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The Giant Panda

When... no. If some day, for whatever reason, I should find myself in a state of mind well beyond courage and daring or, to be more specific, a state of mind in which a person might distribute bumper stickers at the Bosnian Serbian-Muslim border that say “Risk More Democracy.” Or, to put it more simply, if some day I should have nothing left to lose, then...yes, then I will badmouth the giant panda.

You see, I recently saw something that opened my eyes, although it almost sealed my lips. It was a pleasantly leisurely, indeed a rather slow animal film, 45 minutes long, presumably British, dealing exclusively with a crisis that threatens the survival of this universally idolized mammal. And from the film I learned something I had actually always suspected, but which I had suppressed due to the massive pressure exerted by international animal protectionists and in view of the constant cheering of children, namely: the giant panda is dumb, indeed wretchedly stupid.

Mind you, I don't mean single specimens. Rather, I dream about the dastardliness of literally declaring, without regard for any animal or political correctness, the entire species stupid and virtually completely unviable and triply worthy of extinction. Because the afore-mentioned animal film allowed me to realize the full scope of the following:

First of all, for thousands and thousands of years the giant panda has been sticking to an idiotically unbalanced diet based on one particular species of bamboo, thus depriving itself of the possibility of adapting to different habitats, which Darwin

described so clearly as a prerequisite for the preservation of the species. Not even a tiny mutation has so far enabled the dumb giant panda to partake occasionally of a few red berries, some juicy root, a little delicious terrestrial mammal or, for all I care, a carelessly discarded piece of bread and butter to gain an increased amount of energy. Instead, the giant panda has placed himself at the mercy of all the perils of monoculture. And how horrendous are those British pictures that show him in his desperate travels through a terrain where at this very moment, after the completion of a hundred year cycle, the bamboo is blooming and will then die off – as it is now doing simultaneously at all the ornamental European gardens.

From this first fact follows a second, an intensification of the horror: Since the giant panda has concentrated on a foodstuff that not only becomes very rare on occasion, but that, moreover, is extremely poor nutritionally, he has to eat non-stop, in order to keep up his strength, even in the midst of actual plenty. For him it is the same as it would be for us if we were to concentrate exclusively on the consumption of low-fat cottage cheese on rye crisp crackers. So it is understandable, and painfully clearly documented in the British film, that because of this compulsory constant feeding the giant panda has no time left for the most essential of obligations. It is gruesome to watch, for instance, how a mother panda is so involved and befuddled with bamboo chewing that – believe it or not – she does nothing to prevent her one-year-old from climbing up a 30-foot high, crooked, even shaky and brittle tree. Instead she sits there, eating and eating, while her cub (and God knows, perhaps this cub constitutes one thousandth of the entire population of pandas on this planet) at the end of its childish climb falls down into the depths from the very top of the aforementioned tree.

There, its fall, according to the accompanying British commentary, was fortunately cushioned by the dense bamboo undergrowth. “Fortunately”? – not at all! Rather, an allegory of horror. Need I expound further? For in a short time, after all the fall-cushioning bamboo is consumed without any gain in energy worth mentioning – what will happen to future young pandas when their falls will no longer be cushioned by these bamboo thickets? No, I’m sure I don’t have to go into that!

And that’s why, if at some point I really have nothing more to lose, I shall badmouth the giant panda in public. I shall welcome its forthcoming extinction, if need be, in the face of stones and curses hurled at me by WWF functionaries and in the midst of a chorus of wailing children. For this planet should not have to support a dumb species! Not a species that invariably deals thoughtlessly and mindlessly with the treasures of Nature. And not a species that in the process of rectifying one stupidity forgets or fosters a hundred others. The planet should not have to support the giant panda. Thus, let us say “no” to the giant panda. And any other species of that ilk!

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