Altery, the Trick that Builds Up a Human Society: The Day that Tomasello Met Economics—A Concept Paper

Smărăndița Tapalagă Gheorghincă, Heidelberg University, Germany
Elena Druică, University of Bucharest, Romania

ABSTRACT

This article relates two highly important views on the social characteristics of Humans: Michael Tomasello’s theory regarding the evolutionary difference between nonhuman and human primates and the Human portrait, as seen by Economics. Never before considered together, these two ideas agree and sustain each other. Tomasello’s common psychological infrastructure of shared intention and attention finds reason into the normativity circumscribing economic behavior, where fairness, morality and justice prevail. Correlatively, integrating alterity into one’s utility calculations, observed by Economics, reminds of Tomasello’s self-other equivalence and prosocial motivation as key features of building a human society. Finally, altruism, encompassed effortlessly into Human Behavior, is the fundament of social exchange and evolution.

Keywords: Alterity, Altruism, Economic Behavior, Evolution, Human Society, Joint Attention, Joint Intention, Normativity

INTRODUCTION

For quite a long time, scientists have wondered what was the missing link that managed to turn Apes into educated, language-possessing, military empowered, and etiquette follower Humans. Many theories have been conceived, either due to scientific methodology or as a result of strong imaginative capacities or dogmatic imprisonment. Any side taken, there is one quality that stands out of all: the need for a cause-effect, logical and motivated explanation within its framed domain. Either an isolated creation, an extraterrestrial activity, or a fruit of evolution, Human beings, with their complex brain and emerging high-performance social skills are still a matter of their own intense research.

Once science gained its place, the metaphysical presuppositions could finally be drifted apart or integrated and the cemented highway of reproducible proofs followed one feasible direction: the evolution of species. And there was only one thing left to explain: what was, that in the name of “adaptability” or “fitness”, had the power to transform primates in such

DOI: 10.4018/ijabe.2012010101
a manner that a nowadays’ naive eye would consider civilization as given for granted?

Was it a sudden need? Was it environment? And, if any of that, which type of causation stood underneath? What happened inside the beings that allowed them to come together not just for hunting, but for developing social organizations, constructing a language and, afterwards, proving plasticity of cognitive processing according to that language? If the former questions are matters for biologists, the latter will be at the core of our exploration.

We will address these opened problems considering the research of Michael Tomasello and collaborators, looking first at the “The Origins of Human Communication” (2008), “The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition” (2001) and later at scientific articles that, due to ongoing research, refine and reshape the frames of the explanation. Once this framework is at work, we can turn back our regard on Economy, a science that for a long time conceived Humans more alike to Apes than constructiveness would suggest. However, when Game Theory and cognitive scientists peaked in, a total different view has been released and, as a natural consequence of today’s paradigm of science, the economic Human became as Human as the linguistic or the social cognitive Human. And Tomasello encountered agreement where he would probably never expect.

So fasten your seat-belts...

SPACE ODYSSEY 2001: OR WHY TOMASELLO THINKS THOSE APES COULD NEVER BUILD A SATELLITE

A rocky, deserted place. Few apes wondering around and joggling into what seems to be an incoherent organisation. In the next “days”, one grabs a stick and starts using it as a war tool. His group imitates the action and so the battle emerges, armed apes at one side and unarmed at the other. Too soon to understand the power of the stick, the unarmed apes collapse under the hit. And so some die before learning. Consequently, the rest remained alive capitulate and learn the trick. And that’s pretty much how it goes, this evolution thing. The survival of the best or, in Darwin’s own words, of the fittest (Delamoir, 2009). And, if plants, fish and animals get around smoothly due to the colour of their layouts or the built-in “weapons” as poison or endurance, the more evolved species had benefited both of the natural ruling above their environmental fellows and of the limitations that a bigger brain and weaker body brought to their biped posture. Consequently, when prodders threaten primates, “the fittest” becomes “the smartest”, as inventiveness, cooperation, discovery, environment manipulation or artefacts are evolutionary ways to compensate the body weaknesses. From these facilities to highly organised social networks the steps succeed rapidly, once the foundation for cooperation has been tuned-in.

In this section we will expose the main ideas of Michael Tomasello, as they have been synthesised in the previously mentioned books. However, before proceeding, there is one fundamental point that needs to be emphasised in order to keep the reader safe from unwanted polemics. And that is what the scientific community pretty much agrees on today: the evolution of species. The human primates came after the nonhuman primates, thus they are more evolved, being just “a bit smarter”, but enough to make a difference. As we will see, that small development had to do with cognitive skills rather than a hairless body and, when put under the magnifying glass, so little but significant the change, that underpasses the whole road from amoeba to whales.

What this evolutionary change was about and how it came into being will be discussed, in Tomasello’s terms, with the help of three main ideas. The first idea is that human cooperative communication emerged spontaneously in evolution through the natural gestures of pointing and pantomiming. Secondly, this capacity rests on a “psychological infrastructure of shared intentionality” (Tomasello, 2001), which presupposes skills for joint attention and joint intention and a pro-social motivation...
Related Content

Without Informed Consent
Sara Belfrage (2013). Moral, Ethical, and Social Dilemmas in the Age of Technology: Theories and Practice (pp. 291-305).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/without-informed-consent/73626?camid=4v1a

Trust and Member Satisfaction in a Developing Virtual Organization: The Roles of Leader Contact and Experience with Technology
www.igi-global.com/article/trust-member-satisfaction-developing-virtual/76946?camid=4v1a

Achieving E-Health Success: The Key Role for ANT
www.igi-global.com/chapter/achieving-e-health-success/110832?camid=4v1a
Performance Studies of Integrated Network Scenarios in a Hospital Environment