monkeys on a high
How drunken apes explain evolution of booze
Kenneth Rogoff's new book makes a forceful, radical pitch for embracing a ‘less cash’ economy for my gains

Cashless, not necessarily clueless

The case for 'less cash' economy
As neuroscientists have shown, the brain breaks down ethanol. This process is that among our fellow primates, there are lots of anecdotal reports of apes, birds and even elephants getting drunk on fermented fruit, not some sort of learned behavior. Instead, it’s a natural and universal instinct to get drunk.

The World Health Organization defines alcoholism as ‘...a chronic, relapsing brain disease, characterized by pathological patterns of alcohol consumption that are diverse and specific to the individual, but common to many people who have alcohol use disorder’. In the same breath, it states, ‘...alcoholism is syndicated in more than 50 countries.’

Kenneth Rogoff is the Thomas D Cabot professor of public policy at Harvard University and a consultant to the International Monetary Fund. He is the co-author of This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly (Princeton). He writes a monthly column that is syndicated in more than 50 countries.

Rogoff's authorial preoccupations have been centered rather more on the development of high-denomination currency notes. "It's the curse of cash", the economist declared in a forceful pitch for just such a radical and sweeping preservation of value in a deflationary society. And there is a big alcohol context. And there is a big alcohol context. And there is a big alcohol context.

The question of whether other people would have existed if there weren’t a bottle of alcohol is one that the modern-day human has to ponder over with every bottle of the beverage that he/ she lifts. What scientists have learned recently is that among our fellow primates, there are lots of anecdotal reports of apes, birds and even elephants getting drunk on fermented fruit, not some sort of learned behavior. Instead, it’s a natural and universal instinct to get drunk.

I n recent years, there has been a surge in the number of research papers exploring the link between alcohol consumption and brain function. This trend is driven by the growing recognition of the role of alcohol in brain development and its potential impact on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Research in this area has focused on understanding the mechanisms underlying the effects of alcohol on the brain at different stages of development, including prenatal and early childhood exposure. This research has important implications for public health, as alcohol use during pregnancy can lead to serious consequences, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs).

The link between alcohol and brain development has been explored in various animal models, including nonhuman primates and rodents. For example, studies in rhesus monkeys have shown that prenatal exposure to alcohol can lead to structural and functional abnormalities in the brain, as well as cognitive and behavioral deficits. These findings highlight the need for further research to understand the mechanisms underlying these effects and to develop effective prevention strategies.

However, the majority of research in this area has been conducted in nonhuman animals, and the extent to which these findings can be generalized to human populations remains unclear. There is a need for more research in humans, particularly in underrepresented populations, to fully understand the impact of alcohol on brain development and its implications for public health.

In conclusion, the research on the effects of alcohol on brain development highlights the importance of preventing alcohol consumption during pregnancy to protect fetal health. Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms underlying these effects and to develop effective prevention strategies. The challenge is to balance the need for public health protection with the need for individual freedom and autonomy. This requires a multidisciplinary approach involving scientists, policymakers, and community members to develop effective strategies for preventing alcohol misuse during pregnancy.