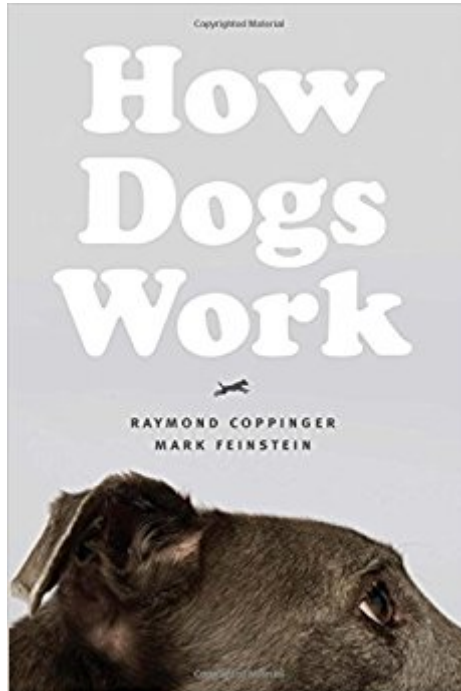




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How Dogs Work



Synopsis

How well do we really know dogs? People may enjoy thinking about them as “man’s best friend,” but what actually drives the things they do? What is going on in their fur-covered heads as they look at us with their big, expressive eyes? Raymond Coppinger and Mark Feinstein know something about these questions, and with *How Dogs Work*, they’re ready to share; this is their guide to understanding your dog and its behavior. Approaching dogs as a biological species rather than just as pets, Coppinger and Feinstein accessibly synthesize decades of research and field experiments to explain the evolutionary foundations underlying dog behaviors. They examine the central importance of the shape of dogs: how their physical body (including the genes and the brain) affects behavior, how shape interacts with the environment as animals grow, and how all of this has developed over time. Shape, they tell us, is what makes a champion sled dog or a Border collie that can successfully herd sheep. Other chapters in *How Dogs Work* explore such mysteries as why dogs play; whether dogs have minds, and if so what kinds of things they might know; why dogs bark; how dogs feed and forage; and the influence of the early relationship between mother and pup. Going far beyond the cozy lap dog, Coppinger and Feinstein are equally fascinated by what we can learn from the adaptations of dogs, wolves, coyotes, jackals, dingoes, and even pumas in the wild, as well as the behavior of working animals like guarding and herding dogs. We cherish dogs as family members and deeply value our lengthy companionship with them. But, isn’t it time we knew more about who Fido and Trixie really are? *How Dogs Work* will provide some keys to unlocking the origins of many of our dogs’ most common, most puzzling, and most endearing behaviors.

Book Information

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 2015 edition edition (October 22, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022612813X

ISBN-13: 978-0226128139

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 27 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #747,647 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #66 in Books > Science & Math

> Biological Sciences > Zoology > Animal Psychology #3336 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Pets & Animal Care > Dogs](#) #8132 in [Books > Science & Math > Behavioral Sciences](#)

Customer Reviews

“Written by two of the most distinguished teachers and scientists ever to have studied dogs, Coppinger and Feinstein, this book explores the behavioral design of the dog most eloquently. The authors detail a modern perspective on our understanding of canine ethology that began with Charles Darwin and continued with Konrad Lorenz, as they build on the pedagogical approach of a course written by Ray for the UK’s Centre of Applied Pet Ethology. *How Dogs Work* clearly describes why a dog behaves like a dog as result of being physically, physiologically, genetically, and developmentally shaped like a dog, and steadily shapes our understanding of just how and why dogs are such a special species. But this is no dry scientific tome; rather, it is delightfully and sensitively written and will surely strengthen your love of dogs by enhancing your appreciation of their evolution alongside man, their emotions, and their behavior. It is quite simply a must have for all dog enthusiasts, dog behaviorists, and training professionals and is an illuminating joy to read for all dog owners.” (Peter Neville, The Ohio State University and the Center of Applied Pet Ethology, Sheffield, UK)

“How Dogs Work draws on the authors’ extensive knowledge from years of experience and field experiments. They have done more serious, hands-on experiments with dogs, over a longer period of time, than almost any other researcher, which makes their research worth paying close attention to. While offering an integrated perspective for viewing and understanding the behaviors of dogs, the book is also entertaining and informative due to its frequent use of colorful examples.” (Lynette Hart, author of *The Perfect Puppy: How to Choose Your Dog by Its Behavior*)

