



## &gt;&gt; MORALITY

## Some Are More Equal

The primate preference for fairness may depend on complex social rules

**Life may not be fair**, but humans have a strong bias for fairness. In experiments, humans will generally reject or punish a partner who offers noticeably less than half of a shared reward, even if they wind up empty-handed. Chimps, it turns out, are not so picky and will (rationally, an economist might add) take whatever they can get, according to an October 2007 *Science* paper. So what could explain this difference between our closest living relatives and us?

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The answer may lie in the social relationships that influence so many of our actions. Recent studies of primate fairness seem to contradict one another—unless you consider who exactly is cheating whom.

In 2003 a provocative study led by Sarah F. Brosnan, now at Georgia State University, concluded that capuchin monkeys were exhibiting humanlike social indignation when they turned down unfair deals. The monkeys

refused to perform tasks if they saw companions getting better rewards for the same work. They threw tantrums, and their food rewards, to protest the unequal treatment.

In 2006, however, a group at American University reported the opposite result—their capuchins' behavior was not affected by the food their partners got. In response, Brosnan's group released an updated study, again showing the capuchins' penchant for fairness. But some experts are still not convinced—Clive Wynne of the University of Florida warns that the different study designs make comparisons "messy."

Brosnan argues that social relationships are more important than the other groups are accounting for. Her group found that chimpanzees were more likely to accept unfair deals from members of their social group than from outsiders. In another study, humans accepted unfair deals from computers but not from people. These results imply that relationships matter when primates judge fairness, Brosnan says, and "may explain the failure to find a response in [the *Science*] study." The chimps, in other words, may have been willing to accept the unfair offers because they came from old pals.

Studying animal fairness could ultimately help us understand human cooperation and justice—but the jury is still out. —Lucas Laursen

## &gt;&gt; STATS

## Mental Illness in America

More than a quarter of adults are afflicted

**In any given year** 26 percent of American adults suffer from mental disorders, based on guidelines in the official handbook for diagnosing mental illness, the *DSM-IV*. Only about a fifth of the cases are serious enough to cause a major disruption of everyday life, however, which has prompted some experts to call for more stringent diagnostic criteria. Others counter that tracking mild symptoms is important for preventing their escalation into more severe illness. The chart below lists many of the most prevalent mental illnesses in Americans older than 18 years, according to a 2005 survey by the National Institute of Mental Health. Nearly half of all people who have one illness also suffer from at least one more. —Peter Sergio

