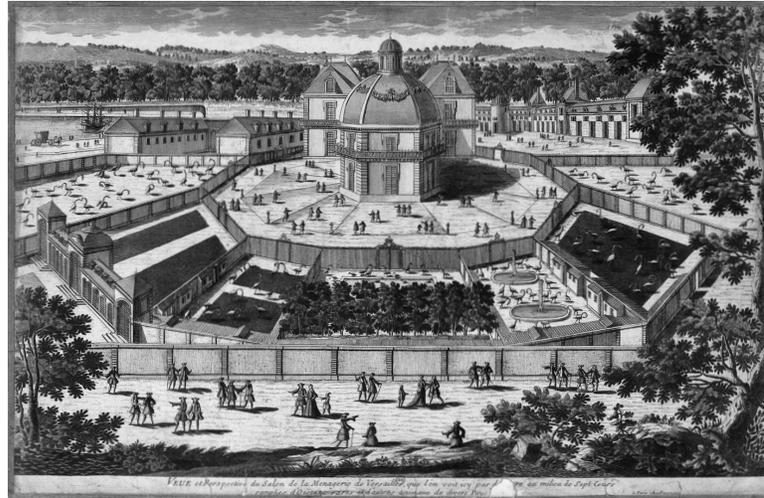


Figure 0.4. Pierre Aveline, *View and Perspective of the Salon of the Versailles Menagerie* (1689).

mythological and allegorical animal statues and fountains that populated the gardens of Versailles. The major sculpted fountains from early in the reign were fantastical beasts—dragons, tritons, sphinxes, or sea horses (fig. 0.5).²⁰

When actually existing animals—frogs, storks, horses, songbirds—appeared, they remained allegorical, unnatural beings, part of what Aurélia Gaillard calls the “Great Fable” that informed the logic of the gardens. Thus the principal fountains built in the late 1660s: the Latona Fountain, constructed by Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy in 1668–1670, depicted Latona and her children, Apollo and Diane, imploring Jupiter to punish the peasants of Lycia for having persecuted her, turning them into frogs (Chapter 8); the Apollo Basin (ironically replacing the existing Swan Basin), sculpted by Jean-Baptiste Tuby in 1668, representing Apollo in his chariot drawn by four horses, surrounded by four tritons and four sea monsters; the monstrous python, the swans, and the dolphins of the Dragon Fountain, by Gilles Guérin in 1667, and others. Animals also occupied marginal and ornamental, if symbolically important roles in the cosmographical and cosmological statuary, as in the female allegorical statues of *Africa* by Jean Cornu in 1682, where a lion sits on



Figure 0.5. Jean-Baptiste Tuby, sea horse for the Apollo Basin (1668).

The sculptural ensemble of the Solar Chariot Fountain, in the reconstructed Apollo Basin (which replaced the Swan Basin), was based on a design by Charles Le Brun and built between 1668 and 1670 (while simultaneously woven at the Gobelins Manufactory in Paris to decorate the walls of Versailles in 1671). Allegory trumped naturalism in the gardens of Versailles, even with the appearance of the Royal Menagerie (1664).

the pedestal of the statue, or *America* by Guérin in 1675–1678, with its crocodile lounging on the pedestal, or the allegorical figure of *Air* by Étienne Le Hongre in 1685, with a chameleon “that points its strange head out from under the powerful folds draping the figure.” But the actually existing animals in the gardens of Versailles have until quite recently been ignored.²¹

Not that the animals themselves in the Royal Menagerie at Versailles have been completely neglected by scholars. The pioneering, if flawed comparative work of zoo historian Gustave Loisel over a century ago, which inventoried all the species found at the Versailles menagerie before 1789, has been renewed in recent years. Gérard Mabillet and Joan Pieragnoli have researched and supervised an astonishing set of 3D reconstructions of the garden palace and its denizens by Hubert Naudeix. The Versailles menagerie has thus resurfaced as an object of inquiry, but the multiple uses of its animals in an astonishing array of media in and around 1668 remains underexplored.²²

Truth be told, we know remarkably little about the founding and early functioning of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles in these years or before 1789, when it was dismantled. The archives of the Maison du Roi on which it depended are bereft of detail, and only the surviving account books give some sense of the scale of expenditures and timing of its construction, but little about its management — or that of the animals.²³ We thus know only a few things about the animals themselves, mostly from the rediscovery of the work of the remarkable Flemish animal painter (*animalier*) Pieter Boel and from the surviving tableaux that decorated the inside of the pavilion done by his more successful, if less talented colleague and countryman, Nicasius Bernaerts (1620–1678). The visual evidence from Bernaerts and Boel of the menagerie’s many birds and mammals tells us much about the makeup of the animal collection, but perhaps even more about Boel’s aesthetic sensibilities and his method.²⁴ And while we do know something more about many of the individual specimens of the menagerie, it is only through their symbolic afterlives that we can learn about individual animal subjects. We can occasionally trace what might be a single animal subject — and not simply a species member — such as one of the charismatic stars of the menagerie, a demoiselle crane (*Anthropoides virgo*), as it appeared in the literary expressions of the visits of Jean de La Fontaine and the novelist and *salonnière* Madeleine de Scudéry in 1668 (Chapter 2); as it was sketched and painted by Pieter Boel, then copied and woven into the royal tapestries (Chapter 3); and as it was dissected by the newly founded Royal Academy of Sciences under the direction of Claude Perrault (although that was a different “subject,” Chapter 4). It is a revealing detail that the graceful demoiselle crane did not make an appearance in the lost physiognomic lectures of Charles Le Brun about the passions (Chapter 5) or in the Royal Labyrinth (Chapter 8, although there were other, more bestial cranes). But while we cannot know details about the brief and no doubt tortured life of that and those cranes, what we might call their “species being” and those of the other animals, we know much about their symbolic afterlives in the political and cultural projects that helped symbolically to constitute the absolute rule of Louis XIV and that brought into being the debate over the “beast-machine” in Paris and at court.