“Coppinger and Feinstein reveal how dog behavior has built-in biological origins and constraints and how it is influenced by genetics, the environment, and the consequences of that behavior. If you really want to know more about animal behavior, and dog behavior especially, then this is a book for you. Be prepared to be challenged and you will learn a lot.” (Robert Bailey, animal trainer)

“Packed with fascinating and provocative insights, *How Dogs Work* throws down the gauntlet to those who believe that dogs possess humanlike feelings and cognitive capacities.” (James Serpell, author of *In the Company of Animals*)

“In a complement to existing science-informed books on the subject, Coppinger and Feinstein bring the concept of dog behaviour neatly to the forefront. While we already have a

fairly firm grasp on the physical inner workings of canines, *How Dogs Work* focuses more on the differences brought about by breed traits, and makes comparisons between dogs and an array of wild canid species, including jackals and dingoes. . . . Aimed at both lay and specialist reader, what really sets *How Dogs Work* apart is a host of anecdotes by Coppinger that provide compelling real-life context. Throughout the book, he draws on his experience of owning and competing with sled dogs as well as his expertise with a range of other working dogs. (Times Higher Education) "Almost everything you think you know about dogs is wrong. Forget the loyal companion stereotype, or the idea you've got to show you're the alpha of the pack. Ethologists Coppinger and Feinstein present this most familiar of animals in a new object light, analyzing their anatomy and behavior with science rather than sentimentality. (Discover)"Coppinger and Feinstein take a scientific look at dogs and other canids, such as wolves and coyotes. They explain why dogs do what they do--why they play, why they bark, how they forage--as well as how they have evolved into the animals they are." (Chicago Tribune)

Raymond Coppinger is professor emeritus of biology at Hampshire College. His books include *Dogs: A New Understanding of Canine Origin, Behavior, and Evolution*, also published by the University of Chicago Press. Mark Feinstein is professor of cognitive science at Hampshire College.

This book might better be entitled "Why Working Dogs work." The primary subjects are herding, guarding and sled dogs, with the vast population of pet dogs earning barely a mention (and that mention comes across with a tone so snide it borders on fatuousness). What I wanted, I suppose, was a book on dog psychology: Their personalities, vocalizations, idiosyncrasies. Instead I found a book on dog physiology, with the authors raising serious questions about whether dogs have minds at all. Disappointing is the best word that leaps to mind. That said, *How dogs Work* is an intellectually engaging disquisition on dog behavior seen in purely scientific terms. More narrowly, it is an ethological view of (primarily) working dogs--a study of behavior as the unit of analysis in the tradition of Conrad Lorenz. Thus, with behavior as the dependent variable, the independent variables are genes, survival-oriented adaptations, and the subtle concept of emergence (a small instruction set that explains apparently complex behaviors). Feinstein and Coppinger (current and retired faculty at Hampshire College) are at pains to avoid any sort of anthropomorphism--attributing human characteristics to their study subjects--as indeed they must if their work is going to pass the sniff test of scientific method. Even with that (possibly over narrow) view, they develop a variety of

