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978-0-521-76948-8 - Human Evolution and the Origins of Hierarchies: The State of Nature

Benoit Dubreuil

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HUMAN EVOLUTION AND THE ORIGINS OF HIERARCHIES

In this book, Benoît Dubreuil explores the creation and destruction of hierarchies in human evolution. Combining the methods of archaeology, anthropology, cognitive neuroscience, and primatology, he offers a natural history of hierarchies from the point of view of both cultural and biological evolution. This volume explains why dominance hierarchies typical of primate societies disappeared in the human lineage and why the emergence of large-scale societies during the Neolithic period implied increased social differentiation, the creation of status hierarchies, and, eventually, political centralization.

Benoît Dubreuil is a postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Philosophy of the Université du Québec à Montréal. His work on moral philosophy, philosophy of science, and cognitive evolution has been published in *Biology and Philosophy*, *Current Anthropology*, *Philosophical Explorations*, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, and *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*.

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The State of Nature

BENOÎT DUBREUIL

Université du Québec à Montréal



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PREFACE

I FIRST IMAGINED WRITING THIS BOOK WHEN I ENROLLED AS A graduate student in political philosophy. I was fascinated by the state as a form of political organization and was determined to dedicate my dissertation to it. The most fashionable stance in the literature at that time – in both political science and political philosophy – was to emphasize the contingent nature of the institution that interested me so much. The state, especially the modern state, was presented as the outcome of a particular history; namely, that of Western civilization during the last five centuries. The world to come, here went the influential tenet, would be one in which the state as we know it would vanish and make way for new forms of “global governance.” In this new era of post-sovereignty, the old Westphalian concepts familiar to us moderns would become unrecognizable.

When I began writing this book, my primary intention was to defend a different view. I wished not to deny that the modern state was in some unquestionable way the contingent outcome of a historical process, but instead, to explore if in another sensible way, it could also result from some robust causes, inseparable from what we are as human beings. Modern political philosophers aspired to understand how the state – or civil society – was taking the human out of the state of nature. In contrast, my objective was to show how the state itself was a part of nature – of our nature.

This naturalist agenda implied that I move quite rapidly beyond my original training in political philosophy and come to grips with the wide range of data and theories relevant to my inquiry. More precisely, it implied having an understanding of variations in social and political organization in humans, of the functioning of the human mind, and of the evolution of both mind and society. Saying that this was an

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ambitious program is an understatement, and saying that it can be achieved to perfection would be a lie. Yet in an academic world driven by specialization, many still think that there is a place for large syntheses. This is one of them.

I am grateful to many people who have played a crucial role at different stages of this project. Jean-Marc Ferry was intrepid enough to accept the supervision of a dissertation project that was certainly unconventional and would have been regarded as pretentious by many. I thank him for his constant support. I also thank Joseph Heath, who brought me to understand early on that the debate on the foundation of normativity should play a central role in my argument, and Luc Faucher, who has supported my integration of the philosophy of cognitive science.

At the Université libre de Bruxelles, Emmanuelle Danblon, Robert Legros, and Marc Groenen provided useful hints and comments on the dissertation from which this book is an outgrowth. At the Université de Montréal, I am especially grateful to Michel Seymour, who read and commented extensively on several versions of my arguments. I also benefited from colleagues who commented on different versions of the manuscript or with whom I discussed important parts of the argument. I am especially indebted to Dave Ancil, Nicolas Baumard, Raul Magni Berton, Mathieu Bock-Côté, Denis Bouchard, Ludovic Chevalier, Christine Clavien, Francesco d'Errico, Jean-François Grégoire, Benoit Hardy-Vallée, Christopher Henshilwood, Hugo Mercier, Olivier Morin, Christian Nadeau, David Robichaud, and Patrick Turmel.

Parts of the ideas discussed in this book were presented to audiences at the SOPHA Congress in Aix-en-Provence, Evolang 7 in Barcelona, the Workshop on Naturalism in the Social Sciences in Paris, the Naturalism Workshop in Kazimierz Dolny, the Symposium on *Homo symbolicus* in Cape Town, and at invited talks at the Université du Québec à Montréal and the Université de Montréal. I thank the participants for their helpful comments and discussions.

Earlier and slightly different versions of some of the ideas also were published elsewhere. The argument of Section 1.2 overlaps with that of "Punitive Emotions and Norm Violations," *Philosophical Explorations* 13:1 (2010). A sketch of Sections 2.5 and 2.6 was presented in "Paleolithic Public Goods Games: Why Human Cooperation and Culture Did Not Evolve in One Step," *Biology & Philosophy* 25:1 (2010). Finally, the ideas of Section 4.5 overlap with the argument of "Strong Reciprocity and the Emergence of Large-Scale Societies," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 38:2

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I also would like to acknowledge the generous support that I received throughout my research from Belgian Fonds de la recherche scientifique, the Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I am grateful to Beatrice Rehl and Amanda J. Smith of Cambridge University Press for their enthusiasm and support for this book. Two reviewers provided particularly generous comments that helped me improve several features of the manuscript. Special thanks also go to Chad Horne and Aviva Shiller, who edited the manuscript, thereby helping me overcome my linguistic limitations.

My greatest debt is to my family, whose support, I can attest, has been unconditional. Thanks to my mother, father, and brothers for their encouragement, and especially to Marie-Pierre and our children, Camille and Eugène, for their affection and for joyfully distracting me from my theoretical imaginings of our shared past and future.