



MAN OF THE FOREST
PETER ZOKOSKY
Oil on wood, 1990

A RETURN TO THE ANIMAL SOUL

*"In the eyes of the animal,
there is no polarity
between opposites."*

The future survival of humankind depends upon return to a right relationship to nature. The need is both inner and outer. In this endeavor, the animal soul is our most dependable guide. If we befriend the animals, they can lead us, show us what we need to know. Animals deserve our thanks, our respect, our admiration. Since we no longer hunt in lonely communion with animals, and since few of us feel called to go on formal vision quests, we have to seek ways of re-creating meaningful connection with the animal realm. Can mythology and depth psychology help us reconnect with the animal soul and reclaim a vital orientation toward life and nature?

In the *Visions Seminars*, C. G. Jung provided deeply moving and original insights about the relationship of animals and psychic evolution. Presenting a lengthy active imagination, Jung described several sequences of images that portrayed a woman's descent to pre-historical layers of the psyche. A Native American and a cortège of animals lead the way. Jung interpreted the symbolic images as manifesting a necessary regression to a deeper, pre-Christian dimension of the unconscious. It is there, he said, that one rediscovers the energies of our lost pagan vitality. A major sequence of the active imagination culminates in "The Vision of the Eyes." The patient vividly described this experience¹:

I behold a face with the eyes closed; I besought the face, open your eyes that I may behold them... Then the face becomes very dark and slowly I beheld what no man is meant to see, eyes full of beauty and woe and light, and I could bear it no longer.

Painting this vision, the patient fashioned the face of an animal with eyes that were indeed, "full of beauty and woe." Jung remarked¹:

... [The eyes of the animal] contain the truth of life, an equal sum of pain and pleasure, the capacity for joy and the capacity for suffering. . . . If you are within the animal, you do not feel unconscious, but it is exactly the thing that from our standpoint we call unconsciousness. . . . You see, it is possible that what we call unconsciousness. . . . has a consciousness in itself. . . . and so what we call the unconscious would be another form of consciousness.

Here is a very key point in understanding our awe and sense of love for the animal world: In the eyes of the animal, there is no polarity between opposites. Rather, there is a unified, whole consciousness that, without self-reflection, expresses the nature of the animal. The animal reminds us of that which we so easily forget: the immediate and simple sense of being human. The possibility of being present in the world in a whole, undivided way can be a gift of the animal. The ego, in its inflations and neurotic defensiveness, all too easily loses touch with its ground and origin. To quote Jung once more²:

Many neuroses come from the fact that too good a victory has been won over the body of dark powers. . . . The old serpent has been too cruelly mauled by too spiritual a consciousness. . . . When God made animals, he equipped them with just those needs and impulses that enable them to live according to their laws. We assume that he has done the same with man. In a way the animal is more pious than man, because it fulfills the divine will more completely than man can ever dream of. . . . I hazard the conjecture. . . . that the [deepest] layers of our psyche still have animal characters. Hence it is highly probable that animals have similar or even the same archetypes.

Is this the mystery we see in animals—the archetypes, or ancient patterns of natural being, manifesting through the animals like Platonic ideas, eternally repeating themselves through time? Do the animals comfort us because they are born already knowing and being what they wholly are? Do the animals remind us of an innate "knowing" we have forgotten—an intrinsic sense of the patterns for being human that we have lost due to technology and the extreme pressures of collective life?

In 1904, Chief Letokots-Lesa of the Pawnee tribe spoke of the time of creation³:

In the beginning of things, wisdom and knowledge were with the animals; for Tirawa, the One Above, did not speak directly to man. He sent certain animals to tell men that he showed himself through the beasts, and that from them, and from the stars and sun and moon, man should learn. Tirawa spoke to man through his works.

