

Is There A Relationship Between "Anticipations" and "Instinct"?

Post by "Cassius" of April 23, 2021 at 8:05 AM

Just to restate a couple of points that are (or should be) obvious:

The suggestion before the house, based on the Velleius material as highlighted by DeWitt, is that there might be "inborn" / "present at birth" dispositions toward certain activities. Not fully formed ideas, not fully formed concepts, nothing with "information" or "opinion" in it, but "dispositions" that are "etched" as it were on the brain even at birth. Or in maybe more modern term, genetic encoding that disposes animals to act in certain ways depending on circumstances that arise in life.

If so, the potential analogy would be that an innate disposition at birth for beavers to grow up and build dams would be an example of a faculty that exists at birth, etched into the brain, which then flowers into a disposition to dam-building later in life when the circumstances present themselves. As per the article Don cited, maybe the sound of flowing water inspires them, or maybe they just recognize as part of their disposition that flowing water is a necessary prerequisite to successful dam-building, and they don't try it til the flow triggers them.

Carrying the analogy forward, Velleius would be saying that the disposition to form ideas of gods exists at birth, and develops as babies age, either without outside influence (in which case the constructed ideas are less perverted) or along with outside influences. But in either case the disposition to recognize an issue as to the existence of "gods" is present at birth.

As to the other recorded example of anticipations, justice, the same analogy can be drawn. Human babies (and others maybe) are born with the disposition to recognize that there is an issue involving social arrangements to be pursued. They find later, but this is not part of the anticipation, that agreements not to harm or be harmed lead to happier living than do other arrangements (random rule of the mob or the strong). But the initial disposition / faculty was the recognition that this social structure pursuit is an activity to be recognized and pursued, just as the beaver builds dams or the human brain contemplates the nature of potential gods.

To me, it is absolutely obvious, and would be obvious to a child, that this is the potential direction that Velleius was going. Why have not these issues been pursued and investigated in great detail? I am sure that there are many reasons that we aren't finding many articles on it, but I think one reason is that Academia / the intellectual establishment is wedded to the Aristotelian "blank slate" approach, and they are opposed to looking for or finding anything that would conflict with their model, in which "education" or "nurture" is everything. It's the old "nature" vs. "nurture" debate and does in fact have lots of implications.

And so I relate this back to the picture of Epicurus and the "This is the way things are" attitude. I don't want to know only those things that make me feel good and give a warm and fuzzy feeling. Just like with the inevitability of death I think that we ought to pursue the truth wherever it leads, confident in the conclusion that we'll find better ways to live happily when we know the truth than when we don't.