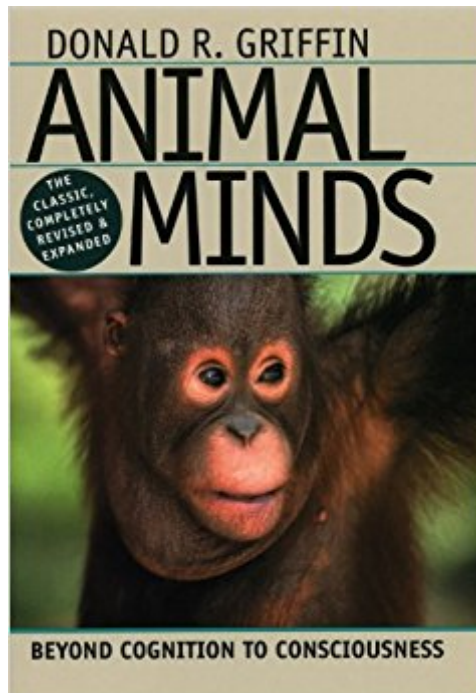




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Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition To Consciousness



Synopsis

In *Animal Minds*, Donald R. Griffin takes us on a guided tour of the recent explosion of scientific research on animal mentality. Are animals consciously aware of anything, or are they merely living machines, incapable of conscious thoughts or emotional feelings? How can we tell? Such questions have long fascinated Griffin, who has been a pioneer at the forefront of research in animal cognition for decades, and is recognized as one of the leading behavioral ecologists of the twentieth century. With this new edition of his classic book, which he has completely revised and updated, Griffin moves beyond considerations of animal cognition to argue that scientists can and should investigate questions of animal consciousness. Using examples from studies of species ranging from chimpanzees and dolphins to birds and honeybees, he demonstrates how communication among animals can serve as a "window" into what animals think and feel, just as human speech and nonverbal communication tell us most of what we know about the thoughts and feelings of other people. Even when they don't communicate about it, animals respond with sometimes surprising versatility to new situations for which neither their genes nor their previous experiences have prepared them, and Griffin discusses what these behaviors can tell us about animal minds. He also reviews the latest research in cognitive neuroscience, which has revealed startling similarities in the neural mechanisms underlying brain functioning in both humans and other animals. Finally, in four chapters greatly expanded for this edition, Griffin considers the latest scientific research on animal consciousness, pro and con, and explores its profound philosophical and ethical implications.

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Customer Reviews

Griffin is no longer with us, but his quality work will be important for years to come--assuming the animals remain as well. There are many changes in the world affecting animals and birds and we need to help them survive and by understanding how fascinating and intelligent they are, we will work for their safety.

It is an amazing theme, but I think the most exciting cases were not as well exploited as I expected.

Donald Griffen was the first scientist to challenge the reductionist notion that animals are incapable of cognition (the word for thinking in non-human animals), in 1985, and thus he founded the science of cognitive ethology. This book, and the earlier version released in 1994, provide a range of reports of eye-witness accounts of behaviour by animals that could not have been performed without mental referencing (or thought), along with his brilliant analyses and discussion of the meaning of each. Though well received by the public, the works of Professor Griffin were widely criticized by the scientific community because his assertions were difficult to prove, and because his views represented a reversal of the currently held belief that animals were unconscious automatons. However, more and more evidence is appearing in the scientific literature in support of his pioneering work, and proving him to be right. This book is unequalled in presenting a scientific argument that animals, invertebrates as well as the so-called "higher" animals, are capable, each in a unique way, of cognition. The latest version of the work includes arguments in response to criticisms of the original.

Griffin spends a lot of time arguing his stance and not enough discussing the definitions and concepts that his stance is based on. He does explain the research in nice detail but I kept thinking that learning theory explains the same behaviors he is describing without reference to conscious awareness and so the arguments don't fully make it for me. *Minds of Their Own* by Rogers is better but I still found this book (*Animal Minds*) better than *Species of Mind* which was way too hard to read

-- I came away with no new knowledge from reading *Species of Mind*. To sum I'd say it's worth reading for sure but only if you intend to also read *Minds of Their Own*. They compliment each other nicely because Griffin describes more detail in the research while Rogers discusses the arguments and definitions better. James O'Heare, Dip.C.B.

Griffin's hair turned white pursuing answers in this field. He lists 800 books in his 45 page Bibliography! It is a real test of the reader's vocabulary: perceptual consciousness, reflective consciousness, epiphenomenon, cognitive ethology and on and on and on. A class in semantics may have clarified the author's thoughts. Everything he talks about, e.g., whether animals and computers can think, is based on his or others verbal definitions without much evidence to verify these beliefs. It is obvious that every creature has its own view of the world. And equally obvious that there is no way to compare the worldview of a bee or ant to a human worldview because of greatly differing boundary conditions. I doubt that a long recitation of one's ignorance will prove useful in the grand scheme of life. And one simply can't define oneself up to a higher state of knowledge. This writing reminds me of a dog chasing its own tail.

Do not read this book. I attempted to read this book for a college class. This book should be cut down to the size of a magazine article and be published in a scientific journal. The public should not be misled into thinking that this book is readable. It is written at too high of a diction, and Griffin rambles on for 20 pages on one topic, which I won't spoil for those of you unfortunate to read this trash. The subject information is interesting, but this is written poorly, and will bore the reader to tears. Just thought I'd let you all know.

There are two huge problems with this book. First, it is based on a large constellation of unexamined presuppositions -- ones that even though they are widely held, nevertheless are suspect. The most fundamental unexamined, tacit assumptions are those concerning language, seeing and treating it as a separate referential semiotic system or tool. A close second set is composed of assumptions about possible explanations -- basically, that explanations must be in terms of articulable/cognitive text or model. The third set of questionable presuppositions concerns what I have called "the pure knowledge paradigm", the search for truth, certainty, for its own sake that thinkers such as Richard Rorty have come to view with suspicion if not disdain. So, the book's effort has no rationale other than the pursuit of academic, abstract truth. Here, the neglected question is, why are we investigating this issue? Our goals ought to dictate what approaches are

appropriate. All in all, the enterprise is a misleading waste of time, masquerading as a scientifically respectable, laudable project.

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