

Handout 2: Animals in Antiquity, Fall semester 2019, Week 3

1. Nicolaus, Progymnasmata 2.11 (about fables)

„The language (*phrasis*) should be very simple, straightforward, unassuming, and free of all subtlety and periodic expression, so that the meaning is absolutely clear and the words do not appear to be loftier in stature than actors, especially when these are animals.“

2. Ben Edwin Perry – Aesopica (1952)

„The range of what might rightly be called Aesopic, both by tradition and by kind, is so vast and so repetitious as not to be worth including, even if it were possible, within the compass of a single necessarily monstrous and chaotic volume. A fable invented by an eighteen-century writer, or by one today, may be just as truly „Aesopic“ in all essential respects as any of those which were made up or adapted from popular lore in antiquity after the time of Aesop, which is to say any of the fables extant in ancient collections.“

3. Hesiod, Works and Days 202-215

„And now I will tell a fable for princes who themselves understand. Thus said the hawk to the nightingale with speckled neck, while he carried her high up among the clouds, gripped fast in his talons, and she, pierced by his crooked talons, cried pitifully. To her he spoke disdainfully: „Miserable thing, why do you cry out? One far stronger than you now holds you fast, and you must go wherever I take you, songstress as you are. And if I please, I will make my meal of you, or let you go. He is a fool who tries to withstand the stronger, for he does not get the mastery and suffers pain besides his shame.“ So said the swiftly flying hawk, the long-winged bird. But you, Perses, listen to right and do not foster violence; for violence is bad for a poor man.“

4. A wolf and a lamb (Perry 155)

A Wolf was drinking at a spring on a hillside. On looking up he saw a Lamb just beginning to drink lower down. „There’s my supper,“ thought he, „if only I can find some excuse to seize it.“ He called out to the Lamb, „How dare you muddle my drinking water?“

„No,“ said the Lamb; „if the water is muddy up there, I cannot be the cause of it, for it runs down from you to me.“

„Well, then,“ said the Wolf, „why did you call me bad names this time last year?“

„That cannot be,“ said the Lamb; „I am only six months old.“

„I don’t care,“ snarled the Wolf; „if it was not you, it was your father;“ and with that he rushed upon the poor little Lamb and ate her all up.

Moral of the story?

5. Fisherman and the fish (Perry 11)

A Fisherman took his bagpipes to the river and played them hoping to catch fish with the melody. But, no fish responded. So, he cast his net into the river and soon drew it out filled with fish. When he again played, the fish in the net flopped in tune with the music.

“You dance now when I play,” the Fisherman said. “Yes,” said an old Fish: “When you are in a man’s power you must do as he bids you.”

Moral of the story?

6. The swan and his owner (Perry 233)

A Fisherman took his bagpipes to the river and played them hoping to catch fish with the melody. But, no fish responded. So, he cast his net into the river and soon drew it out filled with fish. When he again played, the fish in the net flopped in tune with the music.

“You dance now when I play,” the Fisherman said. “Yes,” said an old Fish: “When you are in a man’s power you must do as he bids you.”

7. Lion, fox and the stag

The Lion had fallen ill and was resting in a cave. He said to the fox, who was his friend and with whom he did a bit of business from time to time:

‘If you want me to live and be fierce again, go and beguile with honeyed words the big stag who lives in the forest, bring him to me so that I can get my paws on him. For I long to sink my teeth into his entrails and to eat his heart.’

The fox took himself off into the country and found the stag, who was leaping about in the forest. He approached the stag with a fond air, saluted him respectfully and said:

“I come to announce good news. You know that our king, the lion, is my neighbor. He is now very ill and on the point of death. He is demanding to know which animal will reign after him. The wild boar is lacking in all intelligence, the bear is awkward, the panther is irascible, the tiger boastful. Only the stag is dignified enough to reign. For he is the tallest and the longest-lived and, besides, his horn is deadly to snakes. But why go on any more? He has decided that you should become king. But now that I have brought you this good news, what may I have for being the bearer of it? Speak, for I am in the most terrible hurry, as I am afraid His Majesty will call me back. He cannot do without my counsel.

‘If you would wish to listen to the words of an old fox, I would advise you to come with me and wait nearby for His Majesty’s death.’ Thus spoke the fox. The stag’s hear swelled with vanity at these words and he went to the cave without suspecting what would happen. Then the lion leaped at him headlong. However, he merely managed to tear the stag’s ears with his claws. The stag saved himself and flex with all haste to the woods. The fox clapped his hands in dismay at the loss of all his labour and the lion began to moan and make great roars, for he was overcome with hunger as well as with sorrow. He begged the fox to devise another way to beguile the stag. The fox replied: ‘It is an arduous and difficult task that you ask of me. Nevertheless, I will serve you once more.’ And then, like a hound he followed the scent of the stag towards the forest, plotting deceit as he ran. He stopped to ask some shepherds if they had seen a bleeding stag. They pointed towards his resting place in the wood. The fox came upon the stag resting to get his second wind and presented himself shamelessly to him. The stag, full of anger and with his fur all splattered with blood, cursed him: ‘You scoundrel, you will never get me to go to the lion’s den again. If you so much as come near me once more you will pay with your life. Go and fox others who don’t know you. Go and choose other beasts to make into kings and get them

all excited about it!’ The fox replied: ‘Are you so cowardly and faint-hearted? Is this distrust the reward that you give us, your good friends? The lion, in taking hold of your ear, was going to give you counsel and instruct you on the matter of your regal duties, in the manner of someone about to die. But you, you cannot even take a scratch from the paw of a sick lion! At the moment His Majesty is angrier than you are and wants to elevate the wolf to the kingship.’ And the fox continued: ‘Alas! My poor wretched master! But come, do not be afraid. Be as meek as a lamb. For, I swear by all the leaves of the trees and by all the springs that you have absolutely no cause to fear the lion. As for me, my only wish is to serve you.’ In thus deceiving the unfortunate stag, the fox induced him once more to go to the cave of the lion. When the stag entered the lion’s cave, the lion had him for supper. He swallowed all the bones, all the marrow and the entrails. The fox stood there watching him.

The stag’s heart fell to the ground. The fox snatched it and ate it to compensate himself for all his efforts. But the lion, having looked around for every morsel, could not find the heart, and asked where it was. The fox keeping his distance, said:

‘The truth is, the stag had no heart. Don’t even bother to look for it. For how could an animal be said to have a heart who has gone twice into a lion’s den and encountered the paws of a lion?’