fascinating insights and observations that certainly came as news to me. Their basic idea is this: A dog's physical shape is a primary determinant of its behavior and qualification for success at its assigned task (human or nature-assigned). Thus, for instance, sled dogs fall into fairly tight parameters of size that make them adequate to the task of running the Iditarod race. They will almost invariably be between 40 and 50 pounds. Smaller than that and they aren't strong enough to pull the load (six marathons per day for eight days). Larger than that and they can't shed the heat of exertion fast enough to avoid rapid exhaustion. It's all about the ratio of surface area to volume. Another nifty observation is that your pet dog is not a wolf with only skin-deep differences. From a behavioral standpoint, dogs are nothing like wolves. Wolves go into estrus once per year, dogs twice. Wolves pair bond, dogs do not. Father wolves help with the care of pups, father dogs couldn't care less. Both father and mother wolves regurgitate food for their pups, who stay with them for almost a year. Dogs don't regurgitate unless they've eaten grass, and pups are abandoned as soon as they are weaned. Wolves form packs, hunt synchronously, and have alpha males. Dogs do no such thing. Finally, wolves are well adapted to living in the wild, far from human civilization. Dogs, by contrast, live almost exclusively among humans or at the perimeter of human settlements where they can scavenge human leftovers (and sometimes dead humans too). Drop a group of dogs in the wilds of Wyoming and they'll all be dead within a year--and some within a week. Dogs need us. Wolves don't. Coppinger and Feinstein then proceed to lay out the basic sequence of dog behavior, a strict sequence that can be seen as the fundamental dog behavior prototype. It goes like this: EYE>STALK>CHASE>GRAB BITE>KILL BITE>DISSECT>CONSUME. What is really interesting is that some breeds are missing (the probably genetic) basis for one or more of these steps. Thus, consider some differences between shepherd dogs (like Border Collies) and guarding dogs (like the Italian Maremma or Great Pyrenees). The shepherd/herding dogs have a pronounced chase response, and as pets you can throw the ball endlessly and they never get tired of going after it. The guard dogs, by contrast, are missing this step altogether. You can throw a ball for a Great Pyrenees until your arm falls off and the dog will just look at you. The behavior is simply missing from the gene-induced behavioral repertoire. But here's the take-home lesson: If the behavior is there, you can't train it out. If the behavior is missing, you can't train it in. If you want your guard dog to fetch, buy another breed of dog. Consider another aspect of guard dogs: They lack the dissect behavioral step. Put it next to a dead calf and it will starve before biting into it. (You don't want guard dogs to rip up the sheep, so this is a very valuable deficit.) Border collies, by contrast, will rip up the dead calf with wild abandon. What they lack (in general) is the KILL BITE (another BFOQ for a dog used to care for valuable animals). Feinstein and Coppinger are at their best when explicating these

observable behaviors. They start and end with the DesCartes view of animals being essentially automata--reactive machines--without souls. They are unafraid to raise -- and not answer -- the question of whether dogs have consciousness. I understand their methodological dilemma, but I think they go too far in their search for the directly observable. Much of their dismissiveness of what might lead to an inference of dog consciousness would apply equally to humans. Even college professors. Consider: They EYE a grant opportunity. They STALK it with writing behavior. They break into a CHASE if they hear another professor scribbling. The behavior is clearly impulsive rather than intentional because they repeat it even when it leads no where. They seem incapable of learning, any more than a Chevrolet has an opinion. QED. Professors lack intellect, and if you think they have it, you're just projecting sentimental anthropomorphism. It is instructive that the two areas with which the professors openly struggle is dog play and dog barking. They make some good guesses, but leave the topic as an unsolved mystery. Since my main experience of my dog entails her barking and playing, that's what I really wanted to understand better. Clearly, I bought the wrong book--or turned to the wrong breed of professor. They seem genetically indisposed to addressing the questions of most interest to me.

This was a disappointment. Perhaps I should have recognized the authors' names, but they belong to the group of scientists who consider all nonhuman animals as complicated machines, understandable in mechanistic terms.

I bought this book based on my respect for Ray Coppinger, the preeminent ethologist (study of behavior based on the physical characteristics of the animal). But it's not really about dogs; it's about ethology with dogs as illustration. Good book on ethology but contributed little to my understanding of canine behavior.

When I brought this in from the mail, I looked at my Yorkiepoo and said, "I hope this isn't a hatchet job." In the event, under the heading "man's best friend", the authors note innumerable dog bites and other injuries every year. And they debunk the Dog Waits by Grave story by arguing the dog actually was there because the cemetery crew fed him for years. Three quarters of the world's billion dogs don't even live with people, though they do live on the periphery of our species as food scavengers. One way they are tied to us is that they don't provide their own food.* Then we learn that whatever the genetics, dogs are

