

Editoriale

# Mentalization and Self-Identity: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives

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THIS ISSUE OF THE RIVISTA Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia includes two interlocking thematic sections.

The first thematic section is concerned with *Theory of Mind*, which is the branch of cognitive science that investigates the so-called “mindreading” or “mentalizing” or “mentalist” abilities, i.e., our skills to treat the agents as the bearers of unobservable psychological states and processes, and to anticipate and explain their behavior in terms of such states and processes. These mentalistic abilities are also called “folk psychology” by philosophers, and “naïve (or intuitive) psychology” by cognitive scientists.

It is important to note that Theory of Mind is not an appropriate term to characterize this research area (and neither to denote our mentalistic abilities, as it often happens unfortunately) since it seems to assume right from the start the validity of a specific

account of the nature and development of mindreading, that is, the view that it depends on the deployment of a “theory” of the mental realm, analogous to the theories of the physical world (“naïve physics”). But this view – known as “theory-theory” – is only one of the accounts offered to explain our mentalistic abilities. In contrast, theorists of “mental simulation” have suggested that what lies at the root of mindreading is not any sort of folk-psychological conceptual scheme, but rather a kind of mental modeling in which the simulator uses her own mind as an analogue model of the mind of the simulated agent. And more recently the claim, common to both theorists of theory and theorists of simulation, that mindreading plays an essential and primary role in human social understanding has been challenged, especially but not exclusively by phenomenology-oriented philosophers and cognitive scientists.

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Moreover, although during the 1980s and 1990s most of the work in *Theory of Mind* was concerned with the mechanisms that subserve the attribution of psychological states to others (third-person mentalization), in the last decade an increasing number of psychologists and philosophers have also proposed accounts of the mechanisms underlying the attribution of psychological states to oneself (first-person mentalization). This required a synergy with other research traditions, most notably the studies on confabulation in cognitive neuropsychology and the research work on dissonance and self-attribution in social psychology.<sup>1</sup>

The *Theory of Mind* debate has been going on for thirty-five years, and the state of the play was investigated in a workshop held in Rome on December 2013. The meeting was jointly organized by the “Roma Tre” local unit of the national PRIN “Realism and Objectivity” and the Association of Cognitive Psychology, Rome. The present issue contains as target articles four papers presented during the workshop: the evolution of mentalization (Grazia Attili); the relevance of a life-span perspective on mentalization in humans (Antonella Marchetti and Francesca Sangiuliano Intra); the distinction between third-person and first-person mentalization (Massimo Marraffa); the social nature of personal identity (Cristina Meini).

The second closely related thematic section contains the contributions to another workshop organized by an interdisciplinary group of people from five different departments based at the University of Rome “Roma Tre”.<sup>2</sup> The subject of the workshop, held in Rome on December 2012, was the nature, ontogeny, and pathologies of the construct of “narrative identity”.

Narrative identity is a capacity that originates from the interplay of mentalization, au-

tobiographical memory, and linguistic-narrative capacities. By the end of the preschool years the child begins to experience herself as a person, to define herself as a certain kind of person, and to trace her own continuous identity of person across time and space. This diachronic dimension of self-consciousness, namely the possibility of tracing a unity that persists through time in our inner life, evolves as children attain a level of linguistic-narrative capacity which enables them to organize their own experiences in a chronological biography of self – a capacity that may not be fully consolidated until adolescence and early adulthood. This personal timeline that defines a continuous self through time is what is termed “narrative identity”.

The three contributions included in the present issue explore different dimensions of self-consciousness as narrative self: the role of narrative language in the constitution of human subjectivity (Erica Cosentino and Francesco Ferretti); the self-narratives in child development (Dolores Rollo); the development of personal identity from a psychodynamic standpoint (Gianluca Barbieri). Thus the present issue put together perspectives on the narrative identity that are usually kept separate – philosophy of mind, cognitive sciences, text linguistics, but also some aspects of the psychodynamic tradition.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See M. MARRAFFA, *Theory of Mind*, in: J. FIESER (ed.), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* – URL: <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/theomind/>> - Originally published on November, 12<sup>th</sup> - 2011.

<sup>2</sup> See M. BERGONZI, F. FIORENTINO, D. FIORMONTE, L. FORTINI, U. FRACASSA, M. LUCANTONI, M. MARRAFFA, T. NUMERICO, *The New Humanities Project. Towards a New Asset of Knowledge for the 21st Century*, in: «Humanities», vol. III, n. 1, 2014, pp. 415-441; doi:10.3390/h3030415.