

Fellow-Symposium

Perceiving Objects and Persons

Bochum, February 29th 2012

14:00-17:30, lecture room GA 3/143

The workshop will focus on social perception and its role for understanding other persons. Accounts of social perception claim that understanding what other agents are up to is at least sometimes a purely perceptual process. Do we perceive other agents as a special kind of object? Which role does social interaction play for social perception? When do we not just perceive others but put ourselves in their shoes? We will critically engage with recent accounts of social perception from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The Center of Mind, Brain & Cognitive Evolution at Ruhr-University Bochum invites everybody to participate in a symposium with three of the Center's fellows. Please register by writing an email to Anna.Welpinghus (at) rub.de.

Schedule

14.00 – 15.00 Dr. Luca Barlassina (Mailand/Bochum)

I don't see any trouble. A refutation of Gallagher's arguments against simulation

15.00 – 16.00 Dr. Nivedita Gangopadhyay (Copenhagen)

Perception-action coupling in social perception: Moving beyond motor resonance

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee Break

16.30 – 17.30 Prof. Bence Nanay (Cambridge)

The origins of social cognition: From theory of mind to vicarious perception

Scientific Organization:

Prof. Dr. Albert Newen, Anna Welpinghus, Institute for Philosophy II, Center of Mind, Brain & Cognitive Evolution, Bochum

Abstracts

Luca Barlassina, Mailand

I don't see any trouble. A refutation of Gallagher's arguments against simulation

The debate over social cognition has been for many years dominated by the opposition between the Theory Theory (TT) and the Simulation Theory (ST). In the last decade, however, phenomenologists and enactivists have argued that both TT and ST are seriously defective theories. In this paper, I'll consider Gallagher's (2007) arguments against ST and will show how they can be resisted. This will also give me the opportunity to clarify and defend the fundamental insight of ST, i.e., that the ability to put oneself in others' shoes plays a crucial role in understanding other people.

Nivedita Gangopadhyay, Kopenhagen

Perception-action coupling in social perception: Moving beyond motor resonance

The interdisciplinary field of social cognition is currently witnessing the emergence of a number of embodied approaches to social cognition. (Gallagher 2008, Gallese 2005, Goldman 2006, Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, Fuchs & De Jaegher 2009, Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia 2007, 2010). In general, embodied cognition approaches to social cognition stress the importance of understanding the other's embodied intersubjective engagement prior to gaining a theoretical understanding of the other as a "minded" being. They propose an intertwining of perception and action mechanisms as underlying one's ability to attribute mental states to the other without constructing complex theories of mind. However, the discussion of action mechanisms in this context has mainly been limited to mechanisms of motor resonance which establish automatic bodily synchronization between social agents (Gallese 2005, Gallagher 2008, Fuchs & De Jaegher 2009, De Jaegher 2009). While the emphasis on motor resonance brings out a bodily basis of coordination in social interaction it also tends to oversimplify the phenomena of social interaction by reducing social agents to mere "pendulums" in automatic synchrony (e.g. De Jaegher 2009). A main reason for critiquing the "pendulum" model is that social interaction often demands complementarity of social response where a social agent has to choose the most adequate response and not simply automatically synchronise with another social agent. I shall propose an account of perceiving the other as an intentional agent that builds on mechanisms of perception-action coupling but the notion of action is enriched beyond motor resonance to accommodate the complexity of social interaction.

Bence Nanay, Antwerpen/Cambridge

The Origins of Social Cognition: From theory of mind to vicarious perception

I urge a shift of emphasis in the study of social cognition from 'theory of mind' to a simple perceptual process: the perception of objects as affording a certain action to another agent. This perceptual process, which I call 'vicarious perception', is different from, and much simpler than, theory of mind as it does not imply the understanding (or representation) of the mental (or even perceptual) states of another agent. I argue that if we focus on vicarious perception instead of theory of mind, some of the most severely debated questions about social cognition become easier to tackle. For example, the most convincing experiments that are supposed to show that non-human primates have theory of mind in fact demonstrate that they are capable of vicarious perception. The same is true for the experiments about the theory of mind of less than 12 month old infants.