

Self-awareness, and Why There is No Suicide in Nonhuman Primates

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3A94 Cottrell
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Every 40 seconds on average, someone deliberately ends their own life. As the cause of around 1,000,000 deaths worldwide each year, suicide accounts for more deaths than all wars and homicides combined: it is the leading cause of “violent” deaths. How striking then, that among our nearest evolutionary neighbours there are no known cases of deliberate, self-inflicted death. In my talk I’ll briefly present some theoretical perspectives on suicide, as well as comparative and developmental research on development of the concept of death. Focusing on cognitive processes that arise from self-awareness, including self-conscious emotions, planning, mental time travel, and contemplating alternative future events, I’ll explore not only likely reasons why suicide isn’t a major cause of death in nonhuman primates, but also why it doesn’t exist.