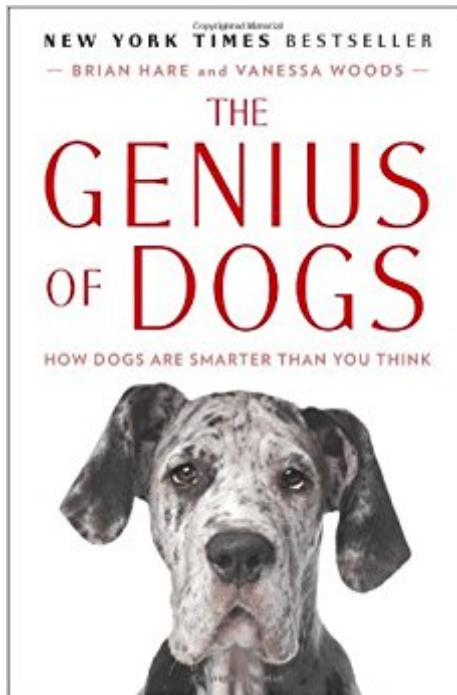


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# The Genius Of Dogs: How Dogs Are Smarter Than You Think



## Synopsis

For readers of *Inside of a Dog* by Alexandra Horowitz, this New York Times bestseller offers mesmerizing insights into the interior lives of our smartest pets. In the past decade, we have learned more about how dogs think than in the last century. Breakthroughs in cognitive science, pioneered by Brian Hare, have proven dogs have a kind of genius for getting along with people that is unique in the animal kingdom. This dog genius revolution is transforming how we live and work with our canine friends, including how we train them. Does your dog feel guilt? Is she pretending she can't hear you? Does she want affection or just your sandwich? In *The Genius of Dogs*, Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods lay out what discoveries at the Duke Canine Cognition Lab and other research facilities around the world are revealing about how your dog thinks and how we humans can have even deeper relationships with our best four-legged friends.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I bought this book because Victoria Stilwell recommended it. In fact, treat trainer that she can be, I'd love to read her honest and full review of this book if one is available... This book is really quite engaging from the beginning through halfway into the read. The essays build a case, chapter by chapter, towards the most fascinating part (in my opinion) called "Survival of the Friendliest," which looks at the evolution of dogs - and humans - in a way that I've never heard of. It really is fantastic food for thought. However, the book's title points to another supposedly revelatory finding in the area of dog cognition or "dognition." And, having finally arrived at its application for us dog owners/handlers, the section was disappointingly thin, just one chapter titled "Teaching Genius" that

runs about 30 pages. And this came at the unnecessary expense of pitting itself against Behaviorism (a.k.a. reward-based training or clicker training). There's even a section very unfortunately named "The Tyranny of Behaviorism." Really, tyranny? This poor choice of words and perspective really does the author's writing a disservice. Behavioral training has done A LOT to advance the methodologies of the everyday trainer. For generations prior, well-meaning but totally misinformed people applying Dominance theory were beating and choking their dogs half to death. The Behavioral approach has given tools that regular people (not just elite scientists and researchers) can understand and use. It's proven to work, it's safe, and has improved the relationships of many households with their pets. How is that tyranny? Better for this book had the author added dognition as an interesting, fresh, and nuanced layer to what Behavioral training has clearly accomplished. Instead, he goes in like a bullheaded academic claiming everyone else is wrong, and this undermines his efforts. Especially since: he admits there's still a lot of work to do / findings to uncover, a bunch of his examples are personal anecdotes (not rigorous science), and in some cases plainly open to interpretation. For instance, there is a big claim that dogs can spontaneously learn things and take cues from humans. But many of the examples required using a family pet or service dog or teaching a dog the setup of a particular game, which means they've all already received tons of information from humans prior to the experiment. I had a hard time seeing how this was clear evidence of "spontaneous" learning. And it was also obvious that the genius dogs that were described were certainly exceptions. I tried to get my own dog to "spontaneously" learn some vocabulary as well as use pointing gestures to clue him to hidden treats. And these didn't quite work the way the book described. Well, to be realistic, maybe I did it wrong. But that goes back to my initial critique. This concept is too new, perhaps premature, even woefully overconfident, to offer any updated training techniques, let alone assert that it has the authority to totally REPLACE a well studied and substantiated method; i.e. Behavioral training. On top of that, the dognition suggestion (especially without a proper instruction/teaching manual) that your dog "knows" to be sneaky or disobedient creeps dangerously close to the thought processes of those that still hold to the picture of the hyper-anthropomorphized dog in Dominance theory. Sure, all of our dogs can be naughty or clever in inconvenient ways, but does it help us to look at them with added suspicion, that they have a conscience that deliberately breaks the known rules? The answer is no. Until Dognition can flesh out its ideas, intention, and practices, I don't believe "The Genius of Dogs" is reading that would add to most people's training toolkits. Let me be clear. I don't recommend against reading this book, thus the fair 3-star rating. As I mentioned, the evolutionary theory is great stuff. But you must take it all in with a grain of salt. This book could have been 5 stars if the author sought

to build upon rather than bash current expertise. And certainly, if you're only beginning to read books about dogs, there are other titles I would recommend first. Like *For the Love of a Dog: Understanding Emotion in You and Your Best Friend*. Or *The Other End of the Leash: Why We Do What We Do Around Dogs*. Yes, written by a dreaded Behaviorist, but also an accomplished trainer and researcher, Patricia McConnell. Plus, these books no less take on some of the same subject matter! Just without the restrictive viewpoint.

