

A phenomenology of animal life: Observations on the lifeworld of a dog

Uma fenomenologia da vida animal: observações sobre o mundo-da-vida de um cão

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Abstract

This contribution to animal philosophy is an attempt to investigate the human-animal relationship through the observation and description of everyday experience. In doing so, this article addresses three fundamental questions. Firstly, can the experience of canine reality be accurately described using human categories and concepts, even if only by analogy? Secondly, to what extent can we speak of canine language, given their capability for communication? Lastly: do dogs possess metacognitive abilities that enable them to navigate their surroundings and be aware of their own actions and agency?

Keywords: Animal phenomenology. Animal philosophy. Dog. Consciousness. Animal lifeworld.

Resumo

Esta contribuição para a filosofia animal é uma tentativa de investigar o relacionamento humano-animal por meio da observação e descrição da experiência cotidiana. Ao fazer isso, este artigo aborda três questões fundamentais.

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Em primeiro lugar, a experiência da realidade canina pode ser descrita com precisão usando categorias e conceitos humanos, mesmo que apenas por analogia? Em segundo lugar, até que ponto podemos falar de linguagem canina, dada a sua capacidade de comunicação? Por último: os cães possuem habilidades metacognitivas que lhes permitem navegar pelo ambiente e ter consciência de suas próprias ações e agência?

Palavras-chave: Fenomenologia animal. Filosofia animal. Cão. Consciência. Mundo da vida animal.

Introduction

In recent years a new, relatively minor but rapidly expanding field of philosophy has emerged: the so-called animal philosophy. Animal philosophy encompasses a diverse range of topics, including animal ethics, the similarities and differences between humans and animals, and the social behavior of animals as well as the so-called animal mind¹. In addition to animal philosophy, the last decade has also witnessed the emergence of research in the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies that focuses on the historical and critical study of human-animal cultural relations. Consequently, the relationship between humans and animals is no longer solely the purview of the natural sciences, such as animal biology.

This contribution to animal philosophy is an attempt to investigate the human-animal relationship through the observation and description of everyday experience. According to Husserl, phenomenology concerns itself with the trivialities of life, and our daily interactions with animals are shaped by countless trivial rituals, both obvious and subtle. The task of understanding animals and our relationship to them is of intrinsic philosophical interest and importance. It is also crucial to inform an understanding of animal life that avoids mystifications and anthropomorphic projections.

The hypothesis from which I² proceed is that while animals and humans are distinct, this difference is not insurmountable or unbridgeable. Indeed, if it were, there would be no possibility of a shared experience of the world or of interspecies communication. Of course, this issue is of interest to the field of phenomenology. When sharing everyday life with an animal, an intersubjective experience is created where the *otherness* of the animal³ cannot – and should not – be understood as a mere projection or identification of the ‘I’ into the ‘you’, of one’s consciousness into another’s, or of the *ego* into the *alter ego*. This is because the animal in front of us does not possess a self that is analogous to the self that we are.

Having established this fundamental premise, it is necessary to clarify an important methodological point. This article is based exclusively on my personal experiences with my dog over the past three years. Accordingly, the methodology employed is descriptive rather than normative, and the subject is contingent rather than universal. In this study, I do not address *the* nature of dogs (or animals) in general, but rather a specific dog and her behavior as representative of her species. Upon the arrival of our dog, Laune (a German name meaning both “bad mood” and “moody”), my partner and I were forced to confront our own limited understanding of dogs. It became evident that canines exhibit a sophisticated and multifaceted social intelligence, which left us astonished. The dog (*canis*) is a unique species that exists solely in culture, as it is the result of domestication as well as cultural rather than natural selection. Its behavior is oriented towards living with our species, representing the threshold between nature and culture. It is a well-documented fact that wolves hunt in packs, in contrast to felines, which are solitary predators. Similarly, and in contrast to cats, dogs are naturally oriented towards pack life and sociality. The sociality of dogs is shaped and structured by their relationships with other members of their own species and with humans.

Although I am a scientifically informed writer, the article itself displays a certain degree of amateurism. This is evident in my observation and description of the contingency of everyday experience

¹ As introduction see Wild, 2008.

² The author will be using the first person singular.