Indeed, it could be argued that the foundational modern distinction of “human” and “animal” as incommensurable and totalizing

categories was born of 1668, or at least of the mid-seventeenth century. It is perhaps not coincidental that (as the *Oxford English Dictionary* has it) the first usage of “beast” to refer to the animal nature of man was Richard Allestree’s *The Causes of the Decay of Christian Piety* (1667). In France, the etymology of *animal*, from the Latin *anima* (soul) was ancient, but the distinction of human and animal dated from the seventeenth century. It was Descartes’s idea of “the animal,” appearing suddenly (in 1643, but not in public debate until 1668) that, following the conventional wisdom of animal studies scholarship (including the work of Derrida) broke the custom of vitalist and anthropomorphic thinking about animals. Animals became things, clocks, or machines.²⁵ But not everything was *la faute à Descartes*, even if Descartes became a touchstone for several debates, especially beginning in 1668, about the souls and bodies of animals and the problem of animate motion.

Historians of science have long noted how the historical transition from an animate and vitalist cosmos dominated by Aristotelian forms to a mechanistic world of inert matter moving according to mathematical laws — the story of physics from Copernicus to Newton — was a long and complex one that, of course, cannot be reduced to a single year or a single thinker. No doubt, the descent of mechanistic thinking from the heavenly spheres to the human body, was an equally drawn-out and contested process. The Greek physician Galen’s (129–216) humoral model of the human body — the four humors (“fluids”) of black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm — had a firm grip: Galen dominated Western medicine for nearly a millennium and a half. The anatomical work of Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564) in his *De humani corporis fabrica* (On the fabric of the human body, 1543) dealt an early blow, followed by almost a century of anatomical work that was capped by the publication of William Harvey’s proof of “great” circulation in *De motu cordis* (On the motion of the heart, 1628). René Descartes quickly overturned Harvey’s continued Galenic beliefs and produced his own (controversial) understanding of corporeal mechanism.²⁶ Descartes was not the only responsible party or vision of mechanism — Claude Perrault, Jacques Rohault, Giovanni Borelli, and others had their own versions.²⁷ But Descartes is most often blamed for the radical mechanization of animals, their “naturalization” and transformation into the beast-machine that stands in for the broader disanimation of a vital and animate (and

feminized) cosmos — what Carolyn Merchant pronounced long ago of the seventeenth century: “the death of nature.”²⁸

There is a great deal of truth to the common wisdom that identifies the thought of Descartes as a rupture, but only if we understand two stories. First, we must pay attention to the history of the diffusion and reception of Cartesian thought and in particular of the figure of the beast-machine in France. Second, we must consider the ways in which individuals (notably, in this book, Jean Denis, Claude Perrault, Charles Le Brun, many of those who participated in the Transfusion Affair, not to mention Louis XIV himself) navigated across the Cartesian divide, borrowing elements of old and new paradigms in their ideas and representations of animals. While 1668 symbolizes a certain epistemic shift in thinking about absolutism and mechanism, and about animals, the historical actors of the Year of the Animal themselves breached the divide, each in their own improvised way.

Descartes and the Animal Question

At its origins, the dissemination of Descartes’s published and unpublished writings in the mid-1660s, long after his death in 1650, was a family affair more than a French one: Jean Chanut, the French ambassador in Sweden, where Descartes died, inherited the philosopher’s papers; his brother-in-law was Claude Clerselier (1614–1684), who was to organize the funeral cortège and reburial of Descartes’s bones in the church of Sainte-Geneviève-du-Mont, in the “Latin Quarter” — among the universities — of Paris, in June 1667.²⁹ (The Montpellier physician Jean Denis, who ten days earlier had performed the first xenotransfusion of blood between animals and humans in Paris, was among the organizers.) Clerselier also oversaw the publication in 1668 of a large number of Descartes’s works by a more extended network of “Cartesians,” including the abbot Claude Picot, Descartes’s friend the philosopher Louis la Forge, and others. In 1668, the Oratorian Père Nicolas-Joseph Poisson published Descartes’s short *Traité de la mécanique* (Treatise on mechanics); Claude Picot republished Descartes’s more comprehensive *Principes de la philosophie* (Principles of philosophy) in its seventh French edition; and the *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* went into a third and fourth edition. The same year, Clerselier himself reissued a third edition of three volumes of Descartes’s letters (originally published in 1657 and 1667), letters that translated

his highly technical languages of mechanics (including optics and mathematics) into terms intelligible and agreeable to polite society. “Cartesian” works published in 1668 include the aristocratic philosopher and linguist Géraud de Cordemoy’s learned *Discours physique de la parole* (Physical discourse of speech). At the same time, endless public lectures in the salons and academies of Paris disseminated accessible versions of Descartes’s work, including those of Jacques Rouhault (Clerselier’s son-in-law), Pierre-Sylvain Régis, and Jean Denis. All these efforts in the mid-1660s were directed toward turning the would-be heretic into a “Good Catholic and Frenchman.”³⁰

For by 1668, the name of Descartes had become synonymous, officially at least, with heresy. In 1663, specific writings by Descartes, including the *Traité de l’homme* (Treatise on man, written in the 1630s and published in Latin that year), were put on the Papal Index, albeit with the qualification “donec corrigatur” (“until corrected”), which left much room for interpretation. In France, the University of Paris banned the teaching of Descartes’s writings, and the royal council, under the watchful eye of the king, sought to censor them in favor of those of Aristotle. The partisans of anti-Cartesianism soon gained traction in the religious and educational establishment of the absolute monarchy. In 1671, the archbishop of Paris, on the king’s orders, convoked Clerselier and Rouhault and exhorted them to cease spreading Descartes’s teachings. Pressure on the Paris Parlement to censor Descartes entirely was thwarted by the timely and anonymous publication of the young critic Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux’s satire, written with the Gassendist disciple François Bernier, the *Arrêt intervenu . . . contre tous ceux qui prétendent faire, enseigner ou croire de nouvelles découvertes qui ne soient pas dans Aristote* (Decree . . . against those who claim to do, teach, or believe in new discoveries that are not in Aristotle, 1671), which ridiculed attempts to condemn the teaching of the “new science,” including that of Descartes, and satirically forbade the circulation of blood. Nonetheless, that same year, the dean of the theology faculty in Paris, Claude Morel, to whom Boileau had addressed his eighth satire “On Man” in 1667, banned the teaching of the works and ideas of Descartes. The movement spread to the provinces, setting off the royal sanction of early January 1675 in which “His Majesty orders the Rector of the University [of Angers] to abandon and forbid that there be taught or considered any opinions founded on the principles of Descartes.”³¹

