Can animals think? One of the first steps towards answering this question should consist in clarifying the relevant concept of thinking. For, trivially, it has to be established in advance what is up for debate: Exactly what are non-human animals supposed to be able to do or not able to do? Reinhard Brandt, in his book entitled Können Tiere denken?, is right in emphasising the importance of this conceptual—and therefore philosophical—task.

Not all concepts of thinking will do, of course. Only a few hold out the prospect of an interesting inquiry into the cognitive abilities of non-human animals. According to Brandt, we should not simply list some more or less striking similarities between cognitive operations of non-human animals and our way of thinking—similarities which at best justify the claim that animals are capable of thinking in a very rudimentary form (a thinking which might be dubbed proto-thinking or something of the like). Rather, we should isolate the core elements (or the core form) of human thinking, elements without which our thinking would be impossible, and then ask the question of whether one can find exactly these elements in non-human animals (Brandt (2009), 28ff.). We should, therefore, ask the question of whether non-human animals are able to think in the way we do. Of course, in order to be capable of thinking, it is not necessary to be able to think in all those complex forms and varieties we find in (many) humans. (Otherwise, the answer to our initial question—can animals think?—would be predetermined and hardly refutable.) But as long as we are interested in applying one concept of thinking to ourselves and to non-human animals, we should inquire into at least the core elements of human thinking in non-human animals.

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What are these core elements—or this core form? According to Brandt, the concept of *judgement* is suited for singling out the central building blocks of thinking. Simply put, judgements are the ‘mental equivalents’ of *predications*. Like elementary predicative assertions, *elementary judgements*—the primary units on the mental side—have a subject-predicate-structure of the form \( \text{a is } F \) and \( \text{a is not } F \). On this basis, the relation between thinking and judgements (or judging) which Brandt has in mind can be formulated as follows:

In order to be able to think, one has to be able to form judgements of the types \( \text{a is } F \) and \( \text{a is not } F \).

Not all mental acts and processes which deserve the title ‘thinking’ are judgements. Rather, the idea seems to be that the notion of thinking *comprises* all mental acts which presuppose the ability to form judgements. Consequently, the truth of sentences of the type “Animal X can think” presupposes the truth of the sentence “X is able to make judgements of the forms \( \text{a is } F \) and \( \text{a is not } F \)”.

In further elucidating the concept of judgement, Brandt highlights two uncontentious features of judgements (Brandt (2009), 32):

(i)  By forming judgements, we are able to refer to things (most of which belong to the external world). Therefore, by forming a judgement of the type \( \text{a is } F \) or \( \text{a is not } F \), we refer—in the case of success only, of course—to object \( a \). And in doing so, we at once predicate something of this object: that it is \( F \) or that it is not \( F \).

(ii)  Judgements have a *truth value*—they are either true or false.

Additionally, Brandt makes a claim which—in the first place—is about the *ability* to form judgements (and probably only indirectly about judgements and the concept of judgement):

(iii)  The ability to form judgements comprises the ability to ascribe properties to objects by means of judgements of the form \( \text{a is } F \) (*affirmation* (Bejahung)) and the ability to deny properties of objects by means of judgements of the form \( \text{a is not } F \) (*negation* (Verneinung)).

1. This reading is supported by the short passage: “[…] wird das Denken zwar als urteilskompetent angenommen, jedoch nicht mit dem jeweiligen Urteilsvollzug gleichgesetzt (thinking is taken as possessing the competence to form judgements but not equated with the actual manifestation of that competence) […].)” (Brandt (2009), 30, translated by G.R.)