³ For the sake of simplicity, I will refer exclusively to domesticated animals.

and the difficulties and misunderstandings in interpreting the incredibly complex behavior of dogs. To observe and describe these phenomena, a certain degree of naivety remains necessary. The following pages address three fundamental inquiries. Firstly, can the experience of canine reality be accurately described using human categories and concepts, even if only by analogy? Secondly, to what extent can we speak of canine language, given their capability for communication? And lastly: do dogs possess metacognitive abilities that enable them to navigate their surroundings and be aware of their own actions and agency?

1. Perception and temporal experience

Laune's sense of smell comprises a long nasal cavity containing several hundred million olfactory receptors and enables her to process olfactory information. The cognitive abilities of Laune are not only significantly influenced by olfactory information, but they are also shaped by it. Her olfactory perception allows her to form complex ideas about objects, places, and events. To her, my identity is primarily determined by my scent, followed by my voice, somatic expressiveness, and lastly by my appearance. The canine experience is defined more by the sounds, noises, and smells in their environment than by the limited range of what they can see. Although dogs have limited vision and color perception, their hearing, smell, and taste provide them with the information they need to navigate their environment. Dogs are not color-blind, but they are unable to perceive the color red. Their visual perception is constrained to the blue-to-green spectrum. They are able to distinguish differences in size, such as between two food bowls of different sizes, with an obvious preference for the larger one. However, they are unable to differentiate between five and eight kibbles, as they lack an abstract concept of numbers or quantities beyond "one", "two", and "many". Dogs lack an epistemic understanding of the world around them. Their primary interest is in the practical uses of objects, such as sitting or lying on them, chewing them, or eating them. Their curiosity is often piqued by objects in motion or things that are actively doing something. However, once an object becomes still and inert, it loses its appeal to them⁴.

Nietzsche's assertion that animals, including dogs, primarily live in the present moment is correct⁵. However, their present is not a fragmented moment on a distinct temporal continuum; rather, it is an extended present, similar to ours. Husserl's lectures on time provide a comprehensive description of the temporality of consciousness, including its structures and performances. This achievement serves as a testament to the efficacy of phenomenology in describing the temporal structure of our experience. Husserl posits that intentional relations can be classified into two categories: the relation between the act of consciousness and its object (*objektivierende Apperzeption*) and the relation between the present moment and retention or "fresh recollection" (*frische Erinnerung*) (Husserl, 1966, p. 32-32). These two relations are interdependent, as all experiences are situated within the stream or continuum of consciousness.

Husserl describes the consciousness of time based on what he calls the "Urimpression," the "primary impression": this term refers to the transient yet incessant influence of external stimuli on our consciousness (Husserl, 1966, p. 52-53). According to Husserl, consciousness is a punctual or atomistic. Rather, the present "in which we live" is metaphorically "expanded" or "extended": in our consciousness, each experience content is related to a previous one as well as linked to a future one. For example, when we

⁴ See Nitzschner, 2018.

⁵ See Nietzsche, 1999, p. 245-7.

listen to someone speak or to a song, we perceive sounds—whether words or notes—not as discrete units, but as parts of meaningful synthetic units, such as sentences, which unfold over time. The same goes for the act of reading. Otherwise, it would be impossible for the reader of these pages to grasp the meaning expressed by the sentences. In essence, the reader would be a prisoner of an absolute “now” in which each graphic sign would be unrelated to the signs that follow or precede it.

According to Husserl, retention is the capacity of consciousness to preserve past perceptions that are no longer present. He asserts that consciousness performs every act through a continuous, dense succession of now-moments, which he refers to as the “time of consciousness.” Unlike Kant, Husserl maintains that perception is not a static intuition but an act, thereby defining it not as a status, but as a process that develops through time, over time, as time. To illustrate, when I rhythmically tap my hand on the table, the initial, second, and third taps remain perceptually present. Upon hearing a fourth tap, the perception of the first tap is no longer consciously accessible; it has become definitively past. The experience is not lost, however, because it can be brought back by remembering it, even if it is no longer present in the evidence of the original experience. Symmetrically, consciousness has the capacity of protention, as Husserl calls it, which allows it to anticipate or imagine what is about to happen (of course, that does not mean that we know or predict what is about to happen). Consciousness is a two-faced Janus: on the one hand, it is oriented to the past, with a tendency to retain information; on the other hand, it is oriented to the future, with a tendency to anticipate possibilities. Our expectations anticipate the realm of possibility of what is immediate and imminent—what lies just beyond the horizon, beyond the limits of present experience.

