

## Do Animals Suffer from Mental Illness?

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### Commentary Article

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Do animals suffer from mental illness? Yes, they do, based on old and recent published literature. A veterinary science sub-specialty to document the ethology, neuroscience (psychopathology) and mental or behavioral disorders of domesticated species and wildlife is yet to be developed. Nonetheless, animal models have been rationalized to study human mental illnesses from a non-adaptive behavior or cognitive disability, emotional impairment or distress.

Scientific data on this area of behavioral animal science is practically non-existent, when compared to human subjects. Psychology in humans is already a difficult science, and at times fails to demonstrate results with real scientific rigor. When studying animal psychology, language is an evident limitation.

The history of man that reports attempts to treat mental illness dates back as early as 5000 BCE, as evidenced by the discovery of trepanned skulls in ancient world cultures. Early man widely believed that mental illness was the result of supernatural phenomena, such as spiritual or demonic possession, sorcery, the evil eye, or an angry deity and so responded with equally mystical, and sometimes brutal, treatments. Also, among others, the Ebers papyrus of ancient Egyptians describes disordered states of concentration and attention, and emotional distress in the heart and mind.

How about animals? In an interesting book by Maria Popova <sup>[1]</sup>, she documents behavioral problems or status among many species of animals. Darwin <sup>[2]</sup> describes the particular behavior of surliness, contempt, and disgust in chimps, astonishment among Paraguayan monkeys, love among dogs, between dogs and cats, and between dogs and humans. Perhaps most surprisingly, she argues that many of these creatures were capable of enacting revenge, behaving courageously, and expressing their impatience or suspicion. Darwin came to this realization more than a century ago, where animals can suffer from mental illnesses that are quite similar to human disorders. The interesting aspect of this difference in animal behavior observations is documented by nineteenth-century naturalists, contemporary biologists, wildlife scientists and ordinary people.

Humans are not the only animals to suffer from emotional disarray. The varying degree of functional anatomical complexity of all (brained) animals appear to entail similar unexpected behavioral changes. On another perspective, the structural and functional similarities between all animals, appear to have even a bigger importance, regarding behavior. Consequently, humans and other animals are more similar than mostly accepted, including mental state and behavior.

Abnormal behavior may touch the territory of mental illness when engaging in an unexpected pattern of response that attempts against the subjects integrity. Likewise, a comparable response pattern, regarding normal and abnormal behavior entails the existence of perhaps (structural and functional) similarities. This idea many not be shared by many, as be based in the ego of man, but evidence indicates otherwise, particularly dealing with emotions and desires.

Identifying mental illness in other creatures and helping them recover sheds light on our humanity, evolution and ancestral connections.

The topic of emotions and consequential behavior is complex and difficult to document, when merely using scientific methodology. It is easier to document the effect and physical manifestation of an emotion, than the underlying dependent variable. You may see the light but not the electricity that fuels it. In order for humans to recognize an abnormal behavioral pattern in an

animal, may be related with previously registered information or vibrational pattern. We cannot give what we do have.

“There is a perfect gradation between sound people and insane...Everybody is insane at some time.” [2].

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