

Communication and Cooperation

Why do humans alone acquire language?

Summarising Tomasello's (2008) argument



Humans alone acquire(d) language because we alone are capable of 'Gricean cooperative communication'. This requires:

- (1) **Gricean communicative intentions** (via Grice 1989)
- (2) **Joint action** (via Bratman 1999)
- (3) **Cooperative reasoning** (via Grice 1989)

Challenges to Tomasello's (2008) argument

Accepting (1) and (2) requires either:

- (a) accepting that ToM is present prior to infants' first words (\approx 14 months), or
- (b) accepting **deflationary accounts of cognition** required for (1) and (2).

However, accepting (b) may jeopardise an explanation of why humans alone acquire language.



Why do humans alone acquire language?

Two further claims to be explored:

- Differences in **social attention**? (Week 8)
- Differences in a capacity for **syntax use**?
(Week 9)



A residual puzzle

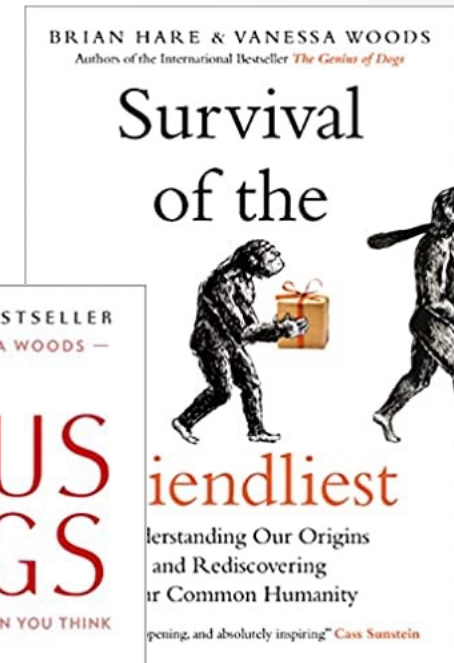
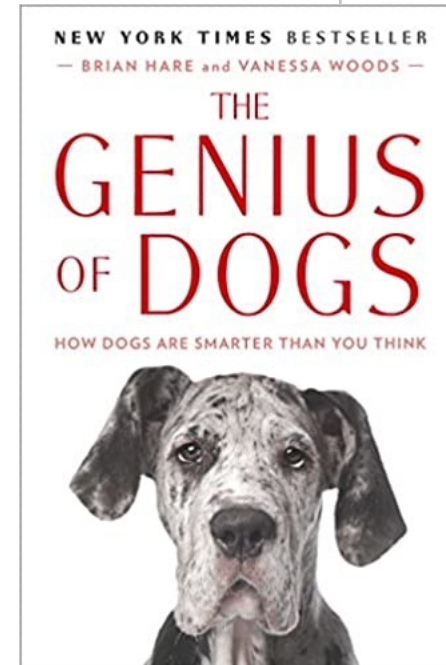
Where do dogs fit in?

Are dogs cooperative communicators? (Hare & Woods 2014, 2021)

Yes – because they understand **informative pointing**, and have **shared evolutionary history** with humans.

- Not claimed to be Gricean communicators
- Or capable of cooperative reasoning

Do Hare et al. have an intermediate position in mind? If so, how do dog and chimpanzee mechanisms compare?



References

Bratman M (1999) Faces of intention: Selected essays on intention and agency. Cambridge UP.

Grice HP (1989) Studies in the way of words. Harvard UP.

Hare B, Woods V (2014) The genius of dogs: Discovering the unique intelligence of man's best friend.

Hare B, Woods V (2021) Survival of the friendliest: Understanding our origins and rediscovering our common humanity. Random House.