

What If Anything Has Changed About Human Nature In the Last 2000 Years?

Post by “Don” of January 9, 2024 at 7:13 AM

This is my dilemma and something I'm still working through. When you say:

[Quote from Bryan](#)

It is the image that comes to mind when you think of something

Which comes first? Did the "image" arise in the mind after you "think" of something, or did you think of something and then the image arises in the mind? Or is it simultaneous? It seems there had to be a sequence, even if almost unimaginably rapid.

I fully agree that we are not born with innate images of dogs, pencils, towers, cows, etc. But it seems to me we are born with some natural ability to make sense of the world by detecting patterns in the world, at first rudimentary patterns, especially faces. Even an innate sense of what constitutes fairness or awe. The youngest of infants seem to be able to have their fascination captured by some phenomena. They'll stare at novel stimuli longer than ones they're accustomed to. Repeated exposure refines and expands those rudimentary inborn and evolutionarily developed abilities and "prolepseis." One's native language begins to label those patterns, but the patterns exist independently of language.

This is where I find the thesis of the mind as a prediction engine so fascinating. According to research, we couldn't survive if we only reacted to stimuli after receiving sense data. The snake would have already bitten us if we waited for it to strike before jumping away. We would already have fallen off the cliff if we waited until our foot felt nothing under it. Our minds - our brains inside our skulls - are constantly constructing the external world from previous sensory data and predicting the next most likely scenario. It fine tunes as data flows in, correcting the prediction, keeping us alive. The more accurate the prediction, the more accurate our prolepseis if you will, the better flow we have through the world.

This is just one of the ways I find the intersection of Epicurus's philosophy and modern science so intriguing and fascinating. The fact that I can even compare modern research with two-millennia-old theories of mind blows my mind.