

Dr. Frans de Waal, Primatologist

Post by "Cassius" of March 2, 2023 at 2:29 AM

You know I think I can precisely point out my problem with Diogenes Laertius down almost to a single word -

Diogenes Laertius:

"By preconception they mean a sort of apprehension or a right opinion or notion, or universal idea stored in the mind; that is, a recollection of an external object often presented, e.g. Such and such a thing is a man: for no sooner is the word "man" uttered than we think of his shape by an act of preconception, in which the senses take the lead. Thus, the object primarily denoted by every term is then plain and clear. And we should never have started an investigation, unless we had known what it was that we were in search of."

All he would have had to do would be to change one word - from "recollection" (which evokes a specific ideal form like Plato, or something that the individual has himself seen in his own living experience) to "recognition," which could evoke reference only to a "pattern." Because I can see the etchings of a "pattern" as something that can be transmitted by DNA across generations, just like beavers can transmit dam-building or others can transmit nest-building. Those are things that an individual can feel disposed to perform himself for the first time, even when he has never before seen an instance in his own personal experience.

I think beavers and dam-building are at least as good for an example of the physiological process than monkeys and celery. Both work and involve anticipations, but dam building strikes me as something where pleasure and pain are more remote and thus the pattern transmission across generations (to recognize dam building as a significant behavior) stands out more starkly on its own.

A critic may argue that what the monkeys are picking up with celery and grapes can be explained in terms of immediate pleasure and pain, but it is hard for me to see how beavers can see immediate pleasure or pain in looking ahead to the distant results of cutting down trees and damming creeks when the reward is far away. Something has to be born in them (at birth) that has originated gradually over many prior generations, but which will unfold over time in each new generation into a recognition of a pattern of dam-building.

A beaver does not "recall" its first dam, but it "recognizes" that dam-building can be done and it is a good pattern for it to follow.