

Clearly Confused Kitty

My late wife, Betty, and I used to wonder whether or not our four dogs and our old cat, John, could see the television shows we watched. We didn't expect them to understand the shows. We just wondered if they could even see the pictures. After all, we understood there were really no pictures on the screen. There were just repeating lines of dark and light and color, changing 30 times a second, that our eyes registered and our brains interpreted as moving pictures.

Would the eyes and brains of our pets recognize the same pictures we saw, we wondered?

We saw little indication at the time that our animals were aware anything was happening. They almost never noticed the sounds from the set, either. There was only one exception that we were aware of to that. One time, we noticed our long-haired, silver bitch's ears perk up when a dog on television barked; but her interest was gone in an instant. Lady, Sheila, Taka, and John didn't seem to hear it.

Since then I have become aware that not all animals are as insensitive to television as ours were. I still don't know why ours never seemed to notice anything on the screen.

Well, it doesn't matter. This video shows a computer monitor; not a television screen. I realize the details are different, but the principle is the same.

In this short video, the cat appears to recognize a toy ball on the screen. She paws the screen as if to play with it, not recognizing the picture of her younger self playing with the ball in real life.

When she can't touch the ball, but the kitten on the screen tosses it around, she quickly looks up as if to ask, "What's

going on here? Are you playing tricks on me?" Then she examines the back of the screen, apparently trying to find the ball.

I believe it was Aristotle (Or was it Socrates? No, Aristotle, I think.) who wrote that animals are like automatons, moving in a fog, and having no thought of what is actually happening around them. For almost the next 2000 years, philosophers and naturalists accepted this as fact, just because Aristotle said so. Thankfully, modern scientists don't do that. They make observations and they experiment to find out the truth. They have finally begun to realize what animal lovers knew long-ago – that mammals, birds, and at least some other animals are indeed intelligent and aware.

Nevertheless, their brains are not the same as ours, and their intelligence and awareness are not the same as ours. It is very difficult to understand their minds without anthropomorphizing them. That is, assuming that they are like our own.

Videos like this show us some of the similarities and some of the differences between their minds and ours.