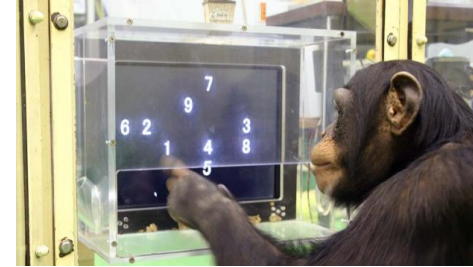




Animal Intelligence



Once one of my Italian students at a local high school got mad at me over a debate on the relationship between humankind and the animal world, and exclaimed contemptuously: 'Anybody knows animals have no soul!' The implied message was that any view different from this Truth (such as mine) could only come from some outré freethinker. My reply was 'Figure out for yourself the etymology of the word **animal**. From Latin '**anima**' (**breath**), meaning '**little soul**'. Some religious doctrines have systematically **belittled or denied animal intelligence** to legitimate the exploitation of nature by humankind as a ruling species appointed to power by God himself. Well, those very same religious doctrines also denied the evidence provided by **Galileo** that the Earth revolves around the Sun, rather than the other way around - as had been commonly believed before then. The truth is, **animal intelligence** is obvious to whoever closely observes any animal in action, including bugs and worms. However, our understanding of different species seems to be linked to **cultural prejudices**: we sympathize with those closely related to us, so mammals are (often erroneously) viewed as smarter than birds and reptiles, while we think of less related species, like insects, as non-thinking machines. The reality is that **intelligence is a complex concept**, difficult to define and hard not to base around our own abilities. Measuring intelligence is even more difficult. However, nowadays **animal cognition scientists** avoid viewing humans as the apex of intellect and regard animals as intelligent species that experience the world in fundamentally different ways than we do.

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