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SÉMINAIRE

Transmission Biases & Cumulative Culture in Human and Nonhuman Primates

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Cumulative culture requires individuals to build upon the knowledge of previous generations such that trait complexity/efficiency evolves across generations. Such cumulative cultural evolution is arguably unique to humans and is widely held to be responsible for our outstanding success in colonising virtually every terrestrial habitat on the planet and solving countless ecological, social and technological challenges. In contrast, social learning (learning from others) underlies the wide-spread occurrence of traditions or culture in all animals. Although social learning is a cheap and efficient form of learning, it is not adaptive to use social information indiscriminately due to its potential unreliability. Thus it is predicted that social learning strategies (heuristics / transmission biases) should evolve enabling individuals to avoid the costs associated with asocial learning and determine when they should use social information and from whom they should acquire it. I shall review several of my recent empirical studies, with young children and non-human primates, highlighting the role of socio-cognition, and in particular the potential role of transmission biases, in humanity's striking capacity for cumulative culture. (page web: https://www.dur.ac.uk/research/directory/staff/?id=5444)