



Universiteit Utrecht

Dies Natalis
Peace and the Struggle for Life

26 March 2013

HONORARY DOCTORATES
Professor Frans B.M. de Waal
Professor Avner Greif

Honorary doctorates



Professor Frans B.M. de Waal

Honorary Supervisor:
prof. dr. W. Koops

Professor Frans de Waal is one of the most widely known behavioral biologists of our time, with a world-wide impact, that reaches

far beyond the boundaries of his discipline. His remarkable career started when he completed a Ph.D. study at this university in 1977. It was a study on coalition formation in macaques. The theme was continued during a very fruitful post-doc period, when De Waal studied the famous chimpanzee colony of Burgers' Zoo in Arnhem. The results of this ground-breaking study became widely known in his first book "*Chimpanzee politics: Power and sex among Apes (1982)*". This book was soon translated in 15 languages, a foretoken of the even greater success of his nine later books. Its impact is nicely illustrated by the fact that in 1994 Newt Gingrich, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, recommended the book as obligatory reading for congress freshmen.

During his Arnhem chimpanzee studies De Waal made a most remarkable observation, namely that adversaries in a conflict would often engage, afterwards, in intense affiliative behavior with one another. He interpreted this process functionally as 'reconciliation'. Some skeptics with behaviorist reservations regarded this as undue anthropomorphic interpretation. However, a number of subsequent studies, also by other scientists and on various species, have shown that post-conflict affiliative contacts appear to serve to reduce post-conflict stress and to restore valued and mutually beneficial relationships that had been disrupted by a conflict between companions.

This work led to a paradigmatic change in the emphasis in sociobiological considerations. Traditionally our understanding of the evolutionary process focussed on the "the struggle for life" and on the ensuing competition that is at the basis of natural selection. The resulting "survival of the fittest" has too often been taken to mean the survival of the strongest, the most aggressive and assertive. This has led to a somewhat grotesque view on the evolutionary process that has mistakenly been reinforced by the metaphor that natural selection works at the level of "selfish genes". We have also come to know that at the level of organized individuals and populations unselfish behavior, obligingness and helpfulness can – under specified conditions – be "more fitting" than self-benefitting behavior. This is the case when authentic benevolent and unselfish behaviors act as

investments in structures, ensuring that not only the recipients but also the benefactors are, in the end, better off than the egoists and the free-loaders in a community. It is this insight that has been put on a firm empirical and theoretical basis by De Waal.

The paradigmatic shift on how evolution shapes the social, and in particular the prosocial dispositions of animals and man has profoundly influenced fellow scientists, and even more so the public at large. This is testified by the enormous impact of De Waals books, such as; *Peacemaking among primates* of 1989 "*Good natured*" of 1996 and "*The age of empathy*" of 2009. Here De Waal has eloquently argued how we begin to understand the evolutionary bases of morality.

In recent years De Waal has addressed the question what the implications of the foregoing are for cognitive capacities and their evolution. What do the social processes that are revealed by careful ethological observation in naturalistic groups and by the experimental manipulation of these, learn about aspects of "theory of mind" such as self-awareness, mental perspective taking and empathy? De Waal's experiments to probe these questions are original, simple and, at the same time, ingenious. Exemplary are his well-known experiments on a sense of fairness in capuchin monkeys. The enormous prestige he has earned globally has been impressively recognized with his nomination by *Time Magazine* in 2007 as one of the 100 most influential persons in the world. As few others De Waal has been able to bridge the gap across disciplines, between biology and the social sciences. His imaginative work highlights the strength and importance of evolutionary and functional approaches to the understanding of cognition and behavior.

Professor emeritus J.A.R.A.M. van Hooff, supervisor of de Waal during his Utrecht period, kindly supported in elucidating de Waals work

*Willem Koops,
Distinguished Professor of History and foundations of Developmental Psychology and Education
Utrecht University*

Word of thanks

Professor Frans B.M. de Waal

It is with great pride and delight that I accept this honorary doctorate from my Alma Mater. I thank the university board for the recommendation and Professor Koops for kindly presenting me with the laudatio on behalf of the university.

