

Psychology



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To what degree do you think that nonhuman animals share our capacity for semantic and episodic memory? To what degree do you think that nonhuman animals share our capacity for semantic and episodic memory? Memory is an integral part of being a living being. Its presence helps us do things in order, remember events and plan our lives ahead. Going into further detail, we find memory divided into certain categories. Long-term memory has two subtypes: procedural and declarative. The latter has further two divisions, one of them being episodic memory which deals with memory of specific events - the how, where and when incidents have happened. The second division is semantic memory which is more associated with skills and how to perform tasks (Hayes, 1991). With reference to humans, excellent semantic and episodic memory is present. We are able to remember and recall events with accordance to time, place and manner. Also, humans have the ability to learn and retain tasks and perform them successfully. Using memory is not confined to humans but also to non human animals. Considering animals, it has been difficult to prepare models to test the episodic memory of animals, which can be mainly due to the difference of level of consciousness between humans and non humans. Nevertheless the studies that have been carried out, though they have not yet been able to successfully differentiate between episodic recollection of events from semantic factual knowledge in animals; however, in the main it is assumed that animals recall incidents with no past-time orientation . A dog may be able to remember a familiar face, but would be unable to remember when or where it saw previously. Contradictory to this theory, episodic-like memory has been observed in certain birds. Experiments involving food-caching trials show that some type of birds have been able to successfully recollect the

location of their caches, while other types are also able to recall the contents of the cache. These experiments do provide us with substantial evidence that animals do not possess episodic memory as highly developed as humans but certain animals do exhibit some level of episodic-like memory. While taking semantic memory also in view, Tulving, a world-renowned experimental psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist, suggested that episodic memory is unique to humans and not found in animals. Therefore an animal responding to a stimulus for reward basis is demonstration of semantic memory rather than episodic memory (Grondin, 2008). On the other hand, other theories suggest that animals do not have enough semantic networks to develop this type of memory. Therefore their experiences are based on episodic memory. Apes however do display some sort of semantic memory through sign language which is limited to certain situations.

Combining all the above theories, we can infer that animals and humans share a very limited level of similarity in terms of semantic and episodic memory. Some theories suggest sharing of limited episodic memory while other theories completely negate it. In my opinion, the experiments carried out on birds do give us a significant idea that some sort of primitive episodic memory is present. Semantic memory requires knowledge and learning and has a rare chance of presence in animals. Since humans have the ability to communicate through language, semantic memory trails are difficult to evaluate on mere basis of behavior of animals.

Reference List

Grondin, S. (2008). Psychology of time. Emerald Group Publishing.

Hayes, N. (1991). Introduction to Cognitive Processes. Wiley-Blackwel.

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