



# Baboon Metaphysics: The Evolution of a Social Mind

*Dorothy L. Cheney, Robert M. Seyfarth*

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In 1838 Charles Darwin jotted in a notebook, “He who understands baboon would do more towards metaphysics than Locke.” *Baboon Metaphysics* is Dorothy L. Cheney and Robert M. Seyfarth’s fascinating response to Darwin’s challenge.

Cheney and Seyfarth set up camp in Botswana’s Okavango Delta, where they could intimately observe baboons and their social world. Baboons live in groups of up to 150, including a handful of males and eight or nine matrilineal families of females. Such numbers force baboons to form a complicated mix of short-term bonds for mating and longer-term friendships based on careful calculations of status and individual need.

But *Baboon Metaphysics* is concerned with much more than just baboons’ social organization—Cheney and Seyfarth aim to fully comprehend the intelligence that underlies it. Using innovative field experiments, the authors learn that for baboons, just as for humans, family and friends hold the key to mitigating the ill effects of grief, stress, and anxiety.

Written with a scientist’s precision and a nature-lover’s eye, *Baboon Metaphysics* gives us an unprecedented and compelling glimpse into the mind of another species.

“The vivid narrative is like a bush detective story.”—Steven Poole, *Guardian*

“*Baboon Metaphysics* is a distillation of a big chunk of academic lives. . . . It is exactly what such a book should be—full of imaginative experiments, meticulous scholarship, limpid literary style, and above all, truly important questions.”—Alison Jolly, *Science*

“Cheney and Seyfarth found that for a baboon to get on in life involves a complicated blend of short-term relationships, friendships, and careful status calculations. . . . Needless to say, the ensuing political machinations and convenient romantic dalliances in the quest to become *numero uno* rival the bard himself.”—*Science News*

“Cheney and Seyfarth’s enthusiasm is obvious, and their knowledge is vast and expressed with great clarity. All this makes *Baboon Metaphysics* a captivating read. It will get you thinking—and maybe spur you to travel to Africa to see it all for yourself.”—Asif A. Ghazanfar, *Nature*

“Through ingenious playback experiments . . . Cheney and Seyfarth have worked out many aspects of what baboons used their minds for, along with their limitations. Reading a baboon’s mind affords an excellent grasp of the dynamics of baboon society. But more than that, it bears on the evolution of the human mind and the nature of human existence.”—Nicholas Wade, *New York Times*

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