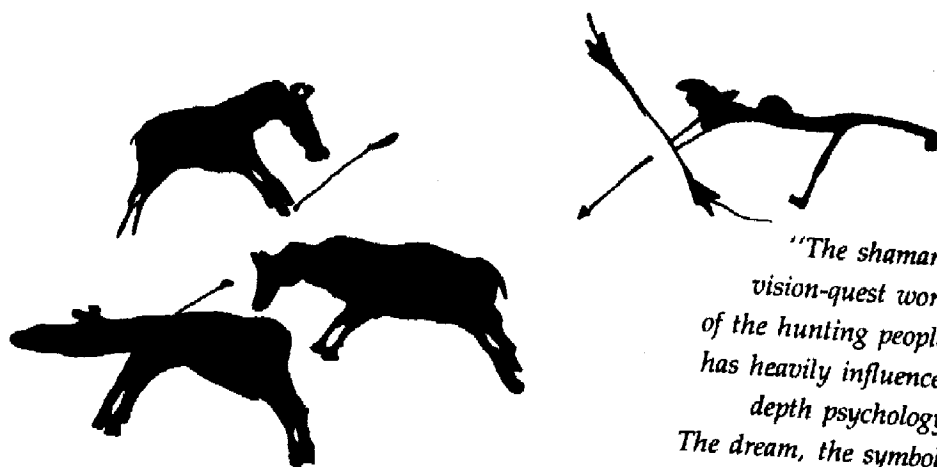
In the mythos of the great hunting cultures, God (or Tirawa) manifests directly in animal forms. Such a view of life dominated Paleolithic Europe, Siberia, and eventually North America; this was the landscape of the "Great Hunt"³:

This landscape was typically a spreading plain, clearly bounded by a circular horizon, with the great blue dome of an exalting heaven above, where hawks and eagles hovered and the blazing sun passes daily; becoming dark by night, star-filled, and with the moon there, waxing and waning. The essential food supply was from the multitudinous grazing herds, brought in by the males of the tribe following dangerous physical encounters. And the ceremonial life was addressed largely to the ends of a covenant with the animals, of reconciliation, veneration, and assurance that in return for the beasts' unremitting offering of themselves as willing victims, their life-blood should be given back in a sacred way to the earth, the mother of all, for rebirth.

In the shamanic cultures of the Paleolithic Great Hunt, communion with the divine occurred mainly through animals. The phenomena of the world were imbued with Being. The cultures of the jungle in the equatorial belt of the world lived in a contrasting universe. In its endless inevitability, the vegetative cycle of nature vividly dominated their awareness. The leafy canopies above, decaying vegetation below, and the swarming struggle for life in-between, presented a world of inexorable bloody death and rebirth. There was little seasonal change, little variation of terrain, as opposed to the dramatic seasons and geography of the Paleolithic Great Hunt.³

This "jungle" view of life, which sees the world as an endless repetition from which one must seek liberation, has dominated our traditional religions. In this view, the phenomena of the world are the source of sin and temptation, and life is lived in bondage to the endless wheel of change. The only hope is detachment or the "*Via Negativa*"—a dying to the world. In Christianity, this view has often approached a near-hatred of life—life seen as *Original Sin* rather than *Original Blessing*.

Ladson Hinton



HUNTING SCENE
MESOLITHIC, C. 8TH-7TH MILL. B.C.

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The shamanic vision-quest world of the hunting peoples has heavily influenced depth psychology. The dream, the symbol, the personal and collective myths—all are rooted in, and give direct access to, the divine. The world, emotions, and symbols are welcome manifestations of Being, not merely illusions to be resisted. The inner voice is a guide rather than a tempter.

A world view dominated by the observation of the order of the heavens later supplanted both mythologies. Through the nascent science of astronomy, the five visible planets with their lord, the moon, became the focus of mythic concern. The world was now perceived as mathematically ordered, and that which could be recorded in writing and mathematics was seen as most real and true. This was a radical shift from the idea of a divine energy observable and immanent in nature, brought to us in the endless forms of animal messengers. It became man's task to decipher, and to put himself in harmony with, a power that was transcendent and celestial rather than immediately tangible in human beings, plants, and animals. We are living amidst the results of this paradigmatic shift: the alienated condition of the modern person, estranged from Being in a cold, uncaring universe.

