

The role of imitation in understanding persons and developing a theory of mind

ANDREW MELTZOFF AND ALISON GOPNIK

So soul into the soul may flow, though it to body first repair — John Donne

Normal adults share a network of ideas about human psychology that are often described as 'common-sense' psychology. Although we directly observe other people's behaviour, we think of them as having internal mental states that are analogous to our own. We think that human beings want, think, and feel, and that these states lead to their actions. Our ideas about these mental states play a crucial role in our interactions with others and in the regulation of our own behaviour.

Deepening our understanding of mind is a lifelong enterprise (Bruner, 1990); but recent research has shown that by the age of five years, children operate with many of the key elements of a common-sense psychology. By five years old, children seem to know that people have internal mental states such as beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotions. Moreover, they understand that a person's beliefs about the world are not just recordings of objects and events stamped upon the mind, but are active interpretations or construals of them from a given perspective. This allows five-year-olds to realize that people can have mental states that are different from their own, and that people act according to their mental representations of the world, rather than according to the way the world actually is.

Such a model explains a lot of otherwise baffling human behaviour; it allows children to predict and comprehend many events within the interpersonal sphere. This model of the way people work has been referred to as a 'representational model of mind' (Forguson and Gopnik 1988). Although there is some debate about details of timing, there is a consensus that such a model develops somewhere between three and six, and supplants an earlier 'non-representational' understanding of mind (see Gopnik 1990; Flavell 1988; Perner 1991; Wellman 1990; Whiten 1991).

Understanding the way other people's minds work, and knowing how those minds are similar to or different from your own mind, is crucial if you want to interact with people. A particularly dramatic example of this is the suggestion that the pervasive social-communicative impairments of

people with autism are rooted in an inability to develop this kind of psychological understanding (Baron-Cohen *et al.* 1985). Autism has been likened to a kind of 'mindblindness' (Baron-Cohen 1990), in that autistic children seem unable to conceptualize another person as an entity with interpretative mental states.

The principal goal of this chapter is to inquire about the earliest developmental history of the *normal* child's understanding of the mind. How does common-sense psychology ever get off the ground? One way of putting this might be to say that we are interested in the earliest precursors of the child's 'theory of mind'. What sorts of things in infancy set the normal child on a developmental trajectory for eventually thinking of people as having interpretative minds – the level of psychologizing that seems so natural for five-year-olds, and so out of reach for most children with autism?

If we want to find the origins of common-sense psychology a good place to look might be in infant interactions with and understanding of persons. We will argue that the bedrock on which a commonsense psychology is constructed is the apprehension that others are similar to the self. Infants are launched on their career of interpersonal relations with the primary perceptual judgement: '**Here is something like me.**' One of the aims of the chapter is to explore the basis and cascading developmental effects of this sort of judgement.

It is sometimes held that normal infants are innately endowed with a special attentiveness to the human facial pattern. This may be so, but we will argue that this is not the only, or even the most critical basis for the 'like me' judgement. Such pattern detectors might direct visual attention, but in themselves they do not provide a link between the self and the other. The infant might see the adult as a particularly interesting entity; but because infants cannot see their own facial features, why should they think of the adult as relating to themselves? Similarly, others have seen the roots of intersubjectivity in the early temporal co-ordination of infant and adult behaviour, the 'conversational dances' that infants and care-takers perform. But again there seems no clear reason why these behaviours, by themselves, should lead the infants to think of other people as similar to themselves in deep ways. Infants, for example, also engage in temporally contingent interplay with objects.

We propose that infants' primordial 'like me' experiences are based on their understanding of bodily movement patterns and postures. Infants monitor their own body movements by the internal sense of proprioception, and can detect cross-modal equivalents between those movements-as-felt and the movements they see performed by others. Indeed, we will suggest that one reason normal infants preferentially attend to other people is the perceptual judgement that those entities are 'like me'. Without such a judgement, other humans might have interesting visual or temporal character-

istics, but they would not have the unique place they do in our world.* It is this fundamental relatedness between self and other that we wish to explore in this chapter.