Why should Descartes's work have provoked such strong political reactions, moving his ideas from the realm of philosophy to ideology? Paul Mouy has argued that Louis XIV's proscription of the philosopher was directed against Cartesian physics, yet it was precisely Descartes's physics that met the least amount of resistance, at least outside the university and beyond the Jesuits. Trevor McClaughlin insisted that Louis XIV's opposition to Descartes was overtly political, as evidenced in the entangled histories of Cartesians and Jansenists. Descartes found a visible reception among the followers at Port-Royal in the 1650s and 1660s, and since Jansenists were suspected for their republican tendencies, Cartesians were guilty by association.³² (Descartes himself denied all politics in his philosophy and, it is widely accepted, "preached a doctrine of submission to society," even if he himself sought to escape it at times.³³) Yet Louis XIV, pushed by the Jesuits, orchestrated a wide set of sanctions by the law courts, the universities, and the church—even as "Cartesian" thinking about matter and the universe gradually spread among the courtly and urban elite of French society and within the French universities, accommodating itself and gradually displacing that of Aristotle. Indeed, by the 1690s, at a moment when Descartes's physics were superseded by Newton's, Descartes had several disciples at court and in polite society—although never Louis XIV, and many remained troubled by his understanding of animals.

What defined a "Cartesian"? There were several registers in which intellectuals and writers voiced their support and opposition to different elements of Descartes's thinking, but until 1668, the stickiest wicket was the philosopher's purely materialist and mechanistic explanation of the mystery of the Eucharist, a question that was to plague Descartes during his lifetime and his later reputation.³⁴ The problem climaxed as a debate among Cartesians: Père Nicolas-Joseph Poisson, of the Congregation of the Oratory, Clerselier, Rohault, and the Benedictine monk Robert Desgabets (1610–1678, who, we will see, pioneered work on blood transfusion a decade before Jean Denis) were divided on the material and physical transformation of bread into the body of Christ. Although all of their writings explained transubstantiation of material matter into the holy body of Christ in a way that sought to remain within the confines of orthodoxy—except perhaps the radical Cartesian Desgabets—all of the "Cartesians" were tainted as heretics by the

affair. Yet at this moment, in and around 1668, the terms of the debate shifted abruptly from the mysteries of the Eucharist to the souls of animals. The debate about material extension and the Eucharist continued into the early 1670s, but it was overshadowed beginning in 1668 by the animal question. Everything happened as if, to invoke the structuralist incantation, animals at that moment provided better, safer food for thinking and digesting the new materialist philosophy.

The first salvo to defend Descartes's views of animals, in the form of a letter to a learned Jesuit, was published by the Cartesian Gérard de Cordemoy in 1668 and reprinted immediately. The affair was launched and was to continue for twenty years, climaxing in the 1690s. It was not, however, as the Jesuit Father Gabriel Daniel was to argue satirically in his response to critics that followed the publication of *Voyage autour du monde de Descartes* (Descartes's *Voyage around the world*) in 1690, that animals were the "touchstone" of Cartesianism: "I have become convinced that the essential point of Cartesianism, and the touchstone that you use, you party leaders, to recognize the faithful disciples of your master, is the doctrine of automata that makes pure machines of all animals in taking away their sensation and knowledge."³⁵ In fact, many of those who embraced a certain method, or even a physics, of Descartes during the reign of Louis XIV were doubtful of and even opposed to this view of the beast-machine, including (among the most famous) the royal tutor Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, François Fénelon, and Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757), not to mention (Chapter 7) Made-moiselle de Scudéry, Madame de Sévigné, and others.³⁶ But the figure of the beast-machine did help to crystallize a new understanding of animals in and around 1668.

The beast-machine was the name given to Descartes's original idea of animals as God's elaborate clocklike mechanisms whose movement and behavior depend entirely on the "disposition of their organs" and the complex corporeal machinery that was seen as producing their behavior, not on the existence of an immortal soul. Whether or not Descartes believed that animals "feel" pain has remained contested by scholars of the beast-machine, raising important debates about the nature of sensation and cognition.³⁷ But Descartes was not concerned about animal suffering—the essential animal question since Jeremy Bentham asked during the revolutionary year of 1789, "Can they suffer?"—when he introduced the figure

of the beast-machine in the widely accessible *Discours de la méthode*, reprinted for the fourth time in 1668. In that work, Descartes not only demonstrated the existence of God with a “geometrical proof” (part 4), but outlined his mechanistic notion of blood circulation (part 5), which simultaneously linked the bodies of humans and animals and insistently stated a difference. Although their bodies resemble each other, one could not argue by analogy, he claimed. Only humans have a soul, which is not only immortal, but marks the distinctly human capacity for language, reason, speech, and consciousness. Magpies and parrots can “utter words,” but they cannot reason, they cannot think. “This shows not merely that the beasts have less reason than men, but that they have no reason at all.” “We must not confuse speech with the natural movements which express passions and which can be imitated by machines as well as animals,” wrote Descartes. “Nor should we think, like some of the ancients, that the beasts speak, although we do not understand their language.” Beasts lack intelligence and consciousness; their actions are a function of the “disposition of their organs. In the same way a clock, consisting only of wheels and springs, can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can do with all our wisdom.”³⁸ Far more sophisticated and complex than a human-made clock, the animal was nonetheless a machine.