Mythologically speaking, return to the animal soul would involve a return to a more primordial ground of existence. From such a perspective, one experiences the divine as directly accessible. By returning to the mystery

of the animal, the "eyes of the animal" in the words of Jung, we can begin to see through the veil of our rationality. We come closer to our natural origins. Through the animal, we can regain connection with the intersecting web of life as it manifests in all beings.

ANIMAL MESSENGERS IN OUR DREAMS

Animals often manifest themselves to the modern Western person during the analytic process. They come most frequently in dreams. By comparison to earlier times, our contemporary connection may seem impoverished. However, considering the sterility of our technological culture, the persistence and vivid proliferation of animal life in the modern psyche stands out all the more remarkably.

One example is a dream reported by an unmarried, 33-year-old man:

First, there is a herd of cows. I am milking one, or trying to. The whole herd starts mooing or barking. I'm frightened! Next, I'm backing my car out of a parking place. I hear a very loud yelp—I think it's a cow. I jump out of my car, thinking something terrible has happened. But the car is only on the cow's hoof and it seems okay. I pull back into the space.

This was the dream of a highly intellectual person, who had major problems relating to women. He tended to become infatuated with very attractive but unstable females who led him "around in circles." He was troubled by moodiness, with a kind of testiness and hypersensitivity that sometimes caused problems with colleagues. He often felt alienated and gravitated toward a self-imposed isolation. In discussing his early life, he described his mother as a "witchy" woman who abused him physically and emotionally.

Together, we pondered this dramatic and mysterious encounter with the cows. The eyes of the cow are deep, soft, and mystical—they seem bottomless. The cow generally appears to be passive, although a cow or cows may become aggressive when provoked. Mostly, the cow ruminates, chewing quietly, turning the grass of earth into milk. Its tongue is gentle, soft, warm, enfolding.

In Hindu belief, bull and cow often represent the active and passive generative forces of the universe. Gandhi once said about the cow⁴:

"Cow protection" to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in all human evolution; for it takes the human being beyond his species. . . man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives.



YOUNG BULL (DETAIL)

PAULUS POTTER, 1654

Another beautiful description of the cow's meaning is provided by Helen Luke⁴:

The cow is the passive feminine heart of unremitting attention without which there can be no transformation by fire. . . all of us have somewhere buried the capacity for image-making, and the little spark can be nursed into a blaze only if we will care for our cow. She must be milked without fail, morning and evening, or she will sicken and die. We must draw the milk and drink it.

Cow-consciousness, then, was the order of the day for this man. Through analysis, he was getting deeply involved in the unconscious. His efforts at milking evoked a response that frightened him. Pervasive fear and anxiety, due mainly to the early experiences with his mother, had continually interrupted his efforts to forge ahead in life. The future direction clearly entailed more patient, receptive caring for the soul—respect for the cow nature.

In the second part of the dream, he would like to back out: The analytic process has stirred up the unconscious and the ego-consciousness wants to regain a sense of control. However, cow-consciousness has developed sufficiently to voice a strong protest. He heeds the warning. The patient is beginning to discover the re-wounding that results from disowning inner and outer possibilities. The inner witch-mother, with her frightening affects, had constantly blocked his development. The cow strongly calls attention to other, more nurturing, possibilities. His nature is an innately vital one, and the cow offers the prospect of fuller creative expression of that life energy. Everything is now possible—if he stays parked long enough!

Another animal dream from a professional woman in her forties:

An older woman, a psychologist whom I admire, comes to my house to observe me with a client, who is a depressed, withdrawn woman. Someone tells a dream and my mentor watches. Then I'm in the kitchen with her husband. He's telling me about the bad termites in their house. I say I have them too, but they're subterranean and not in the basic structure, so they're not a serious problem.