Until comparatively recently, there was no reason to suppose that young infants could apprehend cross-modal equivalences between body-movements-as-felt in the self and body-movements-as-seen in others. Indeed, classical theories of infant development explicitly denied this capacity to young infants, portraying the infant as 'solipsistic', 'radically egocentric', and so on. Among the recent experiments that served to change this view are those showing that normal infants are more proficient *imitators* than was previously thought. As we shall see, these findings suggest that infants can, at some basic level, process the correspondence between self and other (Meltzoff 1985).

The news is not just that infants imitate, for that has been known for some time (Baldwin 1906; Piaget 1962), but that they can imitate facial movements at an early age. Why is early facial imitation so important for developmental theory, and particularly for accounts of the ontogenesis of common-sense psychology? One reason is that it informs us about the 'starting state' of social cognition in normal infants. A second reason derives from the unique nature of facial imitation itself. Facial movements are special because infants cannot make a direct visual comparison between their own faces and those of adults. We will argue that early imitation is relevant to developing theories of mind because it provides the first, primordial instance of infants' making a connection between the visible world of others and the infants' own internal states, the way they 'feel' themselves to be.

Early imitation also provides a mechanism for infants' learning about other people and distinguishing them from things. In order for a common-sense psychology to get off the ground infants must make a basic cut between people and things, and respond to them differently. What is a person for a young infant, for a newborn? How would a newborn recognize one when he or she sees one? For the youngest infants, persons may not be defined solely in terms of salient facial features like the presence/absence of eyes. We suggest that infants at first rely on more functional rules (Meltzoff and Moore 1992). We suggest that for the youngest infants, persons are: 'entities that can be imitated and also who imitate me', entities that pass the 'like me' test. Such a rule would be effective in sorting the world into people versus things, and could be operative in the opening weeks of life – because the data show that infants imitate at birth.

* This reverses the standard developmental relation; but it is as easy, perhaps easier, to see how a primordial 'like me' apprehension might determine the direction of perceptual preferences than how raw looking preferences in and of themselves would ever lead to a means of making the 'like me' connection of interpersonal relatedness. We return to this issue in the conclusions of this chapter; also see Meltzoff and Moore 1993.

Moreover, as increasingly complex imitative interactions take place, this basic knowledge may be extended. In particular, at least by nine months of age or so, infants will not only imitate pure body movements but will also duplicate specific object-manipulations, and will do so after extended delays. Such deferred imitations provide an important source of information about objects in the world and the shared relation to those objects that people can hold. As we will show, imitation is not only an indicator of early common-sense psychology, but may itself be a mechanism for developing and elaborating this framework.

Imitation in infancy also runs in the reverse direction: parents mimic their infants as well as infants imitating parents. Why should this be so enjoyable to both parties? Trevarthen (1979), Bruner (1975, 1983), Stern (1985), and others have shown that infants seem to take pleasure in the temporal aspects of early interactions; the interactions can be likened to gestural dialogues, because of their turn-taking nature and overall rhythm. Without denying these temporal characteristics, we want to highlight a different aspect of the gestural dialogues. In particular, we will focus on a subset of interactive games that are imitative in nature. Mutual-imitation games may be an especially meaningful avenue of early communication because both partners can recognize the common acts — the self-other equivalences that exist when the body movements of one person match the other. We will suggest that over and above turn-taking and temporal factors, infants take special pleasure in mutual-imitation episodes because the adult's acts become more 'like me' in their form. Mutual-imitation games ratify the identity between adult and child.

BODY AND SOUL

The kind of 'like me' equivalences that we have discussed so far all involve equivalences between the child's *body* and the body of others. In contrast, the aspect of common-sense psychology that has attracted so much recent attention is the development of the understanding that people have *mental* states of a certain character. Is it helpful to think of infants' understanding of bodily movements as the bedrock for 'like me' judgements, and this in turn as being connected up to the ascription of 'like me' human minds? Quite apart from the infant data, there are philosophical reasons for thinking that some understanding of a 'like me' equivalence, indeed one centred on body equivalences, is wrapped up in our ascription of mind. Although 'philosophy of the body' has always been a neglected area of inquiry, several philosophers have suggested that such abstract mentalistic notions as reference may have their origins in the perception and understanding of bodies (for example Evans 1982). From this viewpoint it makes sense that infants are engaged

in mapping out 'like me' equivalences in the bodily realm as the first step toward understanding persons.