Descartes’s figure of the animal was less a description of animals than a philosophical foil to argue for the immortality of the human soul and the metaphysical distinction of spirit and matter. The beast-machine was a fable that Descartes used, not as a literary ornament, but an exemplary figuration, a means to disclose the essential truth about the human cogito and the material world. Beyond this, Descartes’s understandings and relations to animals were complex, for during his life, Descartes had encountered living creatures in a wide variety of contexts. He regularly practiced vivisection on the animals he procured from the butchers of Kalverstraat (Calf Street) in Amsterdam in the 1620s to illustrate a model of the body that mechanized William Harvey’s ideas of circulation, even if he complained in 1645 that his “Treatise on Animals,” begun fifteen years before, would be difficult to complete.³⁹ His graphic description of a dog’s vivisection only confirms his reputation as impervious to the suffering of animals: “If you cut off the end of the heart of a living dog, and through the incision you put your finger into one of the concavities,

you will clearly feel that every time the heart shortens, it presses your finger, and it stops pressing it every time it lengthens.”⁴⁰ At the same time, Descartes kept a small dog, affectionately called Monsieur Grat (Mister Scratch) that he took on walks and ostensibly treated with great affection, at least according to his first biographer.⁴¹ His philosophical and notional animal was neither of these: instead, it was a figure that was critical to thinking through the foundational metaphysical dualism of body (extension, divisibility) and soul (substance, indivisibility) that brought out both the continuities and differences with humans. He even expressed (Cartesian) doubts that there could be definitive proof of thought or its absence in animals, “since the human mind does not reach into their hearts.” But all his investigations produced the most probable explanation of animal behavior: animals are “natural automata,” without thought or soul.⁴²

Not that Descartes sought to “disanimate” the world of animals, following the formulation of the Shakespearean scholar Laurie Shannon: in Descartes’s mechanical philosophy, animals were a limiting case precisely because they represented animate matter in motion—the principle of life itself. The question of animate motion was at the center of mechanistic philosophy brought down from the heavens, and animals were its epicenter.⁴³ As Descartes explained in his 1649 letter to the English Platonist Henry More: “There are two different principles causing our movements. The first is purely mechanical and corporeal, and depends solely on the force of the spirits and the structure of our organs, and can be called the corporeal soul. The other, an incorporeal principle, is the mind or that soul which I have defined as a thinking substance.” Animals, in this ontological dualism, fell squarely on the side of the corporeal and the mechanical: “Thereupon I investigated very carefully whether the movements of animals originated from both of these principles or from one only. I soon perceived clearly that they could all originate from the corporeal and mechanical principle, and I regarded it as certain and demonstrated that we cannot at all prove the presence of a thinking soul in animals.”⁴⁴

In several ways, this was a traditional and Christian principle: following Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, and the Church Fathers, Descartes believed that only humans possess reason and thus an immortal soul, and Descartes’s defenders were quick to point out his orthodoxy on this point. At the same time, the belief that

language separates men from beasts was a common trope among philosophers in the early modern period, apart from the “theriophilous” (discussed below).⁴⁵ But Descartes also radically reconfigured the inherited tripartite set of souls—of plants (vegetative), animals (sensitive), and humans (rational)—that dated from Aristotle and the Greeks, reworked as common coin in medieval scholasticism, and persisted long into the seventeenth century. Even the experimental philosopher and scholar Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), despite his atomist theory of matter, defended the Aristotelian idea of a “sensitive” soul. But for Descartes, there was only soul and body, and only humans could possess both: the behavior of animals was relegated to the complex mechanism of the body.⁴⁶

In Descartes’s view, humans share an anatomical identity with animals that is absolute. Even animals possess pineal glands in their brains—a much-debated organ in 1668, which functioned for Descartes as the material seat of the soul, the site where animal spirits produce thought and specifically human passions take their definitive shape (Chapter 5). But for Descartes, animals live without souls, acting according to their senses and the disposition of their organs—he very rarely used the word “instinct”—modeled on the mechanistic imagery of automata or “moving machines,” as he explained in the *Discourse on the Method*, describing the mechanism of animal movement:

This will not seem at all strange to those who know how many kinds of automations, or moving machines, the skill of man can construct with the use of very few parts, in comparison with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and all the other parts that are in the body of any animal. For they will regard this body as a machine which, having been made by the hands of God, is incomparably better ordered than any machine that can be devised by man, and contains in itself movements more wonderful than those in any such machine.⁴⁷

The animal’s body functions according to the “disposition of its organs.” Extension and motion: everything is governed by purely material and mechanistic processes of physiology. These he was to explain in greater detail in his *L’homme* (Man), his unfinished treatise published posthumously (in Latin) in 1662 and in French two years later. Corporeal mechanism in humans and animals involves the movement of “animal spirits,” he explained, subtle matter distilled

from the blood and distributed down the nerves to cause muscle movements in accord with sensory stimuli. But only men have souls, capable of thought, language, and reason, all of which have no material extension (except perhaps in the pineal gland), but which are capable of directing and controlling the body.⁴⁸

It is true that Descartes was not always consistent, and the metaphysical distinction was sometimes blurred in practice; Descartes's writings offer at times conflicting formulations of the animal figure. The problem lay with the "passions"—emotional states and expressions—that could be found in both humans and animals and their relation to thought or cognition. In his epistolary explanations near the end of his life, Descartes insisted that our "passions" are "accompanied by thought," but do not depend on thought—and consequently are shared by animals, expressed at times "even more violently than they are in human beings." Animals thus are capable of passions, although theirs are primitive, base, and violent: "anger, fear, hunger," he wrote to the English Platonist Henry More on 5 February 1649, but also "hope" and "joy," all of which could be "performed without any thought," he wrote to the Marquess of Newcastle in 1646.⁴⁹ The passions of animals—very different from the "animal spirits" that circulate in the body—could exist because of Descartes's reluctant admission to Sir More that animals do have a "corporeal soul," devoid of thinking substance, functioning purely mechanically. If animals might have passions of the body, they were incapable of having "passions of the soul," the subject of his treatise published the year before his death, in 1649. Yet in his concrete accounts of specific passions, it is not always clear which passions belong to the soul and which to the body (was in the case of the chameleons of Chapter 7).