I had worked with this person for about two years. She suffered from chronic depression and low self-esteem. Fulfilling the scapegoat role in a large family, she had difficulty believing any good would come her way. By contrast, her relationship with the mentor in the dream had been an exceptionally good one. On the other hand, she had a pattern of over-idealizing people and then being disappointed.

The termites are the most enigmatic part of the dream and greatly puzzled the patient. She thought they seemed dangerous and alarming.

Termites are the little things we can't get rid of, no matter how hard we try. Everyone is bugged by such things. They are tiny, almost invisible, working deep below the surface, eating away at structure. They are highly organized and live for the whole, to feed the collective. They are industrious and rather linear. The queen is proliferative, endlessly laying eggs. In mythology, ants are an attribute of the Earth Mother, Demeter. Ants helped Psyche, the evolving feminine soul, in a difficult part of her task.

In this dream, the admired woman—the older, wiser spirit—is coming home. She is becoming a part of the inner life of the patient. No longer is she merely projected into the world. However, there is also a danger of falling into depression, of identifying with the withdrawn woman, when the knowing eye of the idealized mentor takes over the house of the psyche. Then someone tells a dream—another dimension enters the picture. The mentor's husband appears. One would expect that he would know about

the non-ideal side of his wife. They are in the kitchen, the place of alchemical transformation. The husband confides that *they* indeed have termites, of a sort even worse than hers.

This shows a healthy process of balancing and compensation. *Everyone* has termites! All of us are prone to the petty annoyances of life. All of us need to become small in order to appreciate the detailed immediacy of things. We can't be soaring eagles all the time! In these bugs one senses the inexorable vitality of life, the determination to be, no matter what neat structure is undermined, no matter how banal the task at hand. These termites live in the earth, which is *humus*. *Humility, humor, and ultimately humanness* come from this earthy connection.⁵ If we are in touch with our ant- or termite-consciousness, it is hard to become inflated. When we see the bugs of others, it's much harder to over-idealize them. It brings them down to human proportions, and thereby frees us.

A 44-year-old woman dreamed:

I am presented with a certificate. It seems mass-produced, not valuable. I don't want it, but I have to accept it. Then as I accept it, it becomes black silk. It's a death certificate! It shimmers! I use it like a bullfighter's cloak, and I am enticing bulls with it, moving gracefully out of the way, like a dance.

At the beginning of analysis, this woman was leading a deeply unsettled life. Divorced after many years of marriage, she continued to experience a disturbing degree of ambivalence in intimate relationships. She would become close, and then experience deep dread of becoming engulfed. When her life became too difficult, she often returned home for an extended visit with her aging parents (she was the youngest and only daughter in a large family). She regained a sense of groundedness during these visits. . . something that came both from the containment of family and the nourishment of native soil.

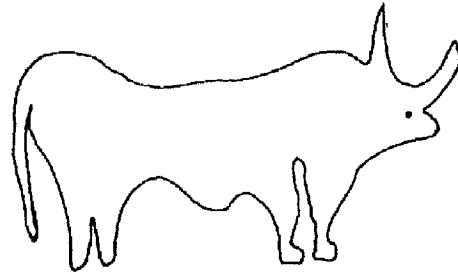
At the beginning of this dream, she did not want to accept the certificate—it seemed "too ordinary." This reflected an underlying grandiosity in her character: She subtly disdained "submitting" to analysis and to working out life and relationships in an earthy, everyday way. A part of her felt she should be "above" all that. Her family prided itself on aesthetic and social superiority. They clearly conveyed this attitude to their only daughter, who was in many ways the "princess." However, her sense of entitlement had not led to a fulfilling life, but to intense fear of failure,

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because nothing was ever good enough. She suffered from painful feelings of inferiority and at times felt like an "impostor," as if no accomplishment was "real." A tyrannical inner judge, severe and perfectionistic, evaluated every experience. This judge was also projected into relationships, including the analyst-patient relationship.



