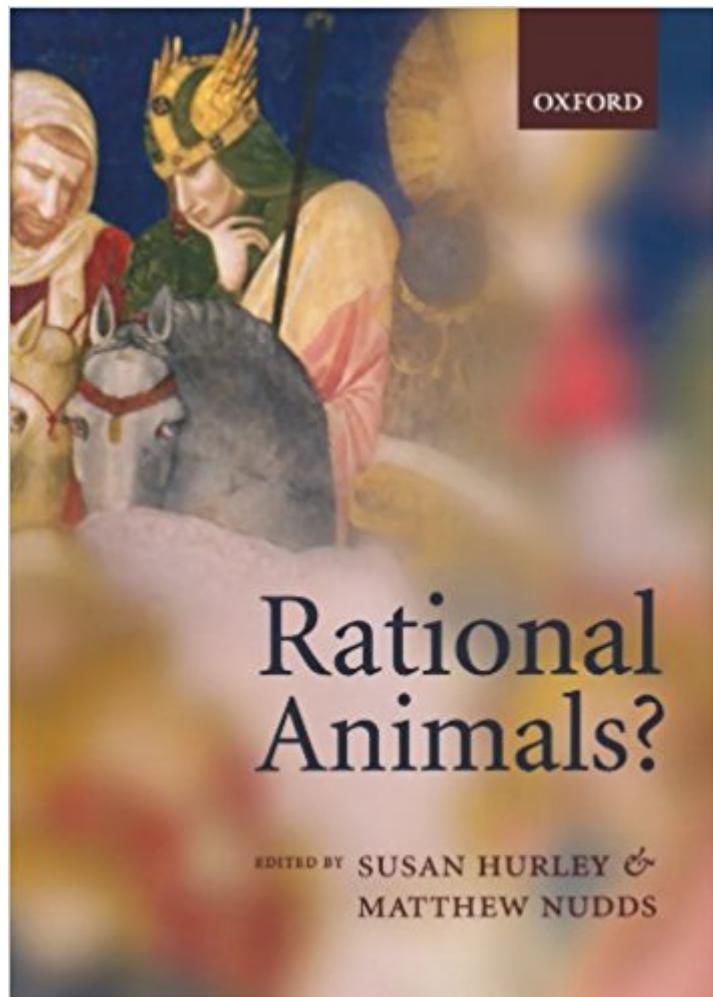


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# Rational Animals?



## Synopsis

To what extent can animal behaviour be described as rational? What does it even mean to describe behaviour as rational? This book focuses on one of the major debates in science today - how closely does mental processing in animals resemble mental processing in humans. It addresses the question of whether and to what extent non-human animals are rational, that is, whether any animal behaviour can be regarded as the result of a rational thought processes. It does this with attention to three key questions, which recur throughout the book and which have both empirical and philosophical aspects: What kinds of behavioural tasks can animals successfully perform? What if any mental processes must be postulated to explain their performance at these tasks? What properties must processes have to count as rational? The book is distinctive in pursuing these questions not only in relation to our closest relatives, the primates, whose intelligence usually gets the most attention, but also in relation to birds and dolphins, where striking results are also being obtained. Some chapters focus on a particular species. They describe some of the extraordinary and complex behaviour of these species - using tools in novel ways to solve foraging problems, for example, or behaving in novel ways to solve complex social problems - and ask whether such behaviour should be explained in rational or merely mechanistic terms. Other chapters address more theoretical issues and ask, for example, what it means for behaviour to be rational, and whether rationality can be understood in the absence of language. The book includes many of the world's leading figures doing empirical work on rationality in primates, dolphins, and birds, as well as distinguished philosophers of mind and science. The book includes an editors' introduction which summarises the philosophical and empirical work presented, and draws together the issues discussed by the contributors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rational Animals? edited by Susan Hurley, Matthew Nudds (Oxford University Press) Are any nonhuman animals rational? What issues are we raising when we ask this question? Are there different kinds or levels of rationality, some of which fall short of full human rationality? Should any behaviour by nonhuman animals be regarded as rational? What kinds of tasks can animals successfully perform? From what kinds of processes does their behaviour result, and do they count as rational processes? Is it useful or theoretically justified to raise questions about the rationality of animals at all? Should we be interested in whether they are rational? Why does it matter? This book pursues these questions both theoretically and empirically. The contributors include 'distinguished philosophers, as well as scientists who report and reflect on their work with such impressive animals as Kanzi the bonobo, Betty the New Caledonian crow, Sheba the chimpanzee, Sweetie-Pie the scrub jay, Akeakamai the bottlenose dolphin, and Alex the African Grey parrot. Studies of different species are brought together for comparison, and philosophical arguments about rationality are brought into contact with empirical evidence of the behavioural and cognitive capacities of animals. Sections of the volume focus on various types and levels of rationality, on rational versus associative processes, on metacognition and metarepresentation, on social behaviour and cognition, on mind reading versus behaviour reading, and on behaviour and cognition in symbolic environments. An editorial introduction provides an analytical framework for the issues discussed by contributors and a comparative summary of the chapters.

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