I sometimes joke that I attended almost all Dutch universities, which is true since we had only 5 of them when I was a student. After Nijmegen and Groningen, I joined the University of Utrecht in 1971 to work with Professor Jan van Hooff. I am very pleased to see Jan here for this ceremony.

I studied in Utrecht at a time when research on animal behavior still enjoyed pride of place on the Dutch scientific scene. I was very lucky to benefit from the enormous reservoir of expertise that existed at the time, and to take some of it along with me when I crossed the ocean to work in the U.S., putting it to good use in my work on primate behavior.

In the U.S., primate behavior is often studied by anthropologists and especially psychologists, known as comparative psychologists. I would argue, however, that the European tradition of ethology, which belongs firmly within biology, has a critically important voice. Many social scientists look at other animals as proxies for humans, calling them “animal models,” whereas most biologists are interested in animals for their own sake. We are not nearly as eager as social scientists to postulate differences between humans and other animals, and are perfectly happy to categorize humans as animals.

This perspective is now silently invading psychology via neuroscience, given how hard it is to draw a sharp boundary between the brains of humans and those of other mammals. It is a perspective that I myself like to promote by pointing out the behavioral similarities between humans and our fellow primates. Since I have been doing so for decades, I lecture for all sorts of audiences, who confirm how much the world has changed. I grew up when there was intense resistance to biological approaches to human behavior. In the 1970s, we had the controversy surrounding sociobiology, and in the Netherlands we had the “Buikhuizen affaire” -- not the proudest moment of Dutch intellectual life.

But most resistance has now evaporated, and human/animal comparisons are more accepted.

Many people are eager to hear what evolutionary biology can tell us about ourselves. It has even gotten to the point that their enthusiasm needs to be curbed, such as when people go overboard claiming that we have a “God gene,” which makes us religious, or a “gene for language.” I now often feel the urge to stress the other side, the role of learning and environment, which by the way is just as important in other species as it is in ours.

To return here and be recognized for pushing the boundary is a great pleasure. I owe much to the stimulating climate that existed at the time at “Vergelijkende Fysiologie” (Comparative Physiology) at the Jan van Galenstraat, but of course also to my many American students and collaborators as well as the funding received over the years. Leaving the Netherlands was in fact not so hard -- I left at a time of economic malaise, in the early 1980s -- but I have been back many times, and always feel welcome. I am in fact still very Dutch at heart.

Since I will speak at length about my studies in a few minutes, I don't want to take up any more time. Let me close by thanking all of the parties involved and the university for the incredible honor bestowed on me today. Since I love Utrecht, I will carry the city's colors with special pride.



Professor Avner Greif

Honorary Supervisors:
Professor Stephanie
Rosenkranz and Professor
Vincent Buskens

More than any other
species, humans are capable
to cooperate and organize
their behavior, and to utilize

systems of communication for self-expression and the exchange of ideas. They have created complex social structures, composed of various cooperating and competing groups, which range from clans or families to nations. Social interactions between humans have established a wide variety of rules, values, social norms, and rituals, which form the institutions that are at the basis of human societies.

Why do people cooperate, and why does cooperation sometimes break down? In what social structures do people cooperate, and what explains how specific social structures evolve? Under what conditions do cooperative solutions to societal problems emerge? What are the societal outcomes in terms of economic performance, or relative contributions to quality of life. How are they related to the nature of the basic institutions of cooperation? How can these institutions be improved to foster innovation and prevent economically disruptive violence? Why do some societies fail to adopt more economically successful institutions?

These and related questions are at the core of the Utrecht University's strategic theme 'Institutions', where economists, political scientists, sociologists, jurists and historians join forces to provide insight into the origins and impacts of institutions on cooperation. Prof. Avner Greif is one of the most influential scientists in this multidisciplinary field. He obtained his PhD in Economics from Northwestern University and became a professor at Stanford University in 1999. His studies on social institutions that support economic development are published in many highly cited articles, and two influential books that won him distinguished prizes and were translated into several languages. His work often set the stage for new directions as he has the very rare ability to combine detailed knowledge of historical processes with analytical approaches of modern game theory. This enabled him to successfully conduct comparative historical analysis of the relation between societal outcomes and institutional structure.

