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Origins of Meaning

Theorizing about the origins of meaning has been limited thus far by a paucity of conceptual machinery that may be used to delineate different dimensions or aspects of this notion. Many theorists write as if the only viable such notions are Grice's concepts of natural and non-natural meaning. In this talk I take inspiration from the evolutionary biology of communication to develop a notion of *organic meaning* that shares with natural meaning the absence of a requirement of communicative intentions, while sharing with non-natural meaning the failure of the factivity condition. Organic meaning is then elucidated with the concepts of cue, coercion, and signal. On this basis I argue that organic meaning is nearly sufficient for the institution of semanticity, itself one important step in the evolution of language. I also explain expression as a form of organic meaning whose job is to reveal an agent's psychological condition. Expression is thus of communicative significance, while still not requiring reflexive communicative intentions; it is therefore also a plausible by-way on the way to language.