In her dream, she *must* accept the "mass-produced" certificate. This sense of the necessity of submission often comes from the Self. She must submit to analysis, to suffering through emotions and relationships, in order to experience the vitality of being fully alive in the world. When she does so, there is a remarkable transformation. What seemed like a death certificate becomes a black, shimmering cape. In the ordinary, which she had treated as death-like, she found the extraordinary. Then the fascinating dance with the bulls ensues. She wields a dark, silken power over the bulls, which seems erotically connected and almost Dionysian. It was this last scene, with its surprising transformation, which stood out the most for her.

Bulls have been revered since Paleolithic times. They are wild, red-eyed, snorting, strong, fertile, quick to take offense, territorial. They are often associated with the sun and its fertility (as in Egyptian and later in Mithraic rites); their horns are connected with the moon, and their bellow with the movements of the earth and earthquakes. The ancient Cretans performed a ritual dance with the bull, in which the dancers' greatest achievement was a somersault over the horns of the animal. In this way, right relationship could be established with the core of the bulls' strength and fertility. Rather than fleeing from or feeling engulfed by this elemental life force, the patient was gaining a sense of controlled relatedness. She connected with the raw vitality of her inner depths—something so powerful it could overthrow the tyranny of the inner judge, who would sacrifice life on the altar of perfection. The vitality of the bull-energy was fully active, not killed or repressed. It was indubitably *real!* The black silk cape represented an ancient knowledge that was now hers. She had gained an instinctive relationship to the energies from the Self, brought to her by the bulls. It required a delicate balance between connection and distance. One should not forget that submission to the scorned and "ordinary" certificate is the means of access to this archaic wisdom. It represented the routine and "ordinary" ritual of analysis, as well as the necessity for enduring "ordinary" life.

A 38-year-old woman dreamed:

I walk into a large arena-like area. It is full of caged animals. There is a wild energy present, like a circus. The cages are in ornate geometrical patterns. There are bands of guards, with bows and arrows. Some seem friendly and some menacing. The groups seem to argue. A huge elephant with sad eyes stares at me. I want to leap on its back and ride out, breaking down all the cages to free the sad animals. The unfriendly guards sense my intention and point their bows at me. They look angry. I am afraid and hesitate to act.

This extremely bright, single, university science professor was the oldest of four children. She had been the responsible caretaker in her family. Her mother was alcoholic, and she strongly identified with her father, a successful scientist. Her youngest sibling's suicide precipitated her entrance into analysis. She felt somehow to blame. Although her intellectual achievements were impressive, she did not find meaning in her scientific career. She attracted many men, but the relationships did not evolve into long-term commitments.

In the dream, she enters into a circus-like world, a sort of Dionysian panorama of life. However, there are geometrically-shaped cages. It is a world of the extraordinary, what with all the people, animals, and wild energies. It contrasts strongly with her ordinary world where she tries hard to be the good daughter: predictable, dependable, and rational. There is argument going on, meaning that parts of her psyche are becoming dynamically interrelated rather than carefully compartmentalized. Her fear of the hostile guards—representing the old ruling principle of her psyche and her lifelong character structure—inhibits her desire to lead the animals out into the world.

Elephants are huge, ponderous, majestic animals. They are slow, weighty, and deliberate. Their adult life begins late and they live long. They mate in secret and adultery is rare. Wise and intelligent, they have a kind of patience and long memory that projects an aura of timelessness. In myth, they are often noted for their invincibility in overcoming impediments. In the Hindu pantheon, an elephant carries the world. The elephant Ganesha, the "Lord of Obstacles," breaks a path for his devotees. Elephants are the bringers and bearers of weight.

Elephants have a thick-skinned resistance to the slings and arrows of the world. They are slow to anger, to gestate, and to die. They are vegetarians and love the green world. They are the most magnificent land animals, often alone in their wise and dignified way. As we all too sadly know, poachers now kill them ruthlessly for their ivory tusks, threatening to make them an endangered species.⁶

Such a weighty animal seemed auspicious for this attractive but frail-looking woman, who felt so insubstantial in both the inner and outer worlds. In the non-rational world of the unconscious, she finds a wild circus of energies as well as the wisdom, solidity, and commitment of the magical pachyderm. This is the strength she needs to overcome inner and outer obstacles, and to bear the emotional repercussions she will experience if she dares to break new pathways. She will need the strength of the elephant to take the potential life found in the circus into the everyday world. She will also need that strength to withstand her critical and angry inner authorities, which would always maintain the status quo.