It appears that the canine consciousness can be accurately described using phenomenological concepts. It is of paramount importance to acknowledge that the experiences of dogs and humans are not mutually exclusive, but rather, they share a common horizon of experience. Though our experience of reality is different, it is not incommensurable. Dogs, much like humans, are primarily oriented towards the present moment. Studies have demonstrated that the duration of a dog’s present can be quantified to be approximately two seconds, which is comparable to the duration of our own lived present. Typically, our lived present is approximately three seconds in duration (similar to the three taps on the table). However, dogs appear to lack the capacity for self-reflection, which, according to Husserl, is the fundamental ability of consciousness to objectify and thematize one’s own actions, experiences, and the content of these experiences. Consequently, it appears that dogs are unable to recall past experiences in a conscious manner, or to recall them (*vergegenwärtigen*) in the same way that humans do.

As previously stated, it is crucial to acknowledge that the canine experience is structured based on olfactory rather than visual perception. Laune is capable of distinguishing between odors that are new and fresh, and those that are old and stale. The latter, however, is a weaker odor that provides information about a past event. The former has a meaning and function for her present perception and actions, such as a strong smell from the kitchen motivating her to get up from the sofa. It is evident that Laune does not organize the information of past events into an objective chronology. It is also clear that she has no representation, definition, or concept of past, present, or future, nor is she capable of conscious recollection—that is, reflexively calling into consciousness past events she has experienced. For this reason, I hypothesize that her phenomenal horizon is exponentially shallower than mine. Conversely, her lived present appears to be denser, populated by olfactory stimuli whose intensity determines both her actions and the intensity of the sensations that color her emotional state.

Nevertheless, it can be posited that Laune still has access to the past, despite the ambiguity of such an expression in her world. As one moves away from the source of a smell, both spatially and temporally, the intensity of the smell diminishes. This is also the case for humans: we somehow perceive the past through our sense of smell, for instance the odor of something that has been here and now isn't anymore. Conversely, a more intense odor can provide information about what is to come or what we will encounter if we move closer to the source, offering a glimpse into the future. Upon returning home, my partner asks me about my day, we speak about the places in which I have been and the people with whom I spoke. In contrast, Laune does not ask such questions; instead, she assesses me olfactorily. The various scents that I have accumulated throughout the day, which often go unnoticed by me, provide her with valuable insights. These insights include the places I have visited, the individuals or animals I have encountered, and even the food that I have consumed. Finally, the act of smelling me serves another fundamental function: it confirms to her that it is truly me who has crossed the threshold. This behavior is not exclusive to Laune and the humans with whom she interacts; it is also observed in other members of her species. When encountering another dog in the park, Laune and her new acquaintance engage in a thorough sniffing ritual to establish recognition and identification. This process also allows the two dogs to determine each other's sex before engaging in further interaction. In contrast to my own, Laune's perspective on the world places less emphasis on sight and instead prioritizes the senses of taste and smell.

2. Horizon of experience, language, and communication

In its philosophical tradition, German thought has long been marked by an engagement with the fundamental distinction between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*. This distinction has been a defining feature of German philosophy, evident in the vocabulary and conceptual tools employed since Kant. Both nouns can be translated as 'reality', but *Realität* refers to the (absolute or regional) totality of things that exist. In transcendental philosophy (and thus also in phenomenology), however, *Wirklichkeit* refers to the horizon of both factual and possible experiences. In this regard, it can be assumed that animals possess their own distinctive *Wirklichkeit*, although they share a common *Realität* with humans. However, it seems that dogs do not concern themselves with ontology. One might assume that the dog's world consists of concrete objects such as chairs, sofas, bowls, and bags, as well as birds, people, and other dogs. In this case, however, we are merely extending our ontology to the canine world. Dogs not only refrain from asking what things *are*, but they also lack an understanding of what a 'thing' is or means. Their understanding of their environment is fundamentally functional and praxis oriented. They are not interested in the intrinsic nature of sofas, toys, or apples. Rather, they are concerned with the practical applications of these objects. For example, a sofa is a place-to-lie-on, a toy is a tool-to-play-with, and an apple is a thing-to-eat. Dogs are pragmatically oriented creatures, and their lifeworld is fundamentally limited to what they can perceive through their senses. Humans, on the other hand, can perceive an infinite number of objects and relationships that they may never have directly experienced. These include things that exist but may never be encountered (galaxies far away or dinosaurs), things that only exist in our imagination (cyclopes), and information that has been passed to us (the history of ancient Egypt).