Two aspects of the psychology of early imitation are particularly relevant here. First, the child maps externally perceived behaviour on to a set of *internal* bodily impressions. Second, the mapping is not only to internal states alone, but also to motor intentions and plans. We suggest that both internal proprioceptive sensations and motor intentions may be interesting half-way stations between behaviour on the one hand, and mental states on the other.

In common-sense psychology, one classical characteristic of mental states that distinguishes them from physical states is their spatial location. Mental states are located inside the skin (or the head or the body), while physical objects, including the bodies of others, are located outside it. In Wellman and Estes' (1986) work, this 'inside/outside' distinction is one of the first children use in differentiating the mental and the physical. Similarly, the paradigmatic example of behaviour is the body movements of others. The work on early imitation shows that even newborn infants recognize some equivalences between externally perceived behaviour — that is, perceived body movements — and literally internal proprioceptive states. Moreover, such proprioceptive sensations, in addition to being spatially located 'inside', would seem to have much of the character of mental states. In particular, they are not publicly observable, and are private experiences. Indeed, on many philosophical accounts, pains and other internal sensations, which are phenomenologically similar to proprioceptive sensations, are *the* quintessential mental states *par excellence*.

Moreover, in order to imitate, infants must not only recognize the similarities between externally perceived bodily movements on the one hand and internal proprioceptive sensations on the other, they also must map those externally perceived movements on to intentions of a sort. The child must not only know that this visually perceived movement maps on to that motor plan, but also know how to go about producing the motor plan in question; and in the case of deferred imitation the child must produce this motor plan in the absence of any visual guidance from the model.

These motor plans, like the internal proprioceptive sensations themselves, are an interesting midpoint between the physical and the mental. It seems difficult to draw a hard and fast line between such simple motor plans and, say, 'simple desires', which themselves are viewed in the theory of mind literature as providing legitimate instances of very early and primitive mentalism (Wellman 1990; Astington and Gopnik 1991). The new findings on imitation strongly imply that motor plans and intentions are mapped on to the behaviour of others from the start. It is as if children, in the case of simple desires, immediately recognize that the other person's behaviour implies desires similar to their own. This would be grounds for

attributing a simple common-sense psychology capacity to the child. In the same way, in seeking the most primitive building-blocks of common-sense psychology, we see it as relevant that the young infant apprehends a similarity between a particular pattern of externally perceived behaviour, a particular internal proprioceptive sensation, and the motor plan that is necessary to produce both the sensation and the behaviour.*

Infants are, apparently, never strict behaviourists: one fundamental assumption of mentalism — that external, visible behaviours are mapped on to phenomenologically mental states — is apparently given innately. Clearly infants have much to learn about the nature of mind, but apparently they need not learn that it, or something like it, exists, and perhaps not even that it is shared by themselves and others. Ironically, given the great Platonic philosophical tradition of devaluing bodies in favour of minds, it may, quite literally, be our knowledge of the body that leads us to knowledge of the mind. From a developmental viewpoint, knowing that we inhabit similar bodies to others, and assuming that they share our internal bodily states, might be an important precursor to assuming that they share more abstract mental states as well. A person is, after all, both a body and a mind, and for very young infants these two aspects of personhood may not be divorced. (See Hobson, Chapter 10, this volume, for a similar view).

THE ORIGINS OF INFANT IMITATION AND THE NOTION OF A SUPRAMODAL BODY SCHEME: RECENT DATA AND THEORY

The last ten to fifteen years have seen the establishment of a new area of infant research, that of early infant imitation. Classical developmental theories had considered the imitation of facial actions to be a milestone in social-cognitive development that was first passed at about one year of age (Piaget 1962). Although other types of imitation, notably hand movements and vocal imitation, were said to occur earlier, facial imitation was classically viewed as a late achievement because infants cannot see their own faces. If they are young enough they will never have seen their own face in a mirror. How can infants possibly match a gesture they see with an action of their own that they cannot see? How can infants come to bridge the gap between visible and invisible experiences? Because this question is so baffling for developmental theory, researchers for many years were content with the analysis that facial imitation first became possible at about one year.

Meltzoff and Moore (1977) challenged the consensus that facial imitation was late to emerge by reporting that twelve- to twenty-one-day-old infants

imitated tongue-protrusion, mouth-opening, and lip-protrusion. Beyond the raw fact that young infants imitate, there are several subtle points raised in this study and the ones that followed that are relevant to theories about the origins and early development of common-sense psychology.

