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# Can Human sciences be applied to animal societies?

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## Abstract

Introduction, By Florent Kohler, CREDA, CNRS (France)

To say, as do geneticists and biologists, that genetic drivers or hormonal processes are at work when it comes to choosing a male reproductive partner, or to educating one's children, or to returning a blow or reciprocating a gift, is only one way of confronting the problem of sociability. If we take it as given that it is our genes that urge us to take care of our offspring, or that circuits of reward are at work as soon as a mother cares for her child, this doesn't leave much room for those who seek to understand the fundamental social tissue or what constitutes the nature of society. There is in fact a simple way of considering the respective fields of genetics, molecular biology, and the human and social sciences. Whether a circuit of reward is activated by the nursing mother, and their hormones encourage mutual attachment between mother and child,

does not in itself explain the diverse forms by which societies transpose and express these social ties. Now, it is precisely at this point when emotions and their social function are expressed that the human and social sciences step in. In other words, what makes social animals – including ourselves – so particular is the fact of having, each in our own way, translated these emotions into a socially intelligible form, as soon as they prove relevant to the life of the group: it is here that we find the very foundation of what we call "culture". The extension of this notion of culture to the animal world appeared once we had to admit that not everything in animal behaviour was genetic in origin, but that there were also behaviours and even innovations that were socially transmitted. Within this framework, culture means that which is socially acquired (in classic opposition to that which is innate), emotions and its expression being the vehicle of social communication and understanding.

The main aim of this session will be to crosscheck the heuristic value of disciplines such as Field Ethology, History, Sociology, Geography and Anthropology to understand how Human categories as Labour, Gender, Sexual Division of Work, Transmission of Techniques and Experiences, Friendship, Mourning, and other ritualized forms of social links can be applied to

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animal societies, especially mammals.

First communication: Grant Goodrich, The Citadel, USA. "Culturally Constructed Concepts in Animals"

Abstract: The last couple of decades have seen an increased interest in the study of culture in animals. Researchers studying culture in animals have noted that the general notion 'culture' is broad enough to include many underlying mechanisms. This raises the possibility that not all kinds of culture are shared between humans and animals. The study of concepts in animals is also an active area of research. Unlike human subjects, researchers rarely ask whether animal concepts are socially constructed or otherwise influenced by the animal's culture (supposing that one exists). In this talk I will argue for the heuristic attribution of socially constructed concepts in animals, and I will consider how supposing that some animals' concepts are socially constructed can inform both the study of culture in animals and also the study of animal concepts.

Second communication: Irina Meketa, Boston University, "The Pragmatics of Nonhuman Friendships"

Abstract: What guides the application of cultural terms to social relationships found among nonhuman animals? In this talk, I focus on how the concept of "friendship" might be used to characterize a species of affiliative bond among nonhuman animals, and show how the presumption in favor of simple cognitive ontologies has forestalled attributions of friendship to some animals. As my case study, I use putative friendships among bottlenose dolphins. I then argue that assessing when and whether concepts from human society may be extended to nonhuman animals requires a pragmatic approach: since human social concepts are inextricably normative (e.g., "friendship," "romantic partnership," "rape,"), they may only be extended to the nonhuman domain when the normative element may be attributed to the animals as well. Conversely, when the relevant normative elements are present (e.g., when the bonds among two animals includes a set of mutually-owed responsibilities, such as consolation after an aggressive bout with a third party), failing to confer the title of friendship to that relationship is an oversight. This is because, even when concepts such as "friendship" fail to add explanatory or predictive value, they always add heuristic value by organizing a variety of disparate behaviors and affective states under a single conceptual umbrella.

Third communication: Colin Allen, Indiana University "Social networks and animal behavior"

Abstract: Scientists studying animal sociality have not ignored the growth of "network science". For example, Barocas et al. (2011) argue for a link between centrality in a social network and longevity in hyraxes, and Lea et al. (2010) argue that position in agonistic networks may, counterintuitively, provide heritable fitness benefits to marmots who are the recipients of aggression rather than to those who are initiators of it. To what extent, if at all, does network science move the study of animal sociality simultaneously towards the human sciences and towards the exact sciences?

Fourth communication: Olivia Sultanescu, York University, Canada, "Social constructionism and theory of mind"

Abstract: Despite a widespread concern among animal cognition researchers with the issue of conceptuality in other species, the question of whether other species possess concepts that are *socially* constructed has not received much attention. In my talk, I will approach the possibility that the concept of *mind* as well as related concepts such as *belief* and *desire* be socially constructed. More specifically, I will address the question of whether the possibility that other species (in particular, other primates) possess a concept of *mind* that is fundamentally different than the one belonging to our standard folk psychological theory (due to it being contingent on practices of a different nature) has any significant consequences on the methodology of current theory of mind research in other species.

