The Phylogeny and Ontogeny of Deductive Reasoning as Cultural Phenomena

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This talk will present a dialogical account of deductive reasoning (narrowly construed, as involving necessary truth-preservation), focusing both on its ontogeny – the onset of deductive reasoning in an individual reasoner – and its phylogeny – the historical emergence of the concept of deduction in Ancient Greece. In a slogan, the main claim of the paper is: when it comes to deduction, we may say that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. In both cases, we seem to be dealing with cultural, social phenomena; in particular, deductive reasoning skills must be trained for to be mastered (typically, in the context of formal schooling), as they do not arise spontaneously in untrained reasoners. But I will also argue that some ‘mundane’ forms of dialogical interaction such as story-telling and adversarial betting may also cue untrained reasoners to perform closer to the deductive canons. This is so precisely in virtue of the inherent dialogical nature of deductive reasoning.