First, the facial gestures used were picked to help assess the specificity of the imitative effects and distinguish it from a general arousal response. If infants were simply being aroused by the sight of a human face (but could not imitate) then they might make more oral movements when they saw a human face than when they saw no face at all. This would not support the inference of imitation; but the increased oral movements might be confused with imitation if the correct control conditions were not employed. In Meltzoff and Moore's work true imitation was demonstrated, because infants responded differentially to two types of lip-movements (mouth-opening vs lip-protrusion) and two types of protrusion actions (lip-protrusion vs tongue-protrusion). In other words, the results showed that when the body part was controlled, when lips were used to perform two subtly different movements, infants responded differentially. Likewise, when the same general movement pattern was demonstrated, a 'protrusion in space', but with two different body parts (lip- vs tongue-protrusion), they also responded differentially. The response was not global or a general reaction to the mere presence of a human being or a human face, because the same face was present in all these conditions, yet the infants responded differentially.

Another issue concerns the psychological basis of the imitation. It is critical to determine if young infants are restricted to some sort of reflexive mimicry, a kind of Gibsonian 'resonance' in which perception of human acts somehow 'directly' lead to their motor production with no intervening mediation. To test this notion experimentally a pacifier was put in infants' mouths as they watched the display, so that they could only observe the adult demonstration, but not duplicate the gestures. After the infant observed the display, the experimenter assumed a passive-face pose, and only then removed the pacifier. Infants were then given 2.5 minutes to respond, during which the adult maintained this passive face regardless of the infant's response. The pacifier was effective in disrupting imitation while the adult was demonstrating. Infants' sucking reflexes took precedence over any tendency to imitate. In Gibsonian terms, it was as if the second tuning-fork was bound and forbidden to resonate while the first tuning-fork was sounding. In such a situation there would, of course, be no transfer of the tone from one fork to the other. However, the infants imitated the displays. The finding suggests that imitation, even this very early imitation, could be mediated by memory of the absent display (Meltzoff 1990a; Meltzoff and Moore 1977, Study 2; Meltzoff and Moore 1989, 1992, 1994).

There are also other data showing that the early imitation is not well characterized as a simple reflex. In particular, the imitative response was not simply triggered, or fired off by the sight of the adult display. The data

* This capacity to map one's internal sensations on to the behaviour of others might form the aboriginal basis for a simulation device of the sort that has been proposed by Harris (1989, 1991), Johnson (1988), Gordon (1986), and Goldman (1987).

showed that the infants did not produce exact matches early in the response period. The first responses of the infants were often with the correct body part, but were only an approximation of the adult's act. Infants would move their tongues, but not produce full tongue-protrusions. Infants then appeared to home in on the detailed match, gradually correcting their responses over successive efforts to correspond more exactly to the details of the display. The adult was sitting with a passive face all this time; thus the infant was comparing his or her motor performance against some sort of internal model or representation of what had been seen. For these reasons and others it seems more accurate to think of early imitation as intentional matching to the target provided by the other, rather than as a rigidly organized purely reflexive response (Meltzoff *et al.* 1991).

Learning theorists could argue that all this is unnecessary. The subjects were twelve to twenty-one days old. Perhaps they had been trained to imitate during the first weeks of life. Infants could be conditioned to poke out their tongues to a ringing sound, or to an adult tongue-protrusion. Perhaps the conditioning of a few oral gestures is part of the natural interaction between mother and baby. To resolve the point, Meltzoff and Moore (1983) tested 40 newborns in a hospital setting. The average age of the sample was 32 hours. The youngest infant was only 42 minutes old. The results showed that the newborns imitated both the gestures shown to them, mouth-opening and tongue-protrusion. We can infer that a primitive capacity to imitate is part of the normal child's innate endowment.

These findings of early infant imitation were originally considered surprising, and sparked lively debate in the literature. Surprising though they may be, they have now been replicated and extended in well over 20 different studies. Early imitation is a cross-cultural phenomenon: positive results have been reported in the US (Abravanel and Sigafoos 1984; Field *et al.* 1982); Canada (Legerstee 1991); France (Fontaine 1984; Switzerland (Vinter 1986); Sweden (Heimann and Schaller 1985; Heimann *et al.* 1989); Israel (Kaitz *et al.* 1988); and rural Nepal (Reissland 1988). In short, the basic phenomenon reported by Meltzoff and Moore has now been documented by independent investigators, in different settings, using a variety of different procedures. At a phenomenological level, the finding of early facial imitation seems secure. Attention has now shifted from debates about the existence of early matching to a search for the mechanisms underlying this behaviour and its role in development (Meltzoff and Moore 1992, 1994).

