

Humans and Other Animals: Challenging the Boundaries of Humanity

PUBLIC LECTURE

***Wellcome Collection Conference Centre,
Henry Wellcome Auditorium, 183 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BE***

**10th JUNE 2010
7.00P.M.**

**Professor Frans de Waal
Emory University, Atlanta, USA**

‘Prosocial Primates: Empathy in Animals and Humans’

Homo homini lupus – “man is wolf to man” - is an old Roman proverb popularized by Thomas Hobbes. Even though it permeates large parts of law, economics, and political science, the proverb fails to do justice to our species’ thoroughly social nature as well as to canids, which are among the most gregarious and cooperative animals. For the past quarter century, this cynical view has also been promoted by an influential school of biology, followers of Thomas Henry Huxley, which holds that we are born nasty as a result of “selfish” genes. Accordingly, it is only with the greatest possible effort that we can hope to become moral beings. Charles Darwin, however, saw things differently: he believed in continuity between animal social instincts and human morality. Modern psychology and neuroscience support Darwin’s view about the moral emotions.

In this lecture, the acclaimed author of *The Age of Empathy* (2009) shows how empathy comes naturally to a great variety of animals, including humans. In his work with monkeys and apes, he has found many cases of one individual coming to another's rescue in a fight, putting an arm around a previous victim of attack, or other emotional responses to the distress of others. By studying social behaviours in animals, such as bonding, the herd instinct, the forming of trusting alliances, expressions of consolation, and conflict resolution, Frans de Waal demonstrates that animals and humans are preprogrammed to reach out, questioning the assumption that humans are inherently selfish. He argues that understanding empathy's survival value in evolution can help to build a more just society based on a more accurate view of human nature.

Prof. Frans B. M. de Waal is a Dutch/American behavioural biologist known for his work on the social intelligence of primates. His first book, *Chimpanzee Politics* (1982) compared the schmoozing and scheming of chimpanzees involved in power struggles with that of human politicians. Ever since, de Waal has drawn parallels between primate and human behaviour, from peacemaking and morality to culture. His latest book is *The Age of Empathy* (2009, Harmony Books). De Waal is C. H. Candler Professor in the Psychology Department of Emory University and Director of the Living Links Center at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a member of the (US) National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. In 2007, *Time* selected him as one of the Worlds’ 100 Most Influential People Today.