In *Ciferae*, Tom Tyler jumps into the depths of how Western philosophy has tended to view animality. More precisely, he explores the way in which animals have been reduced to metaphoric figures, ciphers, onto which anthropocentric messages can be coded. When observed more carefully, these superficially empty figures reveal rich, nuanced meaning that Tyler wishes to make explicit; the ultimate aim is to liberate animals from their cipheric role, and to hence bring forward the animal perspective. Tyler takes on a momentous task – after all, animals in different form, be they dogs, baboons, frogs or snails, colour Western philosophy. Short and long references to animals can be found in almost all the key texts, beginning with Socrates, who ridiculed Protagoras’ claim, according to which ‘man is the measure of all things’, by suggesting that equally a pig of a dog-faced baboon could act as a similar measure. Despite the task’s scope, Tyler excels in excavating and carefully revealing how animal ciphers have reserved a role in core areas of Western philosophy, and particularly in epistemology.

Tyler begins with anthropocentrism and its keenness on the abstract, generic ‘animal’. Philosophers have been obsessively eager to explain how this generic creature differs from humanity, and Tyler analyses thinkers such as Bataille and Heidegger, according to whom animals are tied to a continuous immediacy, which only humans can transcend due to their lingual ability. Yet, as Tyler points out, this dualistic, generic assumption is not warranted, for there is an astonishing variety of agency in the animal world, which questions the very use of the term ‘animal’, and forces us to pay heed to particular, tangible squirrels and cows. Tyler posits convincingly that singularity offers a better grasp of animality, and celebrates especially defiant animals, including Derrida’s famous cat, who with one look manifest their agency and hence abolish the superiority of the anthropocentric human subject, and who ultimately shake the roots of dualistic metaphysics. Tyler also discusses anthropomorphism – and criticism thereof – as a potential form of anthropocentric narcissism, and proposes that here, too, the presence of the unruly animal – the pest rather than the pet – is required.

In the following chapters, scrutiny is placed on epistemology. Realism, relativism and pragmatism are explored, all from the viewpoint of animal imagery, and philosophers introduced range from Moore and Kant to Nietzsche, Derrida and Rorty. Much emphasis is positioned particularly on Nietzsche, whose rebuttal of realism is brought to the fore. As Tyler explains, for Nietzsche the belief in superior human intellect, capable of grasping the ‘truth’, is nothing short of hyperbole. Perhaps there is no one, correct way of making sense of
the reality, and perhaps the gnat is just as right in her take on the world, as the philosopher is in hers. According to this account, language functions as a form of deception and alteration, not a sign of superiority – thereby, the very grounding structure of anthropocentrism is brought under question. Nietzsche makes use of a hoard of animals in order to present his case, and suggests that if only we could perceive the world from the perspective of different creatures, ranging from birds to worms, the desire for detached, systematic, objective categories would appear ridiculous. Thereby, Tyler ingeniously manifests that, ultimately, realism emerges as a form of anthropocentrism. As a replacement, Nietzsche (and Tyler) offer perspectivism, which depicts knowledge as always rooted in a given perspective, and according to which the road toward a fuller, more concise grasp consists of taking as many perspectives into account as possible. Here, the animal viewpoint emerges as relevant (as Tyler reminds us, even the sphinx has eyes). Knowledge ceases to be a form of representation, and becomes instead a form of activity, which seeks to pay heed also to the perspective of flies and rats.

The final chapter concentrates on depictions of humanity, and here the ‘hand’ emerges as crucial. Does the human hand manifest superiority; can other animals have hands? For Tyler, these questions open the door toward considering, again, the plurality of ways of existing in this world, and he suggests that there are, indeed, many modes of gripping and touching other than the human hand. Tyler considers Darwin’s stance on non-hierarchical species plurality, and reminds the reader of just how animal human beings are – perhaps humans should even change their genus name in order to rid themselves off species-narcissism. Ultimately, the goal is to cease thinking in the terms of ‘we human beings’, and accept the swirling, multilayered plurality of animality all around and inside us.

Tyler offers a genuinely innovative take on animal philosophy. He pushes the reader to critically examine given dogmas of Western philosophy, and asks novel questions such as why do we talk of ‘anthropomorphism’ yet not of ‘arktomorphism’, and what the role of representational language is in invoking anthropocentric viewpoints. For ingenuity, Tyler reserves a full applause. Moreover, Ciferae rests on an extensive bulk of literature, and care is taken to also venture outside of the familiar playground: thus, next to Heidegger and Kant, Tyler discusses anthropology and the Hopi language. Indeed, Tyler elegantly weaves a concise narrative out of diverse influences, and thereby offers just that type of a perspectival, multifaceted reading, which he argues for.

Ciferae’s novelty is manifested also in its layout. Tyler combines images with text, and almost each page comes with photographs, art pieces, cartoons – all accompanied by careful captions – illustrating slugs, seagulls, horses, cows, flies and other creatures of the animal world. Next to images, short definitions of animality fill the pages. The reader is introduced to what ‘black swans’ and ‘eagles’ are, with sources ranging from medieval texts to contemporary...
science. It is rare for a philosophy book to consider other formats than analytical text, and Tyler truly shows what new directions philosophy could adopt in order to truly take its reader on a journey toward unknown worlds – this book is an experience. Throughout, the hand acts as a crucial reference point. Its relevance becomes clear in the early pages of the first chapter, as Tyler explains how Heidegger’s anthropocentric stance revolved around the use of a hand as a human-only endeavour: the hand (concretely) indicates the world, and thus gives birth to signing and ultimately language. As Tyler posits, a categorical difference between the paw and the hand is assumed, rather than demonstrated, and this sparks him to return to the hand, time and again. Each of the chapter begins with an illustration of the hand, as one by one the fingers signal and point out new topics. One struggles to find a more multilayered text in contemporary animal philosophy.

At times, Tyler ventures so deep into the original texts that the connection to the animal issue becomes less obvious (this applies, for instance, to his careful presentation of Kant’s philosophy, or memes and the ‘chin flick’). Readers may also be less impressed with how ‘man’ and ‘human’ are used interchangeably, even outside the context of historical texts. Despite these remarks, Ciferae is a distinctly worthy read for anybody interested in the place of non-human animals within Western philosophy. Tyler offers a multitude of sophisticated interpretations and arguments, and never ceases to impress with his innovative, imaginative way of highlighting why it is that animals ultimately are much more than mere ciphers. Animal philosophy has long been waiting for a book like this.

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David W. Kidner

*Nature and Experience in the Culture of Delusion: How Industrial Society Lost Touch with Reality*


How can contemporary society be so affected by real, tangible natural events like Hurricane Katrina, and yet be so far removed from apprehending the real world? In his book, *Nature and Experience in the Culture of Delusion*, David W. Kidner skilfully explains this paradox by synthesising critical reviews of the roles of language, Cartesian and idealistic philosophies, and the evolution of the industrial market economies of the West that have contributed to a symbol-steeped consumer culture. The rise and functioning of *industrial society* depends upon both dominance over the natural environment (and the understanding of reality that this necessitates), and the obscuring of individual

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