Moreover, in the canine world, there is no equivalent to human language. Instead, there are sounds that are associated with objects or actions. Laune is aware that *Ringo Flamingo* refers to her stuffed animal. Furthermore, she is able to discern the meaning of words such as 'search', 'carry', 'sit', and 'jump'. Like most

other dogs, Laune responds to her name when called. It is unclear, however, what Laune has learned and what her name signifies to her. What does “Laune” mean to Laune? What does her proper name mean to her? Does she know she has a name? And what do other words mean to her? Does she *actually* understand them? Could it be an overdeveloped ability to associate arbitrary sounds with certain objects or actions, or is Laune really able to understand that words *name* objects? If this were true, it could imply that dogs possess a fundamental comprehension of language semantics, which seems to be a highly unrealistic assumption. While it is uncertain what the sound “Laune” signifies to her, if anything, her name may simply be a sound that she has learned to associate with certain actions, such as come-to-us if she is in another room or a few meters away, as well as pay-attention-to-what-is-about-to-happen. She has learned that when we say her name, something—usually good—happens for her: Attention, food, playtime. Dogs, like humans, are capable of learning from experience and creating associations and correlations between different phenomena. Canines possess an acute observational capacity, enabling them to discern and interpret human behavior and respond to their surroundings. For instance, Laune has learned to associate a specific metallic sound with the act of cutting fruit. This prompts her to flee to the kitchen and seek refuge beneath the table, with the hope that a piece of fruit will fall to the floor or be offered to her.

Although dogs can learn a relatively large number of words (up to 1000, in the case of a border collie), to them, these ‘words’ seem to be more like familiar sounds than *actual* words that form part of a structured language. To dogs, our words appear to be sound-labels that are attached to an object or action through repetition. Laune has learned about twenty word-labels that we use to communicate with her. These include commands such as ‘Here!’, ‘Sit!’, ‘Down!’, ‘Turn around!’, and ‘Stay!’ In addition, without us teaching her, she has learned to associate sounds with events: when she hears the word ‘bedtime’ in the evening, she rushes to the living room door and waits for us to begin the ritual with which we end the day. Although dogs lack a language comparable to ours, they are highly adept at communicating. Dogs primarily communicate through somatic expressiveness, which includes body and tail movements. This refined behavioral code informs the entire canine sociability. Like her peers, Laune has developed different communicative registers, a sort of private idiom with which she expresses her feelings to the humans around her⁶.

Laune exhibits a clear preference for specific activities, including enjoying food, running in the sand or tall grass, and curling up on the sofa – as well as she displays a distinct aversion to others. For instance, she tends to avoid being in the company of noisy groups of children. Her behavior indicates a desire to prioritize her preferences and exhibit dissatisfaction when they are not fulfilled, while attempting to minimize her dislikes. She exhibits a pronounced preference for stimuli that enhance her comfort and well-being, and may demonstrate limited tolerance for circumstances that are unpleasant, uncomfortable, or potentially threatening, such as loud noises, cold winds in Berlin, or crowded places. In instances where Laune is in proximity to a group of individuals approaching her, she may display indications of unease, such as pulling at the leash or tucking her tail beneath her abdomen. This could be indicative of apprehension or distress. To convey her emotional state, she emits a grunting sound when she is in a state of health. The act of whining is indicative of discontentment and impatience, particularly in the morning

⁶ Furthermore, dogs are able to communicate not only with humans, but also with each other. Both forms of communication are not only extraordinarily complex, but also radically different from each other. Consider the example of the human smile: it has a positive meaning when exchanged between humans or between humans and dogs; however, when exchanged between dogs, the grin is an intimidating gesture, signaling aggression.

when she is forced to wait before embarking on her daily walk. While she was a puppy, howling was a means of expressing fear of abandonment, a behavior she has since outgrown. When Laune sneezes repeatedly, it could be interpreted as an expression of her joy at seeing someone she likes. Conversely, when she growls, she shows that she wants to keep a certain distance. Furthermore, a subdued "woof" is indicative of the presence of an individual or object at the front door, suggesting the necessity to ascertain the identity of the visitor. Moreover, Laune yawns, and she does it for a variety of reasons, including fatigue, to calm herself and others, and to express physical well-being and relaxation. Like every other dog, Laune barks to express a range of emotions, including fear, anger, warning, or despair. Some dogs bark out of joy, excitement, frustration, or stress. Just as Laune has learned sounds and verbs from us, we have also learned to distinguish, read, and interpret the different communicative registers she uses.

