

CAPUCHIN MONKEYS REASON ABOUT EMOTIONAL VALENCE OF AN OBJECT WHICH ELICITS CONSPECIFIC EXPRESSIONS

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Primates are characterized by a variety of facial and vocal expressions and complex social organizations. To engage in social behaviors such as coalitions, postconflict affiliation or helping behaviors, others' expressions are important cues for inferring other's emotional states and/or environmental situations. Among primates, apes have been shown to understand emotional meanings conveyed by overt expressions. Monkeys also modify their behavior according to others' emotional expressions. But do they do this based on their understanding of emotional meaning, or by other non cognitive processes? The present study investigated whether tufted capuchin monkeys, a New World monkey species, identify which object is responsible for others' expressions. Subject monkeys witnessed another individual (the model monkey) reacting either positively or negatively toward one of two containers. The other container remained closed. Then, the subjects were allowed to choose between the two containers. The subjects preferred the container that evoked positive expressions in the model and avoided the container that evoked negative expressions. This suggests that the subject monkeys appropriately associated the emotional valence of the model's expression with the container that evoked the expression. This finding is consistent with the view that representing others' emotion is not limited to humans and apes. This experiment was approved by the Committee for the Animal Experiments, Graduate School of Letters, Kyoto University.

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