

Introduction

{sec:introduction}

Two cognitive skills that are often considered to set humans apart from their evolutionarily closest relatives are on the one hand our outstanding capacity for reasoning, and on the other our profound communicative abilities. Our ability to reason symbolically on the one hand and our languages with complex syntax, semantics and pragmatics on the other hand, are unmatched in the animal kingdom.

source?

It is hard to imagine our communication without reasoning. In our everyday lives, a lot of the content we intend to convey to others, we relay pragmatically: we do not literally spell out these things, but rather hope and expect our interlocutors to infer the intended message from the communicated content. When I ask my dinner partner if they can pass me the salt, they infer that I am not interested in learning about their ability to pass me the salt but rather that I am requesting to be passed the salt.

source?

It is thus easy to see that reasoning and communication are in a way intertwined. But what is the extent and nature of this relation? In 2011, Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber proposed a revolutionary theory of reasoning that intended to account for a number of issues in the experimental psychology of reasoning. According to their *argumentative theory of reasoning*, the main function of reasoning in humans is argumentative; that is, reasoning evolved in humans in order to devise arguments and evaluate those of others. This theory is able to explain a number of properties of human reasoning, such as confirmation bias, and the phenomenon of motivated reasoning leading to attitude polarization.

can I say that?

In the words of Mercier and Sperber,

Reasoning has evolved and persisted mainly because it makes human communication more effective and advantageous. (Mercier and Sperber, 2011, p. 60)

This thesis intends to scrutinize this position, and take it further, to ultimately answer the question of whether advanced reasoning skills in humans evolved because they facilitate more advanced communication.

In order to answer this research question, I will at length consider the argumentative theory of Hugo Mercier and Dan Sperber (Mercier, 2016; Mercier and Sperber, 2011, 2017). Then, an exploration of the origins of human communication is in order (Benítez-Burraco, Ferretti, and Progovac, 2021; Moore, 2017; Scott-Phillips, 2017, 2018; Tomasello, 2008).

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