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HOW TO STUDY ANIMAL MINDS

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How to Study Animal Minds

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Abstract: This Element examines the methods of comparative psychology, which remains especially concerned about how to study animal minds and behavior without falling prey to fuzzy thinking. Training in comparative psychology places special emphasis on avoiding bias and on avoiding developing warm relationships with animal subjects. The principles of comparative psychology, including anti-anthropomorphism, Morgan's Canon, rules to avoid forming relationships with animals, and the instruction not to presume anything about animal consciousness, have been introduced to minimize bias in the science. Rather than seeing animals as sentient beings who live in community and have their own interests, these principles instruct scientists to remain distant and detached, introducing different biases that students are not instructed to watch out for. In this Element I argue that rather than attempting to avoid bias, comparative psychologists should acknowledge a range of biases and seek widespread collaborative projects to integrate different approaches to studying animal minds.

Keywords: animal minds, comparative cognition, consciousness, comparative psychology, bias, apes

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