There are several psychological mechanisms that might underlie this behaviour. The hypothesis suggested by Meltzoff and Moore is that imitation is based on infants' capacity to register equivalences between the body transformations they see and the body transformations they only feel themselves make. On this account there is a primitive *supramodal body scheme* that allows the infant to unify acts-as-seen and acts-as-felt into a common

framework. Meltzoff and Moore have argued that early imitation fits in with a larger network of perceptual and social-cognitive abilities that is also tapped by studies showing infant matching of facial movements and speech sounds (Kuhl and Meltzoff 1982, 1984) and other intermodal phenomena (Bower 1977, 1982, 1989; Meltzoff and Borton 1979). We suggest that the supramodal body scheme revealed by early imitation provides the foundation for the development of the notion of persons and self-other equivalences in infants, as elaborated later in this chapter (for further analysis see Meltzoff 1990b; Meltzoff and Moore 1992, 1994).

USING OTHERS AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT ACTIONS ON OBJECTS: DEFERRED IMITATION AND MEMORY

The foregoing research with neonates concerns imitation of basic body movements. Such imitative behaviours reveal a capacity to map internal states on to externally perceived behaviour, a kind of aboriginal mentalism. The states that are so mapped, however, could not be construed as referential in any way. There is no sense in which either the bodily movements that are imitated, or the proprioceptive sensations and motor plans, involve anything outside the child or the other person.

Later in development, however, we can see signs of what might be called 'proto-referential' imitation: imitation begins to be used as a mechanism for learning about how objects work. Children treat adults as a source of information about objects — they look to adults for guidance when they are uncertain how a particular novel object works, in a manner somewhat analogous to more traditional cases of social referencing (Campos and Stenberg 1981; Klinnert *et al.* 1983). Adult pedagogy often takes the form of showing the child that the object can be used in a peculiar new way. Certainly before language can be used with the child, much of the explicit teaching about the world by parents is done via showing the child what to do, and trying to elicit a decent reproduction of the activity. Of course, the adult's goal is not just to get the child to 'mindlessly' perform the act on-line, merely mimicking the act when the adult is performing it and failing to access this new information at a later time, after a significant delay. The parents' goal is to bequeath something to the child, to have the child incorporate it into his or her repertoire, in a sense to truly make it his or her own. In the experimental literature, the ontogenesis of these phenomena is deeply related to the problem of 'deferred imitation'.

Children who do not treat adults as a source of information about the world, who do not learn from observing the acts of others (perhaps because they cannot map between the self and the other), would be at a

developmental disadvantage. At what age do normally-developing children begin to profit from deferred imitation? The classical view derives from Piaget, who thought that deferred imitation emerged contemporaneously with pretend-play, high-level object permanence, and productive language, at about eighteen to twenty-four months of age. We shall return to this potential connection between deferred imitation and pretend-play, partly motivated by Leslie's (1987, 1988, 1991) thesis that pretend-play is related to children's theory of mind, and partly because the recent data provide some new insights about the relation between play and imitation. To set the stage for this discussion we first provide a brief overview of some new studies on deferred imitation in normal children.

Meltzoff conducted a series of studies on deferred imitation in infants ranging from nine to twenty-four months old. One of the studies with fourteen-month-olds has three interesting features: (a) it tested imitation after an exceedingly long delay, one week; (b) infants were required to remember not just one demonstration, but to keep in mind multiple models—six different displays; (c) at least one of the acts was completely novel to the children. In particular, one object was a small wooden box with a translucent orange plastic panel for a top surface. The novel act demonstrated was for the experimenter to bend forward and touch the panel with the top of his forehead.

