

## Inside the Minds of Animals

**Lesson Date:** 5/21 (7A,7B,7D,7E)

**Intro:** For much of modern science, since the Enlightenment, animals were generally thought to be automatons: materialist robots programmed to behave in certain ways. Rene Descartes drew a sharp distinction between thinking beings, humans, and everything else, matter. 20th Century behaviorism continued to think of animals in this way but added humans to the mix. “Mind” was a myth, a “ghost in the machine“, and did not really exist. All that counted was behavior and we did not think to complicate science by positing a “mind” behind the actions.

But in recent decades the question of the animal mind has come to the fore again. The question of an animal mind is a difficult one:

1. You want to avoid anthropomorphizing species by claiming similarities to our experiences simply on the basis that they look similar.
2. You also want to avoid denying similarities just because they are, well, animals and not humans.

Connected to this are a set of wonderful questions about consciousness, the marks of mind, intentionality, self-awareness, and the basic challenge for us of understanding a being which is not completely analogous to a human and may be quite alien. Think: snakes, mosquitos, fish.

### **Review of HW (Nat. Geo's *Minds of Their Own*):**

1. With regard to the National Geographic article: what skills or behaviors have generally been used to claim the presence of mind and thought?
2. Evaluate the claims made by Irene Pepperberg about her parrot. Do you agree with her claims or could you offer an alternative explanation?
3. What evidence is offered for animal creativity? Which appears most persuasive to you?
4. What is the significance of being able to discern that a picture of a frisbee can designate both itself and an actual frisbee?
5. What makes deception a particularly complex thought process? Offer your own example.

### **Video: TED's Moral Behavior in Animals**

<https://youtu.be/GcJxRqTs5nk>

1. After watching the Franz DeWaal video of his work with animals and moral judgement and feeling, in what ways does this suggest animals have minds?
2. As a group, offer your own definition of the criteria for something to be considered a mind. What would this include or exclude?