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Intentions as interactional and interspecies achievements: enactivist contributions to language evolution

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Abstract

Philosophy drawing on studies of animal behavior has paved a middle-way path regarding natural and non-natural meaning (Bar-On, 2021; Bar-On & Moore, 2017; Green, 2019; Moore, 2018). Elaborating the question of communicative intention goes hand-in-hand with growing appreciation of the reaches of non-human animal mindedness (Andrews & Beck, 2018; Merritt, 2021), pushing the plausible bounds of higher-order cognitive capacities beyond the singular province of homo sapiens. The question of relating human languaging to non-human languaging is enriched through a dialogue between enactive philosophy of social cognition and post-Gricean discourse. Speaker meaning presupposes coherent, stable, individual, internal, and prior intention as a cognitive or mental state. The enactive theory of social cognition, participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007), calls all of these premises into serious question. Prioritizing the role of interactions in cognition brings attention to the multitude of possible partners humans had and have in communication and sense-making engagements.