James R. Hurford is Professor of General Linguistics, University of Edinburgh. He is co-editor, with Kathleen Gibson, of OUP's *Studies in Language Evolution*, co-founder, with Simon Kirby, of the Language Evolution and Computation Research Unit at the University of Edinburgh, and co-founder, with Chris Knight, of the EVOLANG series of international conferences on the evolution of language. His books include *The Linguistic Theory of Numerals* (CUP, 1975), *Language and Number: The Emergence of a Cognitive System* (Blackwell, 1987), and *Grammar: A Student's Guide* (CUP, 1994).

'A wonderful read—lucid, informative, and entertaining, while at the same time never talking down to the reader by sacrificing argumentation for the sake of "simplicity". It is likely to be heralded as the major publication dealing with language evolution to date.'

Frederick J. Newmeyer, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, University of Washington

'Hurford's aim is nothing less than to bring language into Darwin's reach. Many attempts to press natural selection into innovative service fail through too analogical an approach failing to mesh with the realities of some other discipline. Hurford's sheer practicality and professional appreciation of modern biology have produced a work of the highest academic seriousness that would without question have delighted Darwin himself. The project can fairly be described as the abolition of the division between linguistics and biology, and has significant broad implications for philosophers and social scientists, as well as more focussed ones for biologists, linguists, and anthropologists. This major intellectual endeavour promises to transform substantial parts of linguistics and anthropology, and also to provide the most interesting single application ever of the principle of natural selection.'

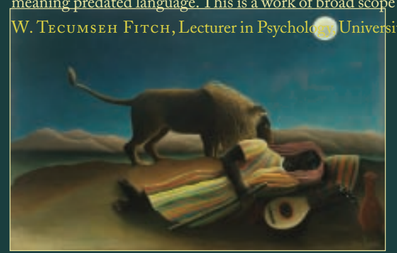
Alan Grafen, Professor of Theoretical Biology, University of Oxford

'To explain the evolution of language, one must explain the evolution of both a system of communication and a system of thought—a way of representing and communicating about the world. In *The Origins of Meaning*, James Hurford does just this. Writing as a linguist, he clarifies for biologists the complexities that must be explained in an evolutionary account of language, while at the same time illuminating for his colleagues in linguistics the rich communicative and representational abilities of animals—from which we can begin to reconstruct the semantic and pragmatic origins of language. *The Origins of Meaning* is synthetic, provocative, and intellectually rich.'

Robert Seyfarth, Professor of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania.

'In this engagingly written and broadly interdisciplinary book, Jim Hurford integrates findings from ethology and neuroscience with concepts from philosophy and linguistics to make an explicit and convincing case that animals have rich concepts, and thus that meaning predated language. This is a work of broad scope and significance.'

W. Tecumseh Fitch, Lecturer in Psychology, University of St Andrews



Jacket illustration: [detail from] *The Sleeping Gypsy*, 1897, by Henri Rousseau. Oil on canvas, 51" x 6' 7" (129.5 x 200.7 cm). Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim. 646.1939. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/ Scala, Florence.

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
www.oup.com

ISBN 978-0-19-920785-5

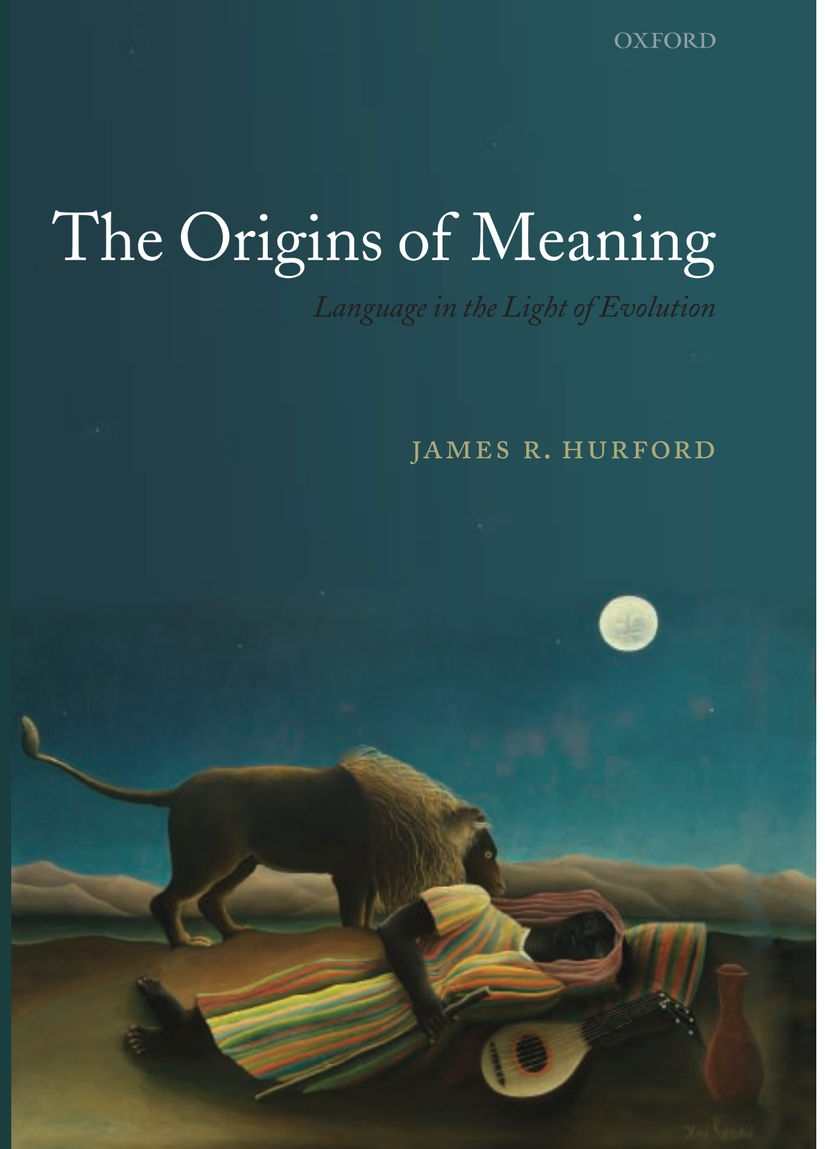
HURFORD The Origins of Meaning OXFORD

OXFORD

The Origins of Meaning

Language in the Light of Evolution

JAMES R. HURFORD



The Origins of Meaning

JAMES R. HURFORD

In this, the first of two ground-breaking volumes on the nature of language in the light of the way it evolved, James Hurford looks at how the world first came to have a meaning in the minds of animals and how in humans this meaning eventually came to be expressed as language. He reviews a mass of evidence to show how close some animals, especially primates and more especially apes, are to the brink of human language. Apes may not talk to us but they construct rich cognitive representations of the world around them, and here, he shows, are the evolutionary seeds of abstract thought—the means of referring to objects, the memory of events, even elements of the propositional thinking philosophers have hitherto reserved for humans. What then, he asks, is the evolutionary path between the non-speaking minds of apes and our own speaking minds? Why don't apes communicate the richness of their thoughts to each other? Why do humans alone have a unique disposition to reveal their thoughts in complex detail? Professor Hurford searches a wide range of evidence for the answers to these central questions, including degrees of trust, the role of hormones, the ability to read minds, and the willingness to cooperate.

Expressing himself congenially in consistently colloquial language the author builds up a vivid picture of how mind, language, and meaning evolved over millions of years. His book is a landmark contribution to the understanding of linguistic and thinking processes, and the fullest account yet published of the evolution of language and communication.