Though complex and at times inconsistent, Descartes's figural animal was nonetheless a rupture, a radical ontological break with the inherited Renaissance thinking about animals. This epistemic shift in the idea of the animal (or perhaps in the invention of the animal) was not exclusively the work of Descartes, even if a radical reconceptualization took shape in the long shadow he cast, especially after his death in 1650. Nor do I wish to argue that the worldview of the society, or its elite, changed overnight, for many of the individuals active during the Year of the Animal borrowed chaotically (at times) from both sides of this epistemic divide, as we will see most clearly in the story of the blood transfusions (Chapter 6). But Descartes's

views on animals were a lightning rod, and his *Discours de la méthode* set off an immediate response, both in support and against the beast-machine. Henricus Regius (1598–1679) and Pierre Chanet (1603?–166?) extended Descartes’s model of animal automatism, elaborating the conceptual opposition of “instinct” and “reason,” and offered further proof of the linguistic and rational incapacities of beasts and the purely mechanistic understanding of their behaviors. The physician and philosopher Marin Cureau de la Chambre (1594–1669), who would be elected to the Académie française in 1666 and became a founding member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1667, countered the idea of animal “instinct” with an elaborate sensationalist account of animal reason, demonstrating how experience, memory, and imagination have extension in animals, a position he elaborated in his *Traité de la connoissance des animaux* (Treatise on the knowledge of animals, 1645). Although Chanet responded to Cureau de la Chambre’s pamphlet, the debate did not extend deeply into lettered or polite society in the 1640s or into court culture.⁵⁰ Only a quarter century later, in and around 1668, did the question of the beast-machine begin to engage a broader swath of public opinion, among courtiers, in the newly founded royal academies, and in the salons of Paris.

The “Happy Beast”

Descartes and his followers sought to refute what the philosopher George Boas long ago called “theriophilia” in France. The term may appear technical and even inaccurate— from the Greek, “the love of wild animals”—but the concept is quite broad and complex (and not simply reducible to a “pro-animal” position) and can serve as a useful device to understand the ruptures within seventeenth-century thought and culture. In sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century France, across a variety of literary, theological, and scientific writings, Boas saw how a disparate group of intellectuals “turned their admiring glances below man and found true models in the animals,” asserting their moral and natural superiority. He considered the movement as “one of the minor traditions of European thought,” but it was in fact more important than he suggests.⁵¹

Partisans of the “Happy Beast” among sixteenth-century humanists, early zoologists, clerics, and moralists were divided in their judgment about the capacities of animals, especially the attribute of reason, but they shared the claim that animals possess some form

of understanding and thought, feelings, and passions that render them superior to the human animal. The great humanist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) was not only the most eloquent spokesman of this position, but also the straw man of Descartes’s philosophy. As Descartes made clear in his famous letter to the Marquess of Newcastle in 1646, “I cannot share the opinion of Montaigne and others who attribute understanding and thought to animals.”⁵² Michel de Montaigne’s longest essay, the *Apologie de Raimond Sébond* (Apology to Raimond Sébond, written in 1576 and published in 1580), was the touchstone text: Montaigne attributed reason, foresight, and thought to animals, rehearsing and paraphrasing endless stories told by Plutarch, but also Lucretius, Juvenal, and the ancient philosophers of theriophilia. More importantly, he claimed the moral superiority of “beasts” over the wretched condition of contemporary humanity. “The most vulnerable and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the most arrogant,” he wrote, in a stark reversal of the anthropocentric received wisdom:

He feels and sees himself lodged here, amid the mire and dung of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst, the deadest, and the most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven, with the animals of the worst condition of the three [those that walk, those that fly, those that swim]; and in his imagination he goes planting himself above the circle of the moon, and bringing the sky down beneath his feet? . . . How does he know, by the force of his intelligence, the secret internal stirrings of animals? By what comparison between them and us does he infer the stupidity he attributes to them? . . . Animals are much more self-controlled than we are, and restrain themselves with more moderation within the limits that nature has prescribed to us.⁵³

Theriophilia formally contradicted the Catholic Church’s doctrinal affirmation of human superiority and dominion over the animals, following the two versions of creation in the Hexameron, the first six days of creation. But with the bloodshed and violence of the Wars of Religion, Montaigne joined both Protestant and fellow Catholic writers who agreed that beasts are more content, far less driven by the passions, and less violent. The Catholic theologian and moralist Pierre Charron (1541–1603), Montaigne’s friend and protégé, insisted that while humans have many advantages over beasts (power, judgment, and choice among them), and while human blood itself is

superior to that of animals, beasts nonetheless enjoy “spiritual faculties” inaccessible to men.⁵⁴

In the Protestant poetry of Guillaume du Bartas (1544–1590), the wondrous acts of animals were God’s achievement and instruments of God’s will. Later Catholic reformers such as François de Sales (1567–1622), alongside a host of lesser theologians and moralists, used exempla from the animal world in acts of devotion and catechism to describe the glories of God’s creation and to provide an animal eschatology, a path toward salvation using animals. The arguments echoed throughout theological writings of the mid-seventeenth century, including those of the Oratorian Jean-François Sénault (1599–1672), whose own writings anticipated Descartes’s reworking of Stoicism.⁵⁵ More, the resurgence of animal “reason” in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century in France turned its back on the Church and revived an ancient corpus, including the Greek historian and later Roman citizen Plutarch (46–120). Plutarch’s essay became a cultural meme in the Renaissance: “Beasts are Rational,” an interpretation of the story of Circe’s transformation of Gryllus into a pig in book 10 of Homer’s *Odyssey*, was reprised by the Florentine humanist Giovan Battista Gelli’s version of *Circe* in 1548, then extensively reworked across Europe well into the eighteenth century.⁵⁶

Renaissance Humanimalism

This theriophilia of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century could be considered part of a broader notion that might be called, slightly awkwardly, Renaissance humanimalism. As the neologism suggests, the concept has two characteristics: it refused the clear ontological distinction of “human” and “animal,” underscoring the kinship and community across the species boundary; at the same time, Renaissance humanimalism is broadly human-centered, at once anthropocentric and anthropomorphic in its understanding of animals, especially when its theriophilic expressions elevates animals as models of virtuous and civilized human behavior.

