



Kim Sterelny

Kim Sterelny est australien. Né en 1950 en Nouvelle-Galles-du-Sud, dans une campagne reculée, il a grandi à Sydney et dans ses environs. Il a effectué toutes ses études jusqu'au doctorat à l'Université de Sydney. Il a enseigné dans plusieurs institutions de la côte est de l'Australie, avant d'accepter en 1988 un poste permanent à l'Université Victoria de Wellington (VUW), en Nouvelle-Zélande. En 1999, il est revenu en Australie pour travailler à mi-temps au sein de l'Ecole de Recherche en Sciences Sociales (RSSH) de l'Université Nationale Australienne de Canberra (ANU). Il est actuellement Professeur de philosophie à VUW et ANU, et partage son temps entre les deux capitales de l'Australie et de la Nouvelle-Zélande. Il a enseigné en tant que professeur invité à l'Université du Maryland, à l'Université de Northwestern, à l'Université Simon Fraser, à l'Université de Bristol et, par deux fois, à l'Institut de Technologie de Californie (Caltech).

Les recherches du Professeur Sterelny portent, depuis le début, sur l'interface entre la philosophie et les sciences de la nature, en particulier la linguistique et la psychologie cognitive. Depuis une dizaine d'années, son travail fait une part de plus en plus importante aux questions évolutionnaires.

Ouvrages de K. Sterelny

- 2008. WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY ? (AVEC J. MACLAURIN). CHICAGO : UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS.
- 2003. FROM MATING TO MENTALITY : EVALUATING EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY (ED. AVEC J. FITNESS). MACQUARIE MONOGRAPHS IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE. NEW YORK : PSYCHOLOGY PRESS.
- 2003. THOUGHT IN A HOSTILE WORLD. MALDEN, M.A : BLACKWELL, (LAKATOS PRIZE 2004).
- 2001. DAWKINS, GOULD AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST. CAMBRIDGE : ICON BOOKS. SECOND EDITION 2007.
- 2001. THE EVOLUTION OF AGENCY AND OTHER ESSAYS. CAMBRIDGE : CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.
- 1999. SEX AND DEATH : AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF BIOLOGY (AVEC P. GRIFFITHS). CHICAGO : CHICAGO UNIVERSITY PRESS.
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Conférences Jean-Nicod 2008

The Fate of the Third Chimpanzee

Conférence du 13 mai

Plasticity, Learnability, Differentiation : An Alternative Model of Evolutionary Psychology

The best known version of evolutionary psychology is inspired by Chomskian linguistics, and thus is built around a modular, nativist view of human minds; typically conjoined to some version of the social intelligence hypothesis. I agree with two of the fundamental diagnoses that lie behind this approach. First, many of the everyday problems that confront human agents have a high cognitive load. Humans respond appropriately to many ordinary challenges of life only because and to the extent that they can recognise, access and use large amounts of information, much of which is cryptic. Nativist evolutionary psychologists argue that our capacity to do this requires special explanation, and I agree. Second: there is something distinctive in the human evolutionary trajectory; a trajectory that has taken us from being a minor element in the East African fauna to a cosmopolitan distribution and an unprecedented ecological footprint. Such a trajectory cannot be explained as a response to some external stimulus like climate change, for then we would expect to see broadly similar trajectories in other lineages. The unique features of hominin evolution seem to indicate a feedback-driven, internal dynamics. The usual suggestion is that the evolution of human intelligence was driven by the threat and opportunity posed by other humans; as we became more intelligent, our social environment became more complex, which selected for further growth in intelligence. I agree that to explain human evolution, we must explain how we come to be able to solve high-load problems, and we must identify the feedback loops that drove our distinctive and unusual trajectory. But I have a different diagnosis of how these problems are to be solved. In sessions 3 and 4, I develop an alternative picture of the feedback loops which drove the evolution of our distinctive cognitive profile. In this first session I focus on the problem of cognitive load, illustrating and motivating an alternative solution. Cognitive competence can be enriched and stabilised two ways: genetically, and by engineering the learning environment of plastic learners. In my view, both are important, but the role of developmental niche construction has been neglected. I propose to correct, perhaps over-correct, this neglect.

Conférence du 15 mai

The Model in Action : Against Moral Nativism

Language, complex tool-use, extensive co-operation between non-relatives, religion and ritual are all distinctive features of the human mind. They seem to be found in no other living primate, and they seem to be features of all human cultures and of most (perhaps all) their members. We are tool-using, talking, co-operating, god-bothering apes. We are also moralising apes: arguably, making moral judgements is both typically human, and unique to humans. Recently, this has been grist for the modular nativist mill; Marc Hauser and John Mikhail (most notably) have explicitly based their models of moral cognition on language. I draw on the model developed in session 1 to build both a sceptical response to this nativist picture and an alternative analysis of moral cognition. The positive view owes much to those descendants of Hume who see moral cognition as essentially a gloss on pre-existing social emotions, but it gives a much greater role to top-down (and hence cultural) inputs.

