



K O N I N K L I J K E N E D E R L A N D S E
A K A D E M I E V A N W E T E N S C H A P P E N

Your Royal Highness,
Members of the Board of the Dr H.P. Heineken Foundation
and the Alfred Heineken Fondsen Foundation,
in particular their chairwoman, Mrs. De Carvalho,
Distinguished Laureates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Jury for the Dr. A.H. Heineken Prize for Cognitive Science has unanimously decided to award the 2010 prize to **Dr. Michael Tomasello**, Co-Director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology at Leipzig, and Director of its Department of Developmental and Comparative Psychology.

He is receiving this prize because his multidisciplinary research has given us a much deeper understanding of cognitive processes in primates in general, and language acquisition processes in humans in particular.

Michael Tomasello is a truly remarkable cognitive scientist, whose research is both highly influential and groundbreaking. His research interests range from primate social cognition and social learning to developmental psychology and language acquisition in children. Working from the hypothesis that humans are unique among primates in their ability to comprehend one another's intentions, he advocates the view that this understanding not only enabled the evolution of culture and human cognition, but also the evolution and development of language. Fundamental aspects of language such as grammar, he argues, do not require a special mechanism but instead follow as emergent properties from general cognitive abilities.

Michael Tomasello received his BA at Duke University in 1972 and finished his PhD in Experimental Psychology at the University of Georgia in 1980. He worked for several years in the departments of psychology and anthropology at Emory University, and conducted research at the Yerkes National Research Primate Center. In 1988 he became Co-Director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. He is also Co-Director of the Wolfgang Köhler Primate Research Center and Honorary Professor of Psychology at the University of Leipzig and Manchester University. Michael Tomasello has been a visiting scholar, professor and instructor at Harvard University, the University of Rome, Stanford University and UC Berkeley. His many awards and distinctions include a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1997 and the Hegel Prize in 2009.

Michael Tomasello has advanced our understanding on parallel fronts simultaneously: primate cognition, human social cognition, and the acquisition of language. His research programme straddles the boundary between human and exact sciences and has had an enormous impact not merely on the cognitive sciences, but also on our very understanding of 'what makes us human'.



In addition to his research achievements, Tomasello has reached out to a wider public in publications, lectures and television programmes to explain what cognition is about and in what way different species (primates, but also more recently dogs) share or do not share cognitive abilities with humans. His 1999 book *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition* (Harvard University Press) won the 2001 APA William James Book Award and has been translated into a dozen languages.

In the past five years, his work has focused on cooperation, meaning both collaboration and altruism and including both cognitive and motivational aspects. In a recent article in the *New York Times*, he is quoted as saying ‘That’s why we have moral dilemmas, because we are both selfish and altruistic at the same time’. Tomasello is – in his own words – ‘a psychologist down deep’, and has been described elsewhere as **‘a pioneer, bravely entering territory where others have feared to tread’**. When asked **‘In your view, what is the next big frontier to be faced in revealing what makes us uniquely human?’**, he replied: ‘I have no idea. I have never been able to plan research directions more than about a year in advance. If I knew now what the next great direction would/should be, then I would drop what I am doing now and do that. My answer is that the next great direction is the one I’m doing now – almost by definition. So: cooperation, cooperation, cooperation.’

The jury is convinced that the enormous impact of his work, his productivity, and the observation that his views are still developing and incorporating new findings to adjust earlier positions, all guarantee that he will continue to dominate developments and discussions in several areas of cognitive science for the foreseeable future.

On behalf of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, it is my great pleasure to congratulate Michael Tomasello on winning the 2010 Dr. A.H. Heineken Prize for Cognitive Science.

Professor Jacqueline J. Meulman

Chair of the Jury of the 2010 Dr. A.H. Heineken Prize for Cognitive Science