Understood in terms of Renaissance humanimalism, animals occupied a shared moral and political universe with men: Montaigne wrote of this “equality and correspondence between us and the beasts,” calling animals our “brethren and companions,” and Pierre Charron noted the “proximity and kinship” (*voisinage et cousinage*) between man and the animals, ideas that have been taken up

by poststructuralist critics, including Jacques Derrida and Laurie Shannon. The latter has recently argued that this premodern paradigm constituted a political community, a “zootopian constitution” with its “constitutionalist sense of legitimated capacities, authorities, and rights that set animals within the scope of justice and the span of political imagination.”⁵⁷

At the same time, political or not, Renaissance humanimalism was anthropocentric and allegorical. In the moral universe of emblems and fables, in religious sermons and moralist writing, in political pamphlets and literary texts, and even in much of natural history, authors and artists used animals to symbolize the entire range of human behavior, both vices and virtues, but they especially modeled human goodness and virtue on examples drawn from the animal world. In this morally charged world of natural beings, fabulists and philosophers (albeit in different styles and genres) asserted norms of human behavior based on observed or known characteristics of animals or defined animals in terms of human activities. Perhaps the most important of these texts in the sixteenth century was by Barthélémy Aneau, *Décades de la description, forme, et vertu naturelle des animaux, tan raisonnables que brutz* (Decades of the description, form and natural virtue of animals, both reasonable and brute, 1549), which went through eleven editions before 1604 and was reprinted, in parts and with different titles, throughout the first half of the seventeenth century.⁵⁸ Aneau’s work, like his contribution to later editions of *Livret des emblèmes* (Book of emblems, first edition, 1536) by Andrea Alciato (1492–1550), was far from a description of the nature of animals—animals in nature—and far more a book of morals in which human virtues and vices are described in the behaviors of specific animals. As such, it could be considered at first glance a Renaissance version of a medieval bestiary, but whose format increasingly drew from the many emblem books that began to be printed in the sixteenth century.⁵⁹ Well into the seventeenth century, this Renaissance humanimalism found expression in the hugely popular work by Philippe Desprez, *Le théâtre des animaux, auquel sous diverses fables et histoires est représenté la plupart des actions de la vie humaine* (The theater of animals, in which under different fables and histories is represented most of the actions of human life, 1644). In literature and theology, in moralist fable and naturalist writing, animals were understood analogically and allegorically as models of human virtue (and, less often, vice).

But Renaissance humanimalism was no mere continuation of the tradition of the medieval bestiary, the popular compendia of animal images and moral claims that was more of an animal catechism than a natural history. Instead, it extended into the work of early modern naturalists and zoologists. As Brian Oglivie has suggested, Renaissance natural history was also very much a collective effort to produce a “science of describing” both the plant and the animal worlds, and naturalists often insisted on the observation and description of actually existing animals—and especially on their images “drawn from life.”⁶⁰ Such descriptions drew their authority “from nature,” as in the work of Pierre Belon (1517–1564), including his *Histoire de la nature des oiseaux, avec leurs descriptions; & naïfs portraits retirez du naturel* (History of the nature of birds, with their descriptions; and naïve portraits taken from nature, 1555), even if the “naïve” images were frequently copied from previously printed books (Chapter 4). But humanist natural historians of the Renaissance, including Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), Pierre Gilles (1490–1555), and Conrad Gessner (1516–1558), as part of their descriptions of animals, could make sense of the animals described and catalogued only by situating them in relation to human beliefs and practices. In this sense, one could follow William B. Ashworth Jr.’s claim that the goal of what he called “emblematic natural history” until the mid-seventeenth century was “to capture the entire web of association that inextricably links human culture and the animal world”—an essential dimension of Renaissance humanimalism.⁶¹

Until the middle of the seventeenth century, literary and philosophical expressions of “the happy beast,” far from a minor tradition, dominated cultural production, climaxing with Louis XIV’s rise to power. In 1648, as the civil wars of the Fronde broke out, with judges, clerics, and nobles contesting the use of royal prerogative, Cardinal Mazarin’s librarian, the scholar Gabriel Naudé, published the Renaissance scholar Girolamo Rorario’s *Quod animalia bruta ratione utantur melius homine* (That brute animals make better use of reason than man), replete with copious examples of animal sagacity, intelligence, and morals. In 1645, Cureau de la Chambre published his *Traité de la connoissance des animaux*, republished four times, including in 1664, which was a defense of animal rationality constituted through imagination and memory. The same year that Louis XIV took sole possession of his rule, in 1661, A. J. Montfleury wrote a one-act comedy, *Les*

bestes raisonnables (The reasonable beasts), performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, which recounted yet again Homer's tale of Circe and human metamorphoses (echoing Gelli and a host of others), concluding that animals are reasonable beings that enjoy a moral superiority over humans.⁶² There also were many other expressions of literary theriophilia in the middle years of the seventeenth century and across a range of contrasting genres. The satirical and libertine fantastic voyage of *Histoire comique contenant les estats et empires de la lune* (Comical history of the states and empires of the moon, published posthumously in 1657, with a third edition in 1662), by Cyrano de Bergerac (1619–1655) was published posthumously in 1657. The novel contained a ferocious critique of anthropocentrism, using animals (found elsewhere in libertine literature) to critique the church and reason while advancing an appeal to a more “natural” (and thus implicitly “animal”) condition. Bergerac's fantastic voyage involved a complete reversal of human and animal hierarchies: a tribunal of birds on the moon judges whether Drycona, the anagramic traveler of Cyrano, is human or, as the defendant claims, a monkey. The trial provides much space for the libertine author to denounce specific human institutions, and human stupidity and vanity more generally.⁶³

