



Call for Applications

“The comparative anthropology of worlding”

A masterclass beyond disciplinary boundaries with Philippe Descola

Date: June 7-11th, 2020

Venue: Forum Scientiarum, University of Tübingen, Germany

Application Deadline: March 15th, 2020

Organization: Niels Weidtmann and Michael Herrmann, University of Tübingen, Germany

The masterclass is funded by the Udo Keller Stiftung Forum Humanum.

Topic

“The comparative anthropology of worlding”

Anthropologist Philippe Descola says of himself that he was ill-prepared for the field work for which he lived with the Achuar in Ecuador in the 1980s. Poorly prepared, however, not because of his own failings, but because of the self-evident way in which he took for granted the distinction between nature and culture at that time - a distinction which anthropology has always worked with and which had hardly ever been seriously questioned until then. The matter-of-course nature of this distinction, however, not only prevented (and still prevents) a genuine understanding of societies such as that of the Achuar, but also suggests a fatal misunderstanding of these societies. Since nature and culture cannot be easily separated in their case, they are called “primitive peoples”, who still remain in the prehistoric and pre-cultural stage of human development. Descola points out that such a description is completely mistaken. Instead of being trapped in their immediate natural environment, the Achuar recognise in most animals and plants their own personalities with whom they can communicate at least rudimentarily and whose interests they must respect. The nature-culture-border does not carry here.

Committed to the descriptive method of anthropology, Descola pleads to discard any form of ontological preconception when visiting foreign societies. The different life-worlds are not adequately understood if they are merely classified as different cultural interpretations of “the” one nature. Instead, the life-worlds, for their part, first establish the ontology and thus also the understanding of man and the world that corresponds to them. Descola summarizes this with the term “worlding”. He names four different forms of such worlding: naturalism, animism, totemism, and analogism. The ontology of naturalism, which is generally assumed by modern sciences, is on an equal footing with the other forms. Which ontology is valid is determined by the life-world, but not does a presupposed ontology give the correct understanding of the life-world.

In political terms, Descola opens up new possibilities for linking the rights of nature not only to the resource requirements of man. But how is it possible to give non-humans access to the political sphere? What does that mean with respect to current debates on climate change and conservation? A philosophical difficulty that arises from Descola's work can be summarized in the question of the



possibility of plural ontologies. How do we escape the arbitrariness of relativism without simply assuming a universalism again? Furthermore, are there other forms of worlding besides those pointed out by Descola? Shall we conceive them as four completely separate categories to describe the continuities and discontinuities between humans and non-humans? Or are they rather something like Weberian ideal types – useful for thinking, but hard to turn into iron boxes?

These and other questions we would like to explore in the Masterclass.

Organisation

This masterclass will enable discussions with Philippe Descola about his ideas and contributions across several themes. It will be of interest to participants from a wide range of disciplines. There will be an opening session on day one. Day two to four will consist of an initial overview paper by Professor Descola, which is followed by participant contributions and discussions. The school ends with a closing session and a wrap-up of topics on day five. Participants are also invited to attend a public lecture by Philippe Descola during the week.

Participants must present a 15-minute paper that critically discusses one of the themes and/or questions of the masterclass. Engagement with current research questions and issues are particularly welcome as well as connections with current PhD projects.

Application

This masterclass is open to doctoral students from all disciplines (applications of master students will be considered in exceptional cases).

Applicants should supply the following documents:

- Application form (available here: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/de/148503>)
- CV (2 pages max)
- 300-word expression of interest
- paper title and 300-word abstract

Applications should be sent until **March 15th** the latest to info@fsci.uni-tuebingen.de or to our postal address:

FORUM SCIENTIARUM
Doblerstr. 33
D-72074 Tübingen
Germany

A letter of admission will reach successful applicants by the end of March.

There is no program fee. The Forum Scientiarum is provided a limited fund by the Udo Keller Foundation Forum Humanum for supporting travel expenses. In case you cannot get any funding of your home University please indicate the need for partial financial support when handing in your application.

The Forum Scientiarum will assist participants in finding inexpensive accommodation. For more information please see our website (www.forum-scientiarum.uni-tuebingen.de).



Biographies

Philippe Descola is Professor of Anthropology, a student of Claude Lévi-Strauss and his successor at the prestigious Collège de France. He received the Golden as well as the Silver Medal from the Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and is a Commander of the Legion of Honour. He has been elected a foreign member, both of the British Academy and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Important books include:

- *La Nature domestique*, 1986, new edition 2019; (English: *In the Society of Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- *Les Lances du crépuscule*, 1993; (English : *The Spears of Twilight*, The New Press, New York & Harper Collins, London, 1996 ; German : *Leben und Sterben in Amazonien*, Klett und Cotta, Stuttgart, 1996, reprint: Suhrkamp, Berlin 2011).
- Together with Gísli Pálsson: *Nature and Society. Anthropological Perspectives*. Routledge, London 2004.
- *Par-delà nature et culture*, 2005, édition folio essais, 2015; (German: *Jenseits von Natur und Kultur*, Suhrkamp, Berlin, 2011; English: *Beyond Nature and Culture*, The University of Chicago Press, 2013).
- *Diversité des natures, diversité des cultures*. Bayard, Paris, collection 'Les petites conférences' 2010; (initially intended for children from 8 to 13 years, in the spirit of Walter Benjamin's radio broadcast in Berlin 'Aufklärer für Kinder').
- *L'écologie des autres*. 2011; (English: *The Ecology of others*, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2013 ; German : *Die Ökologie der Anderen*, Matthes & Seitz, Berlin, 2014).
- Together with Tim Ingold: *Être au monde. Quelle expérience commune?* Presse universitaire de Lyon, 2014.
- *La Composition des mondes*. Entretiens avec Pierre Charbonnier, Paris, Flammarion, 2014.
- *Une Écologie des relations*, Paris, CNRS Éditions, 'Les grandes voix de la recherche', 2019.

Niels Weidtmann is Director of the interdisciplinary institute Forum Scientiarum at the University of Tübingen. Niels does research in intercultural philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics and philosophical anthropology. Niels has held a guest professorship at the University of Vienna in 2016. He is author of a couple of books and has published a wide range of articles. He is president of the Society of Intercultural Philosophy.