

Response to Rowe's Commentary on Shaw, Scheel, and Gardner's review of Michael Tomasello's book, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*.

Our book review of Tomasello's book, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, reminds readers about three basic tenets of comparative studies:

- Conclusions about developmental differences are justifiable only if developmental conditions are comparable.
- Valid group comparisons require comparable testing conditions.
- Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

We noted that much of the research upon which Tomasello bases the wide-reaching claims in his book violates these basic tenets and is therefore fundamentally flawed.

Instead of addressing our concerns, Rowe redirects the reader to irrelevant things. For example, in his first paragraph, Rowe speculates about our intentions, suggesting that suspect motives undermine valid arguments. This kind of faulty logic is an Ad Hominem Fallacy. We submit that examining the extent to which theories stand up to scrutiny is the purpose of peer review and indeed, a cornerstone of the scientific process.

Throughout his critique, Rowe misrepresents our points, argues against his misrepresentations, and then concludes that we were unsuccessful in making our case. For example, our introductory point was that Tomasello's claims depend on flawed studies. Rowe develops his counterargument focusing on one word ("deficit"). He agrees that Tomasello's research methods have flaws, but immediately dismisses the importance of the issue: "And, without a doubt, the research programs that study them [chimpanzees] have their flaws. But, with equal certainty, they are not so fumbling as to fail to notice a small human being trapped in a chimpanzee body." This is a classic example of a Straw Man Fallacy.

Whether others agree with Tomasello's conclusions, whether his books make interesting reading, or whether Rowe considers our motives suspect are irrelevant to the methodological concerns we

elucidate in our commentary. By misdirecting readers away from legitimate critique, not only does his review fail to negate our points, it undermines open, rational debate.

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