

THE PLAYFUL ANIMAL

Georges Chapouthier – It was long thought that only humans could laugh. Wrong! Monkeys laugh as we do. They laugh if they like something, or are tickled. You can say that monkeys have a sense of humour. I spent a year with chimpanzees, and one was a friend. At group recreation, he'd threaten me. Once I recoiled, as if scared, and he burst out laughing. His threat was a joke. Rats laugh: inaudible ultrasound. Rat pups play and laugh. and if tickled, laugh a lot.

In higher animals, playing is training for adult behaviour. In most species, adults don't play. Humans are neotenic, i.e. juvenile, We look like monkeys' fetuses, our flexible brain allows performances. We are juvenile! We play all the time! Look at games, gambling, sport, etc. Our pets are neotenic dogs & cats playful at all ages, like us. Three key activities involve playing: art, knowledge & sex. As humans we play games. We are versatile and adapt, adapting to bad & good. Humans can be good or evil, and to extremes. Because our brain can adapt. We adapt and play, so develop traits less developed in other species. A chimpanzee won't be cruelly evil, being guided by the group. A human without social constraint might do anything, good or evil.

Humans think culture is their preserve. They alone can teach, learn, imitate. Wrong! Some animals can handle tools, communicate complexity, have basic speech, and even proto-morals & proto-aesthetics. Birds like their partner's colours, e.g. the partner's red... then red in general, as an abstract idea. A sexual choice becomes abstract. Female nudes in human art suggest aesthetics based on sexuality. All social animals have "proto-morals". A dog will not eat its master. Social constraints are basic morals. Human morals are complex, but with roots in animals. We abhor torture, particularly of children. It's Darwin: the parent animal protects its young. Biological morals make incest taboo. For cats or mice, inter-generational incest exists. But for apes incest is taboo, hence immoral for us, as apes. Ethology now sees animals as more intelligent than was thought. The right questions were not asked. This was not thoroughly investigated.

3min 53sec