not tame wolves. Males don't care for pups, don't live in a hierarchy and don't mate. You get the picture: not a book for sentimentalists. I read Konrad Lorenz almost hot off the press and have had and loved and studied dogs all my life. Many folks my age remember the great swings in animal behavior theory. In college I read behaviorist texts not as philosophical oddities but as science. Now, there is a new book every month describing the emotional lives and attitudes of elephants, dolphins, apes and, of course, dogs. Although the authors hedge their language, on a scale of one to ten from behaviorist to anthropomorphist, the authors are at a 2. The don't categorically deny animal consciousness but they certainly minimize it. The book is true to the title. Not a general book on dog psychology (except by extension), it focuses on what we can learn about dogs by considering some working breeds. First there is a consideration of the characteristics of sled dogs. Interesting. A major point being made is that a dog - any animal- is not just a brain, but a whole body and body shape. I was strongly reminded in this discussion of something I read long ago in a book by Watson or Skinner: we think as much with our stomachs as with our brains. I think this is a good point, dogs, people, bats "behave" as an organism. So far, so good. Next the authors go into detail on some specifics on some breeds: hunters, shepherds and flock guarders. They describe the specific behaviors of, say, a pointer, a collie, and others as a sequence of events: eye contact/ stalk /chase/bite/consume (I'm simplifying). They show how in specific breeds some items in the sequence have been modified or eliminated.. I'm with all this yet very skeptical of the direction they are going. . Since in a herder, if you interrupt the sequence it is not taken up in the next but one step, does the animal ever have a goal in mind or was it "conscious" at all? Not likely, according to the professors. Whoa, as the authors tell us, humans also have stereotyped behavior. Eating with our hands is their example. But let's try sex. Because human sexual behavior is stereotyped does that mean it's not conscious!!! Indeed, we repeat this theme couple more times: nursing behavior; orientation, locomotion, attachment, forefoot-tread, suck. We are given the context, shown things that can screw up the sequence and how the behavior is modified as the animal matures. On the side, we learn that geese fly in wedges not because they are "trying" in a social context to do the most efficient thing but because they are innately - the authors prefer to say "intrinsically" - set up to go for the least air resistance. Cooperative hunting, group herding behavior and rat pups huddling for warmth in a corner, the authors explain should not be thought of as the animals having any intentions but can be explained by computer models showing such behavior has the optimal

outcome. I was trying to be tolerant, but by this time was losing patience! I would bet a dollar that a computer model could project a likely strategy for a football team on some particular play. I would bet another dollar that something like that is what we're likely to see the players do. Are the players automatons? The authors finally consider "play" as a "play" theory. I agree with the book that the concept of play is one of the most fertile for anthropomorphism, but the analysis of it here does nothing to suggest that dogs (or other creatures) are not conscious, have goals or are enjoying themselves. These guys need to step across the quad to the philosophy department. As I said, I've been interested in ethology all my life. Also I've had twenty or so dogs. And I studied and taught philosophy of mind. This book may have some good info for dog fanciers and trainers, but it is very weak as a discourse on animal consciousness, the subject which is the main agenda. The authors view the issue too simplistically. It's not anthropomorphism or behaviorism. Anybody who thinks my dog doesn't have intentions, why else is she shoving her squeaky in my hand?, or can't read the intentions of the cat sneaking up on her food (other mind theory is much overdone the last 15 years) is putting theory above common sense. The sensorium of other animals is quite different from our own. It's pretty hard to imagine the conscious field of a dog or elephant. The interests and defaults are not ours. But as has been often remarked, the reduction of behavior to a program (yes, environmentally modified, as the authors admit) works just as well on our spouses, co-workers and every human on the planet as well as on dogs and dolphins (and bees, don't get me started on a beekeeper). I would not recommend this book to the reader who is interested in animal mind and consciousness. It's not sophisticated enough and the authors have not examined their prejudices.* The report that all dogs, tame or not, depend on humans for food answered a question I had had for a long time: Why are dogs such invertebrate beggars? After all, cats, parakeets and hamsters don't beg like dogs (speaking generally). The authors have shown me that the answer is that scavenging from humans is part of the "intrinsic" equipment of these animals. As a general refutation of their theory of dog consciousness, however, it also implies that your dog is only dimly aware of her begging. If that's false, so is their analysis of the mental life of dogs. QED

This gets too far into the ethological weeds for me. Theories are fine, and they make as much sense as any, but I learn almost nothing that would apply to, you know, my dog. I'm less interested in what makes him tick than I am in how to make him behave in ways that are good for

him and me!

Returned as was more on the science level

anyone who wants to understand how dogs minds work. makes approaching training easier when you understand the mechanics of how their brains work

Made great references to scientific data and related it to what everyday people see in Thier dogs!
Such a great read.

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