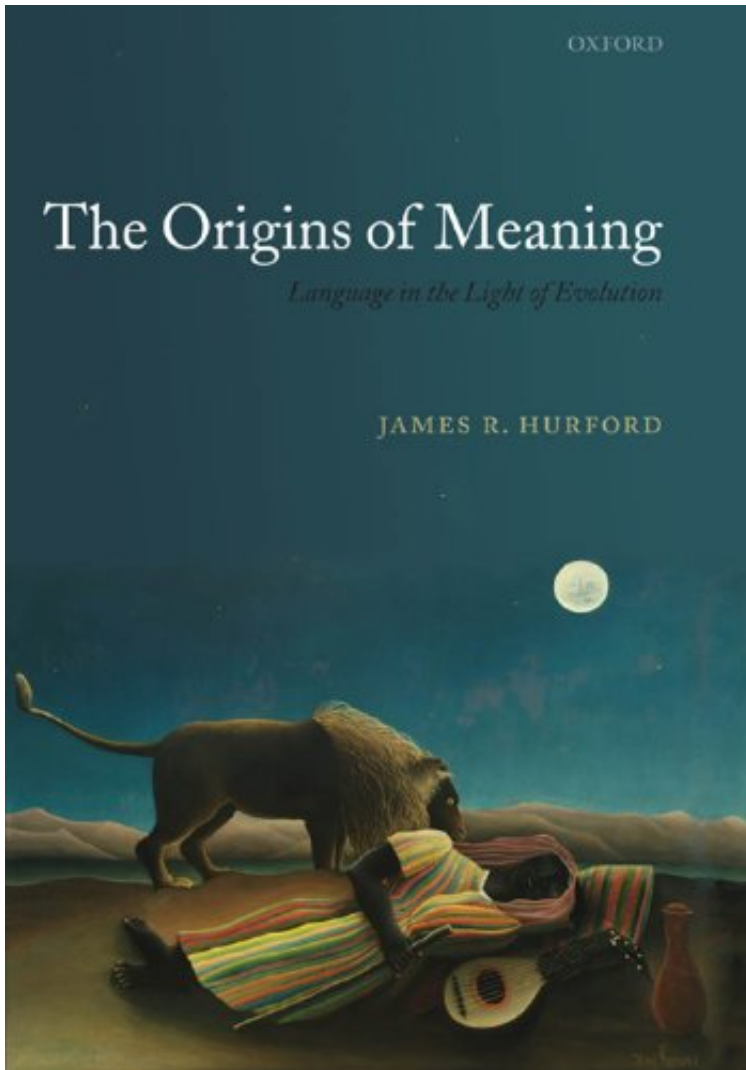


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The Origins of Meaning: Language in the Light of Evolution



Par James R. Hurford
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn this, the first of two ground-breaking volumes on the nature of language in the light of the way it evolved, James Hurford looks at how the world first came to have a meaning in the minds of animals and how in humans this meaning eventually came to be expressed as language. He reviews a mass of evidence to show how close some animals, especially primates and more especially apes, are to the brink of human language. Apes may not talk to us but they construct richcognitive representations of the world around them, and here, he shows, are the evolutionary seeds of abstract thought - the means of referring to objects, the memory of events, even elements of the propositional thinking philosophers have hitherto reserved for humans. What then, he asks, is theevolutionary path between the non-speaking minds of apes

and our own speaking minds? Why don't apes communicate the richness of their thoughts to each other?