BIRTHMARK OF THE ANIMAL SOUL

In 1843, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a visionary short story entitled, "The Birthmark." This story contains extraordinary insights into the plight of the contemporary world. It begins with the marriage of Aylmer, a natural scientist of world renown, to a beauty named Georgiana. They are quite happy until he notices that his wife has one flaw: On her left cheek she bears a crimson birthmark resembling a tiny animal paw. He becomes quietly obsessed with Georgiana's mark of imperfection, "the indelible mark of the human." The birthmark is the visible sign of the animal soul: "The crimson hand expressed the indelible grip in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mold, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust." It is the mark of imperfection, including the ultimate imperfection of death.

When she discovers the source of Aylmer's discontent, Georgiana becomes equally obsessed with her "imperfection." Aylmer has a terrible dream, in which her husband and his servant Aminadab (*bad anima* spelled backwards!) attempt an operation to remove Georgiana's birthmark. They cut deeper and deeper, until it becomes apparent that the roots of the birthmark go clear to her heart. The dream ends as Aylmer resolves to cut or wrench away the grip of the animal paw upon his beloved wife.

Georgiana finds out about the dream and begs him to remove the hated birthmark, whatever the risk to herself. He declares confidence in his science and ability and goes to work with Aminadab in his laboratory. The story notes that, earlier in his career, Aylmer had failed in experiments to fathom or create life because of "the truth...that our great creative Mother, while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine, is yet severely careful to keep her own secrets and, in spite of her pretended openness, shows us nothing but results. She permits us to mar, but seldom to mend."

The mystery of birth, of new creation, belongs to the realm of the dark Mother, and masculine logos can approach, but never decipher, that enigma. Even Aminadab expresses doubt about the enterprise. However, the possessed Aylmer and Georgiana move their quarters into the lab, so as to continue the research uninterrupted.

As the experiments progress, the couple become more and more intoxicated with the enterprise. There are many failures. At last, Aylmer concocts a potion that makes spots disappear from the leaves of a plant. Georgiana herself insists on partaking of the experimental elixir. She quaffs it down and falls into a deep sleep. The mark grows more and more faint; but, as the last sign of the animal paw fades from her cheek, she dies!

This prophetic story presages the growth of faith in rationality, with its deadly one-sidedness. Blind faith in reason is faith in the "perfectibility" of life. However, in the world of nature, blemishes form a part of the wholeness of things. To take away the "flaw" may well destroy the complex totality. In medieval times, they referred to the *felix culpa*—the fortunate flaw—in individual character. What to the rational mind seems a flaw is often a profoundly mysterious key to the secret of individual life. We live in a culture addicted to perfection of mind and body, which yet suffers from aimless violence, discontent, and illness. Reason and logic cannot grasp the mystery of the uniqueness of life, of creation and individuality. Shades of light and dark, of rough and smooth, of strangeness and familiarity, are deeply intertwined in the human character. To arbitrarily eliminate one dimension of personality is to destroy the whole. When we pathologize human foibles in our relentless way, trying to subdue and "purify" life, we kill the soul.

Hawthorne's story describes the plight of the modern psyche. In America, we struggle with a Puritanism that begets witch-hunts and scapegoating. This stems from fear of the enigmatic mystery that life is. We want to eliminate the "evil," the troubling "flaw," and we end by destroying life. Society abounds in Torquemadas. The worst things are always done "in a good cause." Social and moral perfectionism becomes hatred of life itself, very different from a true morality that respects and reveres the individual. Perfectionism's real temple is the temple of death, and at root, it is the stillness of the necropolis that it craves. Creative life is constant change, movement, messiness. When we cease to embrace life as it is, in its turbulent essence, we indeed become worshippers of death. We become secret servants of the Lord of Death and enemies of the animal soul.