One might question whether this communication can be classified as language, but it is clear that animals, including dogs, are capable of conveying their feelings and intentions. Undoubtedly, animals communicate with each other and with humans. Laune can effectively show me when she is hungry, needs to go outside, or is scared and requires protection. Her happiness is evident when my partner or I return home, and she expresses her joy through energetic sneezes and vigorous tail wagging. Compared to ours, Laune's communication abilities seem to be somehow limited; however, they may be more extensive than what we can perceive. Like any other dog, Laune does not use symbolic expressions to communicate. When she brings us Ringo Flamingo, this is not a symbol that functions as a request for us to play with her; she has learned that if she brings us her stuffed animal, we will most likely throw it around, so that she can then retrieve it.

Humans are the only species that possesses the capacity for linguistic communication, despite the long history of coexistence with other animals, including dogs and cats. Although some argue that animals may possess a distinct mode of communication that is absent in humans, their communication is largely confined to their immediate environment. In contrast, humans are capable of communicating about events that have already occurred or that are yet to come. I am able to discuss both my childhood and my forthcoming summer plans, whereas Laune's communicative abilities are constrained to the present moment.

Many philosophers have postulated that the relationship between language and thought is so close that the ability to speak is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the ability to think. Conversely, the inability to speak has been deemed indicative of the absence of the ability to think. This has led some philosophers to categorize computers as thinking beings, on the grounds that they use some kind of language. While language may be necessary for certain forms of thinking, it is not a prerequisite for all types of thinking. Conversely, not any type of thinking has to be expressed linguistically. Indeed, advanced thinking activity can still be observed in organisms that lack language in the traditional sense. Language is a powerful medium of thought, but it is hardly the only one. The creation of symbols allows humans a certain degree of autonomy in their relationship with the world, as they can substitute objects with symbols representing those objects. This demonstrates our ability to think beyond the limitations of language. As Cassirer argues, humans possess a wider potential scope of imagination or feelings than animals due to their status as an *animal symbolicum*.

"Der menschliche Körper ist das beste Bild der menschlichen Seele [*The human body is the best image of the human soul*]" (Wittgenstein, 2003, p. 178). Wittgenstein's statement about the relationship between the soul and the human body can be extended to animals: Observing the behavior of a living being, as Wittgenstein said, provides valuable insight into its "soul," its very nature. Here, the term "soul" refers to a

consciousness or subjectivity, not a supernatural or metaphysical entity: Wittgenstein uses the term “soul” to differentiate between sentient beings and inanimate objects and to state that there is an inherent immediacy in our perception of consciousness of other beings, including animals. In this respect, Wittgenstein’s position is more convincing than Husserl’s. According to Husserl, the perception of the other is primarily the projection of one’s own subjectivity with its qualities into the other, of the I into the you. For Wittgenstein, on the other hand, the other is already there in its immediacy: we do not need to describe the process of recognizing them, whether person or animal, as *Einfühlung*.

While it cannot be *known* with certainty whether a dog has consciousness and thinks, there are more reasons to assume so than not. Imagine Laune running around the apartment and whining. One can somehow insist on being skeptical and question the existence of a consciousness and whether she ‘wants’ something or not. One can engage in such skepticism while sitting at the table and writing theoretical texts; however, one should be well advised to leave the desk and take the dog outside for a walk before they pee on the floor. Upon returning to their desk from the tour and questioning whether the dog wants something, one quickly realizes that such skepticism is trivial.