He has made pioneering contributions to the understanding of the role of institutions in the development of our modern economies, for example by meticulous-

ly studying early trade of the Maghribi Traders' Coalitions in the eleventh century Muslim world, or the Genoese Traders in the twelfth century Latin world. Moreover, he has specifically focused on understanding the role of self-enforcing cultural beliefs and cultural differences in the dynamic development of societal organization, and the adoption and stability of institutions. Avner Greif developed the perspective that social organizations and cultural traits evolve endogenously and mutually reinforce each other. The different paths of development in China and Europe, for example, can be understood by their cultural differences in their respective early histories.

With this honorary doctorate for Avner Greif, Utrecht University honors an extraordinarily inspired and resourceful scientist who has made an enormous contribution to the field of institutional economics with impact on many related fields in the social sciences.

Stephanie Rosenkranz

Professor of Multidisciplinary Microeconomics at the Faculty of Law, Economics and Governance

Vincent Buskens

Professor of Theoretical Sociology at the faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

Word of thanks

Professor Avner Greif

I would like to start by thanking the Rector and the Board for the Conferral of Doctoral Degrees. Inviting me to join the ranks of Utrecht University's graduates is a great honor.

Moreover, joining the ranks of these graduates is particularly significant for me for two reasons. First, my work has focused on the role of institutions in the process of development. This is also a research theme in Utrecht University and there are therefore many outstanding scholars working on this issue here. Among these scholars are Jan Luiten van Zanden, Maarten Prak, Bas van Bavel, Vincent Buskens, Stephanie Rosenkranz, and Werner Raub. I have learned much from their scholarship and have therefore been a virtual student of Utrecht for many years. It is an honor and pleasure to now become a formal student of Utrecht University.

Second, the city of Utrecht epitomizes the social, economic, and political transformations that transpired in Europe and motivated my work. Some centuries ago, Europe was a backward region on the edge of the vast Euro-Asian landmass. Yet, it was in Europe that the 'modern world' has first emerged. Ordinary people are no longer subjects but citizens whose voices and interests matter. Prosperity prevails and people enjoy personal freedom, live in dignity, and are rewarded based on accomplishments more than ever before.

My research seeks to understand the role of institutions in fostering or limiting such social, economic, and political transformations. There is a vast, old and wonderful scholarship on this issue and we thus know much about the details of the European institutional transition. We know, for example, that cities led Europe in developing law-based political self-governance. Specifically, as trade resumed in the late medieval period, cities grew in number, size and wealth and many of them subsequently gained self-governance at the expense of bishops and secular lords. Utrecht was among these cities and gained self-governance in 1122.

Yet, we still have much to learn about why and how this process transpired. Why did the feudal elite fail to capture the gains from trade? Why did trade expansion elsewhere not lead to similar development? How did trade expand although states had a limited capacity to protect property rights? What role did self-governed cities play in the subsequent democratic transition?

My modest contribution to addressing these questions draws on my training in micro-economic theory, the histories of non-European regions, and economic history. Professors Moshe Gil, Joel Mokyr, and Elhanan Helpman had played a large role in my training. It enables me to conduct comparative and historical institutional analyses that combine historical knowledge, empirical studies, and theoretical insights.

To illustrate, one comparative analysis has examined late medieval institutions that governed agency relations in Europe and the Muslim worlds. Another has focused on the evolution of institutions governing impersonal exchange while a current project studies the social foundations of distinct institutional trajectories in China and Europe.

Based on such comparative analyses I have joined many others in challenging the previously dominant view that markets organically emerge in response to gains from exchange, that all markets are fundamentally the same, and that the economy is either independent from or subservient to political elites or cultural heritage. The facts of the matter are more complex. Institutional, political, and cultural features inter-relate in influencing welfare-related outcomes and directing the process of institutional change. Identifying the institutional underpinning of distinct developmental trajectories thus requires a comprehensive analysis of social organizations.

Utrecht University is world-renowned in pursuing such analyses and your recognition of my contribution is thus particularly gratifying. Thank you.

Colophon

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