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"Phenomenology and the Problem of Animal Minds"

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Attempts to determine whether nonhuman animals have minds are often thought to raise a particular sceptical concern; I call it the problem of animal minds. If there are such things as animal minds, the sceptic reasons, they will be private realms to which we humans do not have direct epistemological access. So how could one ever know for certain that animals are not mindless mechanisms? In this paper I use a phenomenological approach to show that this familiar sceptical problem presupposes an account of our relations with others which is both too individualistic and too 'mentalistic' to shed interpretative light on our relations with animals. I conclude that although inquiries into how animals experience the world raise a host of difficult problems, they do not raise one big problem, the problem of animal minds, which must be solved before any such inquiries can get off the ground.

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