

# **Predicative Minds**

**The Social Ontogeny of Propositional Thinking**

**Radu J. Bogdan**

**A Bradford Book**

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## Preface

About fifteen years ago, I joined a growing group of psychologists and a few philosophers in the realization that naive psychology (or theory of mind) is a basic mental competence that evolved to represent and make sense of other minds and our own. That realization eventually went into a book (Bogdan 1997). Work on that book brought the further realization, shared by a much smaller group of developmental psychologists, that naive psychology is also a mind designer, as it enables, often generates, and even shapes a host of other mental faculties, and in particular reflexive thinking or thinking about our own thoughts. This new realization, too, went into a book (Bogdan 2000). This book continues the mind-design theme of the second book, actually a variation of it, as it explores the predicative roots of human thinking.

Predication is construed here as a mental competence—apparently uniquely human—that is exercised intently when one attributes explicitly a property to an object, an action to an agent, a relation to two or more objects, and so on. As far as I can tell, predication is a rather surprising competence, in philosophical, psychological, and evolutionary terms. It cannot be explained by just having and applying concepts, possessing a language, with its grammar, semantics, and pragmatics, or exercising other mental faculties, such as learning, attention, or perception. The capacity to predicate appears to be neither innate nor learned, yet it is universal among humans. And somehow, predication manages to produce thoughts and sentences that are more than the sum of their parts. Puzzling in its properties and history, the mental competence for predication still awaits a coherent and plausible explanation. This book takes up the challenge by inquiring into its developmental origins and *raison d'être*.

Although not a psychologist, I find that development—more than intuitions or conceptual analysis, the usual tools of the philosopher, or the abstract and functional boxes-and-arrows models of the cognitive

scientist—provides a most useful and systematic angle from which to figure out the design of the human mind in general and the predicative design of human thinking in particular. Predication, it turns out, is not only an outcome of development, as everything in an organism is, but also and essentially a by-product of uniquely human features of development, some of them quite unrelated to representation, cognition, and thinking. This truth, I think, would not have become apparent without a close look at development. If the human mind is unique, it is because human mental development is unique. The development of the competence for predication reflects this uniqueness by drawing on and blending several disparate and equally remarkable abilities, also explored in some detail here, such as intersubjective coregulation, communicating meanings, representing reference, and acquiring words. This developmental cocktail opens an unequalled window on the early design of the human mind.

The writing of this book overlapped with an unexpected and dramatic period in Catalina's and my life (and that of so many other people), during which the solidarity, warmth, and support of many friends (and also good-hearted strangers) enabled us to carry on with our life and work, almost normally. In the order of our peregrinations, our heartfelt thanks go to Jeannie and Richard Lee (in Fayetteville, Arkansas), Adrienne and Keith Lehrer as well as David Schmitz (in Tucson, Arizona), and Barbara Moely and Harvey Green (on return in New Orleans). From a distance but as close in spirit and friendship, the constantly warm and supportive Helen Seidler and Owen Mitz, Alice ter Meulen, Luca Mezincescu, Gina and Sorel Vieru, and my sister Adriana watched over our well-being and helped in all sorts of ways, earning our warm gratitude. During this turbulent period, I lost my dear uncle, a second father to me. I miss him very much. I dedicate this book to his memory and to all these good people, who cared deeply when it mattered.

Many other people, in different places, deserve our thanks for their sensitivity and help. I am thinking in particular of those good souls in Tucson who did their best to make us feel at home for a few months—in particular, Lilian Jacques and John Pollock, Chris Maloney, and Massimo Piatelli-Palmarini (whose sonorous and melodic name I always wanted to appropriate, with no success so far).

On a professional level, I want to thank those who read or heard and commented on fragments and ideas of this book—especially Keith Lehrer and David Olson, anonymous reviewers of the manuscript, and audiences at the University of Arizona, the University of Bucharest (and Mircea

Dumitru and Sorin Vieru in particular), the Institut Jean Nicod in Paris (and Pierre Jacob in particular), and in Turkey, Bilkent University, the Middle Eastern Technical University (both in Ankara), Bogazici University (and Ilhan Inan in particular), and Koc University (both in Istanbul).

I want also to thank the MIT Press team for a very fine job at each stage in the development of this book: senior editor Tom Stone, for his constant interest in and support of the project, copyeditor Cindy Milstein for carefully dotting the right i's throughout the manuscript, and production editor Deborah Cantor-Adams for helpfully and graciously putting all the pieces together.

During the final writing of this book, Bilkent University and my colleagues in philosophy and psychology provided a congenial, stimulating, and pleasant place to live and work, for which Catalina and I are grateful. *Tesekkür ederim!*