

QUOTATION

JOSEPH ADDISON ON INSTINCT

With what Caution does the Hen provide her self a Nest in Places unfrequented, and free from Noise and Disturbance? When she has laid her Eggs in such a Manner that she can cover them, what Care does she take in turning them frequently, that all Parts may partake of the vital Warmth? When she leaves them to provide for her necessary Sustenance, how punctually does she return before they have Time to cool, and become incapable of producing an Animal? In the Summer you see her giving her self greater Freedoms, and quitting her Care for above two Hours together; but in Winter, when the Rigour of the Season would chill the Principles of Life, and destroy the young one, she grows more assiduous in her Attendance, and stays away but half the Time. When the Birth approaches, with how much Nicety and Attention does she help the Chick to break its Prison? Not to take Notice of her covering it from the Injuries of the Weather, providing it proper Nourishment, and teaching it to help it self; nor to mention her forsaking the Nest, if after the usual Time of reckoning the young one does not make its Appearance. A Chymical Operation could not be followed with greater Art or Diligence, than is seen in the hatching of a Chick; tho' there are many other Birds that shew an infinitely greater Sagacity in all the fore-mentioned Particulars.

But at the same Time the Hen, that has all this seeming Ingenuity, (which is indeed absolutely necessary for the Propagation of the Species) considered in other Respects, is without the least Glimmerings of Thought or common Sense. She mistakes a Piece of Chalk for an Egg, and sits upon it in the same Manner: She is insensible of any Increase or Diminution in the Number of those she lays: She does not distinguish between her own and those of another Species; and when the Birth appears of never so different a Bird, will cherish it for her own. In all these Circumstances, which do not carry an immediate Regard to the Subsistence of her self or her Species, she is a very Ideot.

There is not in my Opinion any thing more mysterious in Nature than this Instinct in Animals, which thus rises above Reason, and falls infinitely short of it. It cannot be accounted for by any Properties in Matter, and at the same Time works after so odd a Manner, that one cannot think it the Faculty of an intellectual Being. For my own Part, I look upon it as upon the Principle of Gravitation in Bodies, which is not to be explained by any known Qualities inherent in the Bodies themselves, nor from any Laws of Mechanism, but, according to the best Notions of the greatest Philosophers, is an immediate Impression from the first Mover, and the Divine Energy acting in the Creatures.

From: Addison, J., & Steele, R. (1965). *The Spectator* (D. F. Bond, Ed.; Vol. 1). Oxford: Oxford University, pp. 492-493. (Original work published 1711-1714.) Bond notes that the source for much of this selection was Cicero's *De natura deorum*.

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