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Critical Notice: Michael Tomasello on the "Prosocial" Human Animal

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ABSTRACT According to Michael Tomasello humans cannot help but be informative. Apes, like chimps, do not point at each other, only humans do so in order to attract attention, that is, to (get) help, play and share experiences. In shared cooperative activities, individual rationality is transformed into social rationality. A feeling of 'we-ness' is being born, a 'we' intentionality. It is Tomasello's claim that in shared cooperative activities, the collaborators must first all be mutually responsive to each other's intentional states. In *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* he states that human infants are very social from the moment they are born, if not before, and that intention reading and human beings' inborn capability to identify with conspecifics are the clues to the unique human interaction and joint attention. The four theses of this article are: (1) the idea of the prosocial nature of the infant lacks convincing arguments; (2) Tomasello reflects and honours the *zeitgeist* (that is, the hope that we will see a scientific shift away from predominant methodological individualism towards more 'social' and 'emphatic'-oriented approach); (3) his concepts of language as a tool and linguistic interaction as a derived form of pointing gestures are very limited; and (4) he underestimates the power and 'nature' of unforeseen events. Social synchronisation creates the possibility for joint attention and not intention reading. New forms of social interaction do *not* spring from cognitive intention reading processes *inside* the brain. Humans have certain biological predispositions, but they cannot explain joint attention patterns.