



Doctor Dolittle's Delusion: Animals and the Uniqueness of Human Language

By Stephen R. Anderson

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Dr. Dolittle had it wrong, says the author of this fascinating book: animals cannot use language. Stephen Anderson explains the difference between communication and language and shows that animals do not have the cognitive capacities necessary to acquire language.

"A masterly overview of what is currently known about the communicative abilities of a wide range of creatures. . . . Anderson's synthesis provides illuminating comparisons with the infinitely more sophisticated resources of the human language. . . . An elegant book."—Neil Smith, *Nature*

"Well-written, well-argued, and provocative. . . . I enjoyed this book and recommend it to anyone interested in animal communication and the evolution of language."—Marc Bekoff, *Quarterly Review of Biology*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hugh Lofting's storybooks about a British doctor who could speak to animals have been classics almost since they first appeared in 1920. Anderson, a linguistics and cognitive psychology professor at Yale, doesn't dispute the literary merits of Lofting's work, but he does want to establish that Doctor Dolittle's talent is all fiction. Anderson makes a careful argument to defend this conclusion, methodically examining what we actually know about animal communication and simultaneously building up a case for what makes human language unique. He revisits the usual discussions about animals' abilities, from the intricate "dance" of honeybees to the warning calls of vervet monkeys and the sign language learned by lab chimpanzees. His lengthy chapter on syntax is fairly technical and may be difficult for lay readers to navigate, but Anderson does his best to make this arcane subject intelligible because it forms the crux of his book: he identifies syntax as "the essence of language," the primary barrier that animals can't surmount. In reviewing previous claims that animals have language, he insists on the distinction between language and communication—sometimes a fine difference that appears to necessitate lengthy, confusing explanations that incorporate physics, biology and language theory. Despite its use of enlightening examples and fascinating details of animal behavior, this book is best suited for students of psychology and linguistics. But anyone interested enough in the subject to work through it will find a skillfully made case that even devoted animal admirers might find hard to dismiss.

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Review

"In this enjoyable and informative book, Stephen Anderson incisively states the way that diverse areas of study have helped illuminate the question of communication by animals and our communication with them."--Diane Brentari, Purdue University

From the Inside Flap

"A terrific read, informative, judicious, and timely."--Norbert Hornstein, University of Maryland

"In this enjoyable and informative book, Stephen Anderson incisively states the way that diverse areas of study have helped illuminate the question of communication by animals and our communication with them."--Diane Brentari, Purdue University

"If Dr. Dolittle had met Charles Darwin, they would have shared two things in common: an extraordinary love of animals and a deep belief in the continuity of human and animal communication. In this book, the distinguished linguist Stephen Anderson challenges Dolittle and Darwin's belief in the continuity claim, arguing that our capacity for language generates a uniquely designed system of communication, unparalleled in the history of life on earth. Written in a playful and highly accessible style, Anderson navigates some of the difficult territory of linguistics to provide an illuminating discussion of the evolution of language."--Marc Hauser, Harvard College Professor and Professor of Psychology, Harvard University; author of *Wild Minds: What animals really think*

"This deeply informed and lucid book not only is an outstanding introduction to human language and to animal communication, but also identifies clearly and persuasively essential properties that distinguish them, and the enormous significance of these properties for human thought and life."--Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, MIT

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