Both animals and humans express themselves. Human expressions are part of the lifeworld in which we grow up, learn language, and understand ourselves and each other. A person’s cheerfulness is evident when they smile or laugh heartily, and this is a clear indication of their emotional state. Similarly, their sadness is evident when they are sobbing, as it is a clear expression of their emotional state. Although more complex emotions such as loneliness or sadness have intricate criteria, understanding internal processes always requires external criteria. The point is not to equate pain with pain behavior, but rather to describe mental states by referencing external, observable signs. In some sense, we *see* feelings: we do not see facial contractions and then deduce that a person is feeling joy or sadness. We *see* their joy or sadness. Of course, a skeptical voice creeping up could now suggest: *You do not actually know if the person is really sad. Maybe they are just pretending. Or maybe it is just a robot. On the other hand, you know perfectly well whether you yourself are in pain.* However, while one can engage and articulate skepticism, one cannot live by it. Feelings are not merely hidden mental variables, but also observable behavior, actions, and expressions.

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the close connection between a feeling and its physical expression; the feeling does not lie ‘behind’ the gesture, but is contained within it:

Soit un geste de colère ou de menace, je n’ai pas besoin pour le comprendre de me rappeler les sentiments que j’ai éprouvés lorsque j’exécutais pour mon compte les mêmes gestes. Je connais très mal, de l’intérieur, la mimique de la colère [...] je ne perçois pas la colère ou la menace comme un fait psychique caché derrière le geste, je lis la colère dans le geste, le geste ne me fait pas penser à la colère, il est la colère elle-même (Merleau-Ponty, 1976, p. 215).

Of course, we can hide how we really feel: our ‘inner world’ can be concealed, as when we mask our sadness. Facial expressions can become misleading, and we can utilize them to hide or withhold our genuine emotions. However, humans, as well as animals, possess an inner world that is typically not hidden or masked, but rather on display. Of course, determining the criteria for interpreting the sensations of animals with vastly different lifeworlds from ours is a more challenging task. This also applies when considering individuals from unfamiliar cultures. According to Merleau-Ponty, feelings and expressions are flexible and interrelated. He posits that the expression of emotions varies across cultures, indicating a variation in the

emotions themselves. Furthermore, he argues that it is impossible to differentiate between natural and cultural levels of emotion in humans, as they are inextricably intertwined.

When observing a child crying, at first, we do not know whether the distress is due to physical discomfort or perhaps to emotional distress: without the context in which the crying occurs, it is impossible to ascertain the cause. To understand behavior, one must have knowledge of the context, and the same is true of animal behavior. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, the behavior of an individual in each context is indicative of their emotional state, and this is also true of dogs. Wittgenstein emphasizes that many of the concepts with which we describe our own behavior can be applied to animals. It is possible for animals to experience a range of emotions, including relaxation, anger, anxiety, sadness, surprise, and hesitation. Moreover, certain animals can exhibit cognitive abilities, including the capacity to process information and—somehow—change their minds. When Laune is on her bed and I call her, I can observe her taking her time to consider whether she wishes to get up or not, whether she feels like it or not. Although terms such as ‘consider’, ‘weigh up’, or ‘change her mind’ are typically used to describe human behavior, it is not inappropriate to apply these terms to describe animal behavior as well. It is, of course, challenging to determine appropriate terminology for animals. For example, words such as ‘loneliness’ or ‘boredom’ are typically associated with human emotions and may not accurately depict animal behavior. As Wittgenstein argues, certain mental concepts are exclusive to language-capable beings. For example, it is not possible to say that Laune’s intentions are honest, as they cannot be dishonest. For such concepts as honesty or dishonesty do not pertain to her lifeworld.

If we abandon the idea of consciousness as something hidden, as something that can only be revealed through a language that is able to penetrate the barrier that separates the inner and outer worlds, and instead recognize that the inner is revealed in the outer, there is in principle no difficulty in attributing different states of consciousness to animals. While we may not always understand animal behavior, this difficulty does not stem from the fact that their thoughts are somehow hidden in their inner world. As experts in our own consciousness, we can use our own experiences as a starting point to comprehend an animal’s behavior. It is reasonable to assume that there is a systematic connection between behavior and consciousness, which applies to all species.

