

“Representing, Reasoning, and Understanding Cause in Human and Other Animals”

Liz Camp (Rutgers)

Theorists interested in marking a strong distinction between human and other forms of animal cognition often focus on the ability to represent causal structure. Doing so requires grasping an abstract, objective fact, in a way that is both theoretically sophisticated and practically useful, insofar as it contributes to a capacity for flexible instrumental reasoning. Some such theorists have held, further, that an ability to represent causal structure requires possessing a language. I argue that non-sentential representational formats are at least as efficacious as language for representing causal structure, and that there is empirical evidence that a range of non-human animals do represent and reason about causal structure. At the same time, humans appear to be capable of understanding such structures in a deeper way, with commensurate practical effects.