Why do humans alone have a unique disposition to reveal their thoughts in complex detail? Professor Hurford searches a wide range of evidence for the answers to these central questions, including degrees of trust, the role of hormones, the ability to read minds, and the willingness to cooperate. Expressing himself congenially in consistently colloquial language the author builds up a vivid picture of how mind, language, and meaning evolved over millions of years. His book is a landmark contribution to the understanding of linguistic and thinking processes, and the fullest account yet published of the evolution of language and communication. "A wonderful read - lucid, informative, and entertaining, while at the same time never talking down to the reader by sacrificing argumentation for the sake of 'simplicity'. Likely to be heralded as the major publication dealing with language evolution to date. Frederick J. Newmeyer, University of Washington

Revue de presse this is a model exercise in how substantial theorizing about language evolution can be achieved. It is entertainingly written but not oversimplistic, interdisciplinary but not at the expense of rigor; and [Hurford] is open about the limits of his own expertise, yet never afraid to stretch them. He is to be congratulated on formulating insights that he offers with a precision that makes disagreement, hence advances, possible ... this is a delightful and thought-provoking read. [Hurford] has set in train a rich vein of research that continues to provide an unceasing flow of insights. I warmly recommend it and very much look forward to its follow-up volume. (Ruth Kempson, *Language*) we are fortunate when scholars like Hurford... offer us carefully constructed proposals based on years of toil... both accessible and respectful of the reader's intelligence. (N.J. Enfield, *Times Literary Supplement*) very readable and satisfying book... admirably persuasive and thought provoking... (Grover Hudson, *Linguistlist*) Has Hurford achieved his goal of describing the evolutionary foundations of language? Yes, elegantly and in accomplished detail. (Nature) valuable (Roy Harris, *Times Higher Education Supplement*) A wonderful read - lucid, informative, and entertaining, while at the same time never talking down to the reader by sacrificing argumentation for the sake of "simplicity". It is likely to be heralded as the major publication dealing with language evolution to date. (Frederick J. Newmeyer, University of Washington) Hurford's aim is nothing less than to bring language into Darwin's reach. Many attempts to press natural selection into innovative service fail through too analogical an approach failing to mesh with the realities of some other discipline. Hurford's sheer practicality and professional appreciation of modern biology have produced a work of the highest academic seriousness that would without question have delighted Darwin himself. The project can fairly be described as the abolition of the division between linguistics and biology, and has significant broad implications for philosophers and social scientists, as well as more focussed ones for biologists, linguists and anthropologists. (Alan Grafen, Professor of Theoretical Biology, University of Oxford) To explain the evolution of language, one must explain the evolution of both a system of communication and a system of thought - a way of representing and communicating about the world. In *The Origins of Meaning*, James Hurford does just this. Writing as a linguist, he clarifies for biologists the complexities that must be explained in an evolutionary account of language, while at the same time illuminating for his colleagues in linguistics the rich communicative and representational abilities of animals - from which we can begin to reconstruct the semantic and pragmatic origins of language. *The Origins of Meaning* is synthetic, provocative, and intellectually rich. (Robert Seyfarth, professor of psychology, University of Pennsylvania, and co-author of *Baboon Metaphysics*.) [a] fascinating examination... (Morning Star)... a unique, interdisciplinary story of the development of language as we know it today... Hurford is undoubtedly comfortable with his subject matter. He weaves science and theory together expertly. (Science and Spirit) Presentation de l'auteur In this, the first of two ground-breaking volumes on the nature of language in the light of the way it evolved, James Hurford looks at how the world first came to have a meaning in the minds of animals and how in humans this meaning eventually came to be expressed as language. He reviews a mass of evidence to show how close some animals, especially primates and more especially apes, are to the brink of human language. Apes may not talk to us but they construct rich cognitive representations of the world around them, and here, he shows, are the evolutionary seeds of abstract thought - the means of referring to objects, the memory of events, even elements of the propositional thinking philosophers have hitherto reserved for humans. What then, he asks, is the evolutionary path between the non-speaking minds of apes and our own speaking minds? Why don't apes communicate the richness of their thoughts to each other? Why do humans alone have a unique disposition to reveal their thoughts in complex detail? Professor Hurford searches a wide range of evidence for the answers to these central questions, including degrees of trust, the role of hormones, the ability to read minds, and the willingness to cooperate. Expressing himself congenially in consistently colloquial language

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