3. Canine agency?

As previously stated, comprehending animal behavior is a challenging endeavor, in part due to the inclination to ascribe human-like characteristics, intentions, and even opinions to animals. Not only do we lack the vocabulary to describe the mental processes occurring in their brains, but we also lack the knowledge to determine what canine thinking, imagination, etc. could look like. I argue that their mental contents are representations that have the character of images, although I am certain that Laune does not ‘have’ or ‘see’ mental images in the same sense that I have or see mine. In this context, the term ‘image’ refers to the visual and optical dimension of experience, which appears to play a secondary role for dogs. Furthermore, the term ‘image’ suggests a certain capacity to distance oneself from the content of the experience through reflective thinking, which dogs do not appear to possess. As with any image, a mental image not only conveys a wealth of information but also expresses something distinct from mere words.

Dogs are unable to engage in highly abstract thought; instead, they rely on the information that is immediately available to their senses. However, this does not imply that they are solely focused on the

present moment. For example, Laune demonstrates an understanding of the typical patterns of daily life. According to Blumenberg, conceptuality refers to the ability of consciousness to represent what is not present, what is no longer given in the immediacy of perception. This is a minimalist definition in which a concept is understood, at least in its most basic functions, as a substitute for perception. In this sense, it is not incorrect to argue that Laune may possess a concept, a representation of me—a 'Nicola-concept', whatever that may entail—even when I am not present. It is also probable that this representation is inaccessible to me because it is epigenetically linked to the contingent structures of her consciousness. It could be argued that Laune's imagination is constrained by her experiences. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that Laune lacks the capacity to form representations of centaurs, distant planets, or even elephants. This is because she is unable to combine ideas and representations to imagine something that is not present in her reality.

Dogs have a remarkable ability to perceive subtle emotional signals and respond accordingly. This skill is so sophisticated that they often give the impression that they understand our desires, what we feel, what we think. But course, Laune cannot 'read' my mind: she does not know what I am thinking, as well as she does not know *that* I am thinking. For this very reason, dogs cannot deceive or lie to us, because deception, deceit, or lying requires the representation of the thoughts or intentions of the person in front of us.

It has been observed by those who have shared their living space with a canine companion that the dog appears to be particularly attuned to the emotional state of its owner. They seem to pick up on the vibe, so to speak. If I am cheerful, so is Laune. If I am stressed, so is she. If I am scared, the dog is terrified. Dogs, however, do not merely imitate human behavior. Instead, they use it to navigate their surroundings.

For instance, some dog owners believe their pets are skilled at evaluating people; however, dogs tend to warm up to someone they initially disliked. How do we interpret such change in behavior? A dog's ability to assess the character or qualities of human beings is not innate. Instead, it is more likely that the dog has detected subtle cues from us, such as muscle tension, stress hormones, hesitation, or changes in breathing patterns. Dogs have a remarkable ability to perceive and interpret subtle signals that are imperceptible to humans.

It is a common belief among dog owners that their pets display a specific behavior when they have done something wrong. This behavior is often interpreted as a manifestation of guilt, characterized by a quick movement of the tail, ears turned back close to the back of the head, and the dog looking away while avoiding eye contact. Some dogs may even close or squint their eyes, as if attempting to avoid being seen, or they may attempt to cautiously sneak out of the room. Of course, the assertion that a dog is aware of its wrongdoing has profound implications: it indicates that dogs may possess a level of cognitive development that allows them to differentiate between right and wrong. It is interesting to note that dogs that are not supervised do not display signs of guilt or remorse when they engage in behavior that humans may consider inappropriate, such as taking food from a table. The "guilty" behavior is only exhibited in the presence of the owner. The owner's reaction is the primary factor in the dog's perception of guilt. It is not the dog's possession of a conscience or awareness of its wrongdoing that causes the behavior⁷.

To further investigate this hypothesis, one owner could engage in the same behavior when the dog has done nothing wrong. When I exhibit signs of stress, anger, or nervousness, Laune consistently employs

⁷ Furthermore, the dog still behaves like this hours later, when he can no longer remember what he has done wrong.

the same strategy, regardless of whether she has done something (that I consider) wrong: her ears go backwards, her eyes widen, and her tongue licks her nose while she wags her tail so rapidly that she appears as if she is about to fly away. In behaving so, Laune does not display remorse or contraction; instead, she behaves as my dissatisfaction is directed at her, and she reacts accordingly, that is: with caution. However, this is not an innate response, nor is it an attempt to deceive; rather, it is a winning strategy. In this context, it is illogical to apply concepts such as guilt or responsibility. Why should a dog refrain from begging for food or stealing it, for instance, if it has learned from experience that there are no consequences? The dog's actions are constrained by the boundaries set by its owner, which help the dog to understand what is permitted and what is not. Attributing moral responsibility to animals is an anthropomorphic act that involves projecting human behaviors onto them. This can lead to the erroneous assumption that the dog should behave differently than it does, which may be not a fair expectation toward them.