A similar, if more subtle and far less radical use of animals to ridicule claims of human achievement and superiority came from the pen of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, rising star at court, who published his *Satire VIII, sur l'homme* (Satire 8, on man, 1667). Boileau's satire (dedicated to Claude Moreau, regent at the theology faculty of the Sorbonne) was a critique of religious orthodoxy and made satirical use of the theriophilic tradition to state his case. The opening stanza, recalling Montaigne, but more sardonic in tone, established the argument of the piece:

Of all the animals that rise in the air,
That swim the sea, or walk on land,
From Paris to Peru, from Japan to Rome,
The stupidest animal, in my opinion, is man.⁶⁴

In the same year, Cureau de la Chambre published his short *Discours de l'amitié et de la haine qui se trouvent entre les animaux* (Discourse on the love and hatred found among animals, 1667), a highly anthropomorphizing set of observations taken from his lengthy and sophisticated writings on animal sensation and imagination. A frequent visitor to

the salon of Madeleine de Scudéry, Cureau was largely known for his philosophical work on the passions—*Les caractères des passions* (The characters of the passions, first published in 1640, then reworked, expanded, and reprinted over the next twenty-five years)—and his popular work on physiognomy: *L'art de connoistre les hommes* (The art of knowing men), the first part of which appeared in 1659 and went through five editions in a decade. His early challenge to Descartes (above, p. 36) made him a scientific and philosophical theriophile without peer in the seventeenth century.⁶⁵

Scudéry was the author of the longest novel ever published, *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* (Artamène, or Cyrus the Great, 10 vols, 1648–63), and her “Saturdays” at her salon became a space to consume and produce “gallant” and “precious” (fastidiously refined) literature, poetry, and parlor games that frequently used characters of talking and civilized animals. The paragon and acknowledged leader of the literary movement known as *préciosité* (preciosity), she was (relatedly) well known for her love of animals, especially a succession of domestic companions, from a warbler to a chameleon. Although there are exceptions, until the middle of the seventeenth century, most authors of the late Baroque attributed language and reason to animals and frequently moral superiority as well, thus taking part of the general theriophilic tradition. The work of Jean de La Fontaine was the apex of this theriophilic tradition. Already under the patronage of Nicolas Fouquet at Vaux-le-Vicomte, he authored tales and fables of speaking fish and other animals in *Fables choisies, mises en vers* (Selected fables in verse), published in the spring of 1668, was dedicated to the young child of Louis XIV:

I sing those heroes, Aesop's progeny,
Whose tales, fictitious though indeed they may be,
Contain much truth. Herein, endowed with speech—
Even the fish! — will all my creatures teach
With human voice; for animals I choose
To proffer lessons that we all might use.

La Fontaine, as we shall see, was not alone in his use of speaking and reasoning animals chosen “to proffer lessons that we all might use.” From the heights of poetry to the frivolity of gallant novels, animals were cast as superior to humans. In the same year as La Fontaine's *Fables*—the

Year of the Animal—the Jesuit novelist Antoine Torche wrote *Le chien de Boulogne, ou l'amant fidelle: Nouvelle gallante* (The Bolognese, or the faithful love: A gallant novel), in which the favored dog (named “Favory”) enjoys a central, speaking role in enabling two (human) lovers. In high and low literature, as elsewhere, animals appeared as talking, reasonable beasts, more peaceful and less troubled than men and women.⁶⁶

The Advent of Classical Naturalism

In and around 1668, however, a new conception of animals, but also new uses of animals to think about absolutism and mechanism, confronted this literary theriophilia and Renaissance humanimalism more generally. Generations of scholars have identified this rupture with the “naturalism” of René Descartes and his mechanistic account of animal behavior. I will argue that the challenge to Renaissance humanimalism was not just Descartes’s, but was part of a broader rethinking of animals that took place in the shadow of Descartes and under the rays (and gaze) of the Sun King. This challenge I call “Classical naturalism,” and it consisted of the renewed interest in (and understanding of) nature—specifically of animals—to ground and legitimize the political ideals of absolutism, but also the principle of mechanism itself.

In the history of animal representations, Classical naturalism represented a three-fold rupture from the inherited tradition of Renaissance humanimalism. First, it produced a generalized devalorization of animals. This resurgence of anthropocentric thinking in which man was taken to be the measure and master of all things and beings characterizes the Classical age, with its associated values of hierarchy and order. In and around 1668, animals became more than ever “beasts,” beings stripped of reason, driven by instincts or the most base “passions of the body.” This was not so much the fault of Descartes (even if it was provoked in part by the “Cartesian” experimental physician Jean Denis), but was a sentiment widely shared among the courtier anatomists, artists, and writers—although not Charles Perrault and certainly not Jean de La Fontaine—in the early reign of Louis XIV.

The second break with Renaissance humanimalism in and around 1668 was a renewed insistence on the representation of animals as they appeared “in nature.” It is true, of course, that “naturalism”

in the visual arts, as in natural history, long predated 1668. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Dürer, and Caravaggio all produced naturalist images of animals, “drawn from life” (even if their work represented ideals of what each thought the animal should look like), and much of Dutch Baroque painting sought a truthful representation of the natural world (even when nature itself was used symbolically, as in Dutch *vanitas* still lifes of the seventeenth century).⁶⁷ The naturalist renewal in France around 1668 was striking, in part, because it coexisted within the resurgence of the allegorical and emblematic portrayal of animals drawn from fable, mythology, and commonplace ideas: for it was mythological beasts and emblematic animals that dominated the aesthetics of Versailles and populated especially its garden statuary and fountains. Yet after 1688, however ephemerally, but with enduring consequences, a new set of cultural representations and political uses of animals took shape in a movement that diverged from the continued emblematic and allegorical uses of animals in the gardens (apart from the Royal Labyrinth at Versailles) as well as in literature, emblems, devices, and tapestries.