Conférence du 20 mai

The Model in Action : Social Learning and Its Transformation

Social learning is not unique to our species; we do not differ from other primates through being able to learn from our fellows. But social learning takes a unique form in our species: we can accumulate cognitive capital. Human groups (and perhaps individual humans) inherit informational resources from the previous generation, preserve those resources effectively, sometimes add to them, and transmit them accurately to the next generation. This accumulation of cognitive resources is (i) unique; (ii) is central to the explanation of the adaptation of individual and groups to their environment (as Pete Richerson and Bob Boyd have often stressed); (iii) is central to the geographic, demographic and ecological expansion of our species; (iv) confronts human minds with novel problems of information management, both of bandwidth and of content. There has been a lively debate within the human evolution community on both the paleoanthropological signature of this novel form of culture ("behavioural modernity", as it is sometimes called) and about the specific key innovation that makes it possible. I defend the idea that the accumulation of cognitive capital is central to human evolution. But I draw upon the model developed in session 1 to argue against a "key adaptation" model of the establishment of this engine of accumulation. Instead, I argue that the origin of accumulation depended on the construction and stabilisation of social and learning environments of the right kind. Behavioural modernity depends on an innovation in epistemic engineering, not a genetic transformation.

Conférence du 21 mai

The Model in Action : Revisiting the Problem of Co-operation

This session is about the distinctive feedback loops that drove our evolutionary trajectory, and in particular, about the role of co-operation in human evolution. An important theme is that the defection problem, while real and important, has been both over-played and misdescribed. It has been overplayed: understanding how the threat of defection has been contained is not the only challenge to understanding co-operation. It has been misdescribed: in most environments, the defection problem is not one of identification but control. Instead of focusing on defection and its potential costs, I focus on the profit of co-operation, and how that profit came to be amplified over time. In discussing these issues, I develop a social intelligence-ecological complexity hybrid model. I argue that hominins have both created and responded to a unique foraging mode; a mode that is both social in itself and which has further effects on hominin social environments (so as in earlier sessions, a continuing theme is the impact of humans on their own selective and developmental environments). I compare this model to the currently popular idea that the foundational form of human co-operation was reproductive co-operation; in particular, a co-operative alliance between grandmothers and daughters that met the threat posed by increasingly seasonal human environments and which allowed those daughters to wean their infants early and often. I argue that reproductive co-operation was probably important, but only as an element of a more general co-operative syndrome. In contrast to some social intelligence models, on the model defended here, hominin encounters with their ecological environments continue to have profound selective effects. However, though the ecological environment selects, it does not select on its own. Accidents and their consequences; differential success and failure, result from the combination of the ecological environment an agent faces and the social features that enhance some opportunities and suppress others; that exacerbate some dangers and lessen others. Individuals do not face the ecological filters on their environment alone, but with others, and with the technology, information and misinformation that their social world provides.

LE DESTIN DU TROISIÈME CHIMPANZÉ (THE FATE OF THE THIRD CHIMPANZEE)

KIM STERELNY

Mardi 13 mai de 16h à 18h

PLASTICITY, LEARNABILITY, DIFFERENTIATION : AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHOLOGY

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Salle des Actes
45, rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

Remise du Prix Jean-Nicod et cocktail après la conférence.

Jeudi 15 mai de 14h à 16h

THE MODEL IN ACTION : AGAINST MORAL NATIVISM

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Salle des Actes
45, rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

Mardi 20 mai de 14h à 16h

THE MODEL IN ACTION : SOCIAL LEARNING AND ITS TRANSFORMATION

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Salle des Actes
45, rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

Mercredi 21 mai de 14h à 16h

THE MODEL IN ACTION : REVISITING THE PROBLEM OF CO-OPERATION

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Salle des Actes
45, rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

RENSEIGNEMENTS

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philosophie cognitive

Conférences Jean-Nicod de

L'esprit humain, son organisation, sa nature, ses relations avec le corps et avec le monde sont depuis toujours parmi les thèmes centraux de la philosophie. La psychologie contemporaine elle-même a pris naissance au sein de la philosophie. Elle s'est émancipée, mais l'émergence des sciences cognitives consacre d'une certaine façon le retour de la philosophie dans ce champ de recherche. Les développements de l'informatique et des neurosciences, en jetant une nouvelle lumière sur les phénomènes mentaux, ont eu pour effet de relancer le débat philosophique. La « philosophie de l'esprit » est ainsi plus florissante que jamais. Ce retour n'a rien d'une régression, car la philosophie dont il est question est en phase avec la recherche scientifique, informée par elle et en constante interaction avec elle.

Les Conférences Jean-Nicod visent à promouvoir les recherches philosophiques se rapportant à la cognition et à faire connaître en France les travaux réalisés à l'étranger dans ce domaine. Le conférencier, sélectionné par le comité Jean-Nicod, présente ses recherches au cours d'un cycle de conférences qu'il rassemble ensuite en un livre.

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COLLECTION JEAN-NICOD

(MIT Press et CNRS Editions)

J. FODOR, THE ELM AND THE EXPERT : MENTALESE AND ITS SEMANTICS (1994)
- F. DRETSKE, NATURALIZING THE MIND (1995) - J. ELSTER, STRONG FEELINGS : EMOTION, ADDICTION, AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR (1999) - J. PERRY, KNOWLEDGE, POSSIBILITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS (2001) - J. SEARLE, RATIONALITY IN ACTION (2001) - R. G. MILLIKAN, VARIETIES OF MEANING (2004) - D. DENNETT, SWEET DREAMS : PHILOSOPHICAL OBSTACLES TO A SCIENCE OF CONSCIOUSNESS (2005) - G. HARMAN AND S. KULKARNI, RELIABLE REASONING : INDUCTION AND STATISTICAL LEARNING THEORY (2007) - R. JACKENDOFF, LANGUAGE, CULTURE, CONSCIOUSNESS : ESSAYS ON MENTAL STRUCTURE (2007) - Z. W. PYLYSHYN, THINGS AND PLACES : HOW THE MIND CONNECTS WITH THE WORLD (2007).

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2008

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THE FATE OF THE THIRD CHIMPANZEE

