

Origins of Human Communication

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This volume is based on the Jean Nicod Lectures delivered in Paris in the Spring of 2006. Given the people at the Jean Nicod institute, I chose to focus on communication. I have done a fair amount of empirical and theoretical work on: (i) great ape gestural communication; (ii) human infants' gestural communication; and (iii) human children's early language development. I have also worked a good bit on more general cognitive and social-cognitive processes involved in human communication and language: (i) social and cultural cognition; (ii) social and cultural learning; and (iii) cooperation and shared intentionality. My attempt in this volume is to bring all of this together into one coherent account of the evolution and development of human communication. The single animating idea of this attempt is that there must be some fairly specific connections between the fundamentally cooperative structure of human communication, as initially discovered by Grice, and the especially cooperative structure of human, as opposed to other primate, social interaction and culture in general.

The ideas in this volume have come mainly from my cooperative research and discussions with my many colleagues in the Department of Developmental and Comparative Psychology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Much of what is presented here originated in these interactions, and I only wish I could recall all of the particular sources more clearly.

But what is clear is the large debt I owe to several specific people. Most important in the context of this volume is Malinda Carpenter. Malinda and I have discussions on almost a daily basis about topics that relate to the current volume more or less directly. My thinking has been shaped by these discussions in such fundamental ways that, unfortunately, it is impossible to give specific credit for specific things (or to indicate all those points with which Malinda disagrees). Also of particular importance were the many discussions I have had over the years with Josep Call about great ape gestural communication, and with Elena Lieven about child language acquisition.

I presented an early version of the ideas in this volume to the members of our social cognition research group (the infamous September Sessions), and received extremely helpful feedback from Hannes Rakoczy, Tanya Behne, Henrike Moll, Ulf Liszkowski, Felix Warneken, Emily Wyman, Suse Grassman, Kristin Liebal, Maria Gräfenhein, Gerlin Hauser, and others—including the suggestion to leave out a number of diagrams even crazier than those that are currently here. I also received a number

of useful suggestions from the attendees at the Jean Nicod Lectures themselves, especially Dan Sperber.

Several people read more or less the entire volume and helped me to improve it immensely: Malinda Carpenter, Elena Lieven, Bill Croft, Adele Goldberg, and Gina Conti-Ramsden—along with an anonymous reviewer for MIT Press. Others who read selected portions and gave valuable feedback as well are: Hannes Rakoczy, Henrike Moll, Joe Henrich, Danielle Matthews, Nausicaa Pouscoulous, Felix Warneken, Colin Bannard, Emily Wyman, and Kristin Liebal. The thoughtful criticisms of these readers have made this a much more empirically accurate, theoretically coherent, and user-friendly volume. I also thank Esteban Rivas for supplying me with helpful information for table 6.1.

Finally, as always, is Henriette Zeidler, who not only helped with several specific aspects of the book, but also ran things at the department with her usual skill and good cheer while I was home writing. I am also grateful to Annette Witzmann for help with the references, and to Tom Stone at MIT Press for his oversight of the entire publication process.