Classical naturalism was more than the aesthetic return to nature, to animals “drawn from life,” for it also produced a new effort that consistently sought to strip the animal of the fabulous and symbolic, to represent the “real,” the “natural” characteristics of actually existing animals. The project was not restricted to Cartesian mechanism and could be found in the “naturalism” of anti-Cartesians, including Claude Perrault, and even in La Fontaine’s *Fables*. Yet to represent animals “as they appear in nature” remained, of course, a project embedded in cultural and symbolic frameworks. The ways in which artists and naturalists, philosophers and writers—often in the service of Louis XIV—pursued this kind of naturalism in an array of different media and symbolic frames is a major theme of this book.

Third, Classical naturalism involved a new (and renewed) understanding of the human subject as “the beast within”—the animalization of human nature. Animality, what Tim Ingold has called “the actions...impelled by innate emotional drives that are undisciplined by reason or responsibility,” was a common trope among moralists, writers, and philosophers after the mid-seventeenth century. Decades ago, in the shadow of Foucault’s Classical age, Erica Harth

argued that political and ethical struggles of Louis XIV involved the “clash between reason and bestial unreason.” “Bestiality for the seventeenth century was a shadowy zone of terror, a netherworld silently threatening to expand beyond its limits and encroach upon the domain of reason. Madness was an antilife: antireason, antiorder, antinature. Because it was not explained by any type of determinism, because it was relegated to the subhuman formlessness of animality, unreason circulated with a certain freedom.” More recently, Jacques Derrida described this animality as the core characteristic of sovereignty under Louis XIV, in which the “beast” and the “sovereign” shared a condition of being outside the law and the polity itself. Sovereignty—or, for me, absolutism—becomes for Derrida a condition of animality, and he explores the fable (especially La Fontaine’s) as a form that renders intelligible the animality of the king.⁶⁸

Already in 1665, the moralist François de La Rochefoucauld, in his *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales* (Reflections or moral sentences and maxims) described “the relations of men and animals” in physiognomic terms, turning the allegorical relationships of Renaissance humanimalism into a statement of man’s bestial character. “How many men live from the blood and lives of innocent men, some like tigers, always ferocious, always cruel, some like lions, keeping an appearance of generosity, some like bears, crude and avid, other like wolves, ravishing and merciless, some like foxes, which live by work, and whose job it is to fool others.”⁶⁹ In the theater of the Classical age, the tragedian Jean Racine (1632–1699) struggled with the question of animality as both madness and uncontrolled passions, as did the Jansenist philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1632–1692). The philosopher and moralist Jean de la Bruyère (1645–1696) raged against the bestiality of man in his *Caractères*, even as he asserted the innate superiority of man over animals.⁷⁰ Animality, in these writings, was identified not only with madness, but also with the inability to control the “base” and “bestial” passions of the body, including animal behaviors, but also fear (Chapter 8).

Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has argued recently that this “beast within” has always been part of the grand illusion of human nature in the West, from Hesiod to Freud to contemporary culture. Sahlins anchors his account in *The Western Illusion of Human Nature* in his reading of Thucydides and Hobbes, who resonate with Augustine, Machiavelli, and Madison, all echoing a single idea: *Homo homini*

lupus, man is a wolf to man (the adage of the High Latin poet Plautus indelibly associated with Hobbes), but taken up by Rabelais and Montaigne before him).⁷¹ Derrida, too, begins his seminar on the beast and the sovereign with the figure of the wolf, and he goes on to explore Hobbes's "animality" not as a rational sovereign that repressed disorder, but as a wolf, an extralegal being. But in the continuous lineage of animal metaphors in political theory, especially under Louis XIV, animals are better understood as representations of subjects, not of sovereigns. Sahlins described an enduring idea of human nature as a condition of self-interested animals engaged in their self-preservation achieved through predation and violence. This "state of nature" could justify either a monarchical solution (where strength and force assures order) or a republican one (where factions balance each other's drives), but it was in Western civilization a coherent and consistent idea of the animality of human nature, contained by a political structure.⁷²

Yet Sahlins's description, while appealing, is misleading, as is Derrida's, for failing to underscore the history of animality in the West. Conceptions of human nature and of sovereignty shift over time, and there were "strong" and "weak" moments in the metaphor, both political and psychic, of the "beast within." An earlier moment of strength in Europe was the twelfth century, when a "blurring of the lines" between the animal and human included a multiplication of texts and genres that identified the "beast within," if we follow the work of Joyce Salisbury.⁷³ The advent of Louis XIV and the diffusion of mechanism in the 1660s represents another strong moment, but also a distinctive one in the episodic history of human bestialization. For 1667 and 1668 witnessed not just the renewed metaphoric identification of human nature and animality, but the original metonymic one: the idea of beastliness moved from theory to practice, at least in the eyes of the victorious opponents of the animal-human blood transfusions of Jean Denis. Hence the importance of the animals of the first blood transfusion, which lived and died apart from the Royal Menagerie.

Yet it was the extraordinary appearance of a new style of royal animal collection in the gardens of Versailles that gave birth to the Year of the Animal. The presence of thousands of exotic and sometimes charismatic birds and some mammals in the Royal Menagerie ignited debates about animals — figural, allegorical, philosophical,

and naturalist — at court, in literary salons, among the Paris elite, and beyond. The animals of the Royal Menagerie (among others) were sketched, painted, printed, woven, dissected, sculpted, and debated in the double context of the absolute authority of Louis XIV and the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes (among others). The sudden presence of a collection of living animals in the Royal Menagerie, more than anything else, sparked these debates and helps to account for their concentration in and around 1668, the Year of the Animal in France.