It is not Laune's intention to deceive or trick me. At least, it is not in the sense of intentionally leading me to believe something that is not true. Nevertheless, it is conceivable that Laune's conduct could be perceived or characterized in such a manner. As Laune matured from being a puppy, we developed a keen ability to distinguish between the various yelps and whimpers she emitted, allowing us to discern between her genuine needs and the more disruptive, self-pitying whimpers. These latter whimpers, which could be translated as "Why is nobody paying attention to me?" were indicative of a need for attention, whereas the yelps, which could be translated as "I really need to go out right now!" were indicative of a genuine need to relieve herself. However, our puppy also became aware of which sounds elicited a response from us and which ones did not. Laune shuffled the cards, prompting us to believe that she needed to relieve herself when, in fact, she simply desired attention. Was our perception of her actions an accurate reflection of reality? One might inquire whether the dog's actions were intentionally misleading. If this were the case, it would suggest that the dog is more intelligent than its cognitive abilities would suggest. It is reasonable to assume that she is capable of metacognition, or the ability to make assumptions about others' assumptions and act accordingly. However, there is no reason to attribute this ability to her, nor to believe that she is interested in my thoughts. Instead, a much simpler explanation is that Laune has previously memorized the association between a certain type of howl and our reaction, ergo she has learned that she will get our attention with that one howl.

Given that dogs lack the capacity for guilt, it follows that they cannot be said to possess "good will." Dogs have been known to exhibit what has been interpreted as altruistic behavior, as evidenced by numerous anecdotes of dogs rescuing children from drowning or alerting strangers to come to their owner's aid. Of course, canines trained to assist individuals with visual, auditory, or neurological impairments can perform essential tasks to ensure the safety and well-being of their owners. However, while these dogs perform such valuable work, they are only able to do so because they have been taught to. Such a response cannot be considered typical or innate. One might inquire as to whether Laune would be capable of assisting in the event of a distress situation. It is likely that she would not respond in the manner one would expect, given that she would not be able to comprehend the distress that would be experienced by the owner. A number of experiments have been conducted to assess the reactions of dogs to potentially harmful events involving their owners. These experiments include scenarios in which owners simulate a heart attack and fall to the ground, gasping and clutching their chests, or pretend that a bookcase has fallen on them and they are unable to move while calling for help. What were the canines' responses in the following minutes? In

the majority of cases, the dogs displayed an indifference that manifested as inaction. Some approached the owner, touching them with their paw or sniffing them. One or two dogs humped the owner, but none of them attempted to help or displayed any abnormal behavior. The dogs' inability to assist was not due to unwillingness; they were not trained to help and therefore lacked the knowledge of what else to do. The dogs did not comprehend the necessity for assistance on the part of their owner, nor did they recognize the gravity of the situation. This was likely due to their lack of understanding of the nature of a heart attack, accident, or life-threatening circumstances.

It is conceivable that if the dog were able to detect the owner's release of stress hormones, it could discern that the owner is in distress. It would be unfair to blame the dog for its inability to comprehend something it is not capable of understanding. Similarly, it would be unreasonable to hold Laune responsible for her inability to edit this article or provide an informed opinion. One might also consider instances in which dogs have assisted their owners by, for instance, barking and attracting the attention of a stranger. It is plausible that the dog perceived the situation as anomalous or disagreeable and responded with a strategy that ultimately yielded a favorable outcome. While there are documented instances of dogs assisting humans or other animals, these accounts are noteworthy for their rarity. It would be erroneous to assume that such behavior is typical of dogs, merely because it is appealing to believe so. To gain a deeper understanding of animals, it is essential to recognize the similarities and differences between humans and other species. Laune is a dog, not a human, and it is therefore crucial to treat her accordingly, meeting her needs.

Data availability statement

The main focus of this article is contributions of a theoretical or methodological nature, without the use of empirical data sets. Therefore, in accordance with the journal's editorial guidelines, the article is exempt from being deposited in SciELO Data.

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