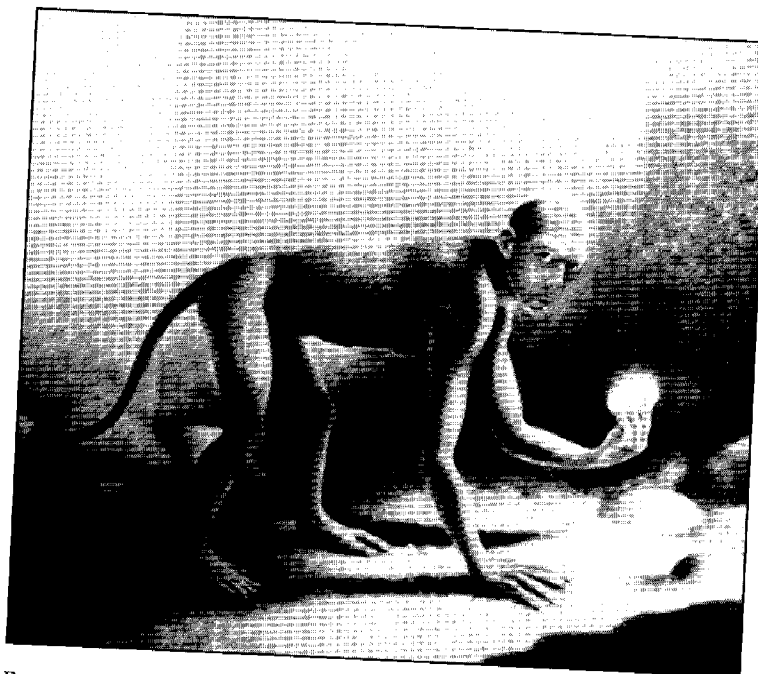
Our cultural obsession with perfectionism touches everyone. We feel entitled to life without flaw or dysfunction, but the world is a messy whirl of constant change. With our Puritan tradition, we tend to blame our prob-

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PRIMATE SELF-PORTRAIT

PETER ZOKOWSKY, 1993

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of the enigmatic mystery that life is."*

lems, our malaise, on someone or something that can be "corrected" or eliminated. We try to starve the animal soul, perfect it, do away with its messiness, outlaw it. We attempt to drug it out of existence, legally or illegally. It rebels in eruptions of personal and social violence. Puritanism foments the dark pathology it most fears.

We all bear the print of the animal, and in that we can find salvation. Zest for life comes from living in accordance with the animal soul, from listening to its messengers. To survive and thrive, we must honor its voice wherever we find it. Dreams and solitude, walks in mountains and

forest, the company of animals, all may help attune us. However, it is not an esoteric pursuit. We must never forget that the animal soul requires *fully living* all the dimensions of our humanness. "*Amor fati*," love your fate, Jung liked to say. We must *live* our nature to "know" nature. If we passionately and *consciously* embrace the raw reality of life in all of its messiness, the animal soul will in turn reward us. We will experience renewed meaning, energy, and purpose. We will feel deeply in accordance with nature. That is the animal's gift.

This does not involve a sentimental romanticizing of nature. Nature is everywhere. We *are* nature. Much of the simplistic adulation of nature we see is, at root, the child's regressive longing for the eternally good mother. It is poetic and understandable, but is another way of disowning the messy business that life is. Such "love" of nature becomes another subtle form of the hatred of life. It is often a shadow-Puritanism, which disdains life as it *is*, with all of its animal smells and creative ferment.

If we acknowledge and embrace this animal zest within us, if we can stay attuned to its voice, the energy of life will flow. The only antidote to nihilistic perfectionism, to cynical skepticism, is an honoring of (to paraphrase Santayana) that dark inner glow of animal faith in life that transcends all reason and is the ground of all creation.

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