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DO INVESTIGATIONS OF PRIMATE COGNITION PROMOTE PRIMATE WELFARE?

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Studies of nonhuman primate cognition and perception are traditionally justified as increasing knowledge of the mental capacities of these animals, illuminating the interconnectedness of species, and revealing the roots of human intellect. More recently, researchers have started to investigate how participation in cognitive studies impacts the welfare of their subjects. In the field of animal welfare, an event is considered “enriching” if it promotes species typical activity while also providing animals an opportunity to make choices or otherwise exert control over their environment. While the specific actions of a cognitive test may not always be “species typical” (such as using a touchscreen or joystick), the act of weighing the outcome of a particular choice is quite relevant to behavior in their natural world. Furthermore, most cognitive testing procedures are designed in such a way that the subject is presented with a series of choices, the outcome of which directly impacts their environment (food reward, tone, timeout etc). The aim of this symposium is to bring together leaders in the fields of primate cognition and animal welfare to discuss their research in this new framework. Participants will discuss a variety of topics including whether choice itself is enriching, the content of current cognitive research programs and how they may be enriching to a variety of species, and how exposing the public to cognitive research can promote primate welfare in the long term.

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