Dog owners know their dogs are smart. Yet they were banned from animal cognition studies for years; researchers thought they must not be very bright because they were domesticated animals. But, as Brian Hare and Vanessa Woods show in this highly engaging and insightful book, dogs are really geniuses. They're not soft and dim compared to their wild wolf cousins--they're geniuses! Why? Because, as the authors write, dogs "were smart enough to come in from the cold and become part of the [human] family." Their book presents the latest studies on dog smarts, and you'll come away with a new appreciation for your pooch--and the scientists who broke away from their own pack to investigate the minds of our best and brightest friends.

Here is a book of real, cutting-edge science that will be accessible to anyone. It's reporting of genuine scholarship, it describes experiments in detail, it has graphs, and it's got seventy pages of footnotes at the end. The reason the science here goes down so easily is simply the subject matter. *The Genius of Dogs: How Dogs Are Smarter Than You Think* (Dutton) is by the founder of the Duke Canine Cognition Center Brian Hare and his wife Vanessa Woods, a research scientist at the center. It tells about how dogs got to be partners with humans with advantages to both sides, what dogs can figure out and how, what dog breeds are smartest, and much more. The book is written in the first person with Hare being the person; he affably describes how much he learned as a kid from his dog Oreo. A professor told him that chimpanzees could not understand human gestures, and Hare blurted out, "My dog can do that!" The professor didn't shut him up, but encouraged him to do research, and Oreo was his first subject. The book invites all of us to have some scientific fun learning what our dogs can do, and the authors have set up a website to help with home research that will supply broad-based data for their team. The experiments described here are fascinating, all the more so because there is a "try this at home" attitude. It is surprising how involved the research had to be in order meticulously to weed out alternative explanations. For instance, Oreo had a choice of two cups, under one of which was a treat. Naturally, Hare the experimenter had not put food under one without faking putting food under the other. He settled himself between the two

cups, and pointed to the one hiding the food. "Okay, Oreo, go find it!" he said, and Oreo went to the cup pointed at. But the experiment had to be re-done in ways that showed Oreo was not simply sniffing his way to the right cup rather than following a point. Maybe Oreo was associating the pointing hand with food and merely going to the cup closest to the pointing finger. Maybe he was just responding to a motion, with no idea that it was a point. Maybe he could respond to Hare's point but would know nothing about the point of some other human. Or maybe training and playing catch made Oreo a genius at following points, whereas an "ordinary" dog would be unable to. The fascinating experiments show that indeed, dogs understand gestures made by humans and they are born understanding, without having to be trained. There are plenty of other "genius" abilities examined here, but the key is that dogs got themselves into a niche where not only did being responsive to gesture prove directly useful (Oreo got the treat), but also it secured them in a comfortable relationship. We like it that our dogs are so "in tune" with what we are doing and that they pay us such close attention, so we take care of them. There are no other species that spontaneously read our gestures as well as dogs can, and by such means, dogs have become our partners for hunting, or leading the blind, or sniffing out bombs, or just being close, attentive friends. There are illuminating pages here on canine characteristics that will interest any dog lover. Some dogs are smarter than others, but what breeds are smarter? It is not a question that science has a current answer for (although many dog owners will propose their favorite breed as smartest); there are so many breeds, and there is little agreement about what a breed really is. There's only rudimentary research on the question so far, but it seems unlikely that there will be big differences between breeds. Are pit bulls aggressive? No, and plenty of dogs that look like pit bulls are something else entirely anyway. Can dogs feel guilt? No; experiments showed that a disapproving voice or gestures from an owner would produce subservient behavior that looked like an admission of guilt, whether the dog had done wrong or not. There's lots of news in this book, a perfect illustration of how looking at something scientifically can only increase our wonder and delight at it.

Highly entertaining and a joy to read, *The Genius of Dogs* artfully blends the remarkable and unlikely journey of dogs and humans with new insights into how dogs evolved into the highly intelligent and cooperative creatures that live and work with us in every corner of the world. Throughout, Hare and Woods share the latest and most relevant research on canine cognition, but also fascinating personal accounts from Hare's life that steered him towards researching canine cognition. Much focus is placed on the past 10 years of research which has popularized and revolutionized the way we look at dog intelligence. As a professional, science-based dog trainer, my

hope is that the information contained in The Genius of Dogs provides dog enthusiasts with a new understanding of how to help dogs navigate through the world with us successfully.

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