In this study, six different actions, each involving a different object, were shown to the infants (Meltzoff 1988a). Infants in the imitation group were shown all six actions on the first day of testing. They were then sent home for the one-week delay. Upon returning to the laboratory, the infants were given the objects one at a time to play with, and their behaviour was videotaped to determine how many of the target actions they reproduced. Two types of control groups were used. The control infants followed the same procedure as infants in the imitation condition, except that they did not see the target actions modelled on day 1, and so they had no memory of what to do with the toys. Like the infants in the imitation group, these control infants also visited the lab after a one-week delay. For the 'baseline' control group, the adult did not show the children the test toys on day 1, and simply talked pleasantly to the mother and child. This group assessed the spontaneous likelihood of the infants producing the target acts when they returned to the lab for the second visit. For the 'adult-manipulation' control group, the adult actively played with each of the objects during the first visit, but did not demonstrate the target acts themselves. This controlled for the possibility that infants might be induced into producing the target behaviour if they saw the adult approach and play with each object, even if the exact target action was not modelled.

The results provided clear evidence for deferred imitation. Of the 12 children in the imitation group, 11 duplicated three or more target behaviours on day 2, whereas only 3 of the 24 control subjects did so ($p < 0.0001$).

What is most striking is the aptitude these young infants exhibited for duplicating the novel act of using the forehead. Fully 67 per cent of the infants in the imitation condition produced this behaviour, as against none in the control conditions ($p < 0.0001$). Similar results have been reported showing deferred imitation in nine-month-old infants (Meltzoff 1988b), and these basic effects of imitation after a delay have been replicated and extended by Bauer and Mandler using a variety of tasks in infants between one and two years of age (Mandler 1990).

In the research discussed so far, an adult served as the model. In such cases the infants are directly mimicking with their own bodies acts that were seen in 3-D space with a minimum of differences between the adult's actions and the imitative act. It is also of interest whether infants can perform deferred imitation when there is 'distancing' (Werner and Kaplan 1963) between the self and the display to be copied. Television presents a miniature, two-dimensional depiction of actions in three-dimensional space. Meltzoff (1988c) found that fourteen-month-olds could also perform deferred imitation (24-hour delay) of particular object manipulations they had seen on TV, even when they had only seen the novel object on television and were not exposed to the real, 3-D variant until twenty-four hours later. These results suggest that for toddlers imitation is not highly stimulus-bound, and can be accomplished even in the face of some distancing and generalization.

More speculatively, the argument can be offered that these results also begin to address the developmental roots of children's capacity to use 'models' of reality to guide their action in space (DeLoache 1987, 1989; Perner 1991). The imitation-from-TV test would seem to be related to, but be a developmentally lower-order task than, DeLoache's intriguing studies on the use of scale model analogies by children. In the case of TV displays, the child needs to learn something in one problem space, a miniaturized depiction of reality by the TV, and project it on to its own actions in 3-D space with no direct comparison between the two. (The children first saw the act done by an adult on TV and then after a 24-hour delay they were given the real object for the first time. During the test, the TV model was absent. So children had to apply what they had learned from seeing the 'other' act in miniaturized, 2-D format to their own behaviour with a 3-D toy in a new situation. (For further discussion about what is involved here, see Meltzoff 1990a).

Older children and even adults learn more easily when the model is perceived to be more 'like me'. Hanna and Meltzoff (1993) conducted studies of peer imitation, in which infants were given the opportunity to watch and learn from other similar-aged playmates. In these studies some infants were trained to become 'infant experts' at particular tasks. Other infants, 'infant novices', observed these experts. In one experiment, the novice fourteen-month-old infants watched the expert fourteen-month-olds manipulate objects. A five-minute delay period was interposed,

and then the novices were presented with the test objects. The results showed that of the infants who watched the experts, 80 per cent produced three or more of the five targets modelled, as opposed to only 1 of 20 control infants ($p < .0001$). The striking level of success in these peer-modelling studies raises the (somewhat counterintuitive) possibility that in some cases infants may actually learn better from observing their peers than from the pedagogical forays of parents. Perhaps toddlers perceive peers as more 'like me', and therefore the incorporation of the other's action as a basis for self-action is facilitated.

One wonders whether deferred imitation might be highly context-dependent at this age. Perhaps toddlers later re-enact actions only if they are in the same environment as they were when they first saw the demonstration. Imitation would be highly situation-bound. To test this we extended the peer-imitation paradigm (Hanna and Meltzoff 1993). The novices saw the expert perform actions in the laboratory. After a two-day delay, an adult experimenter went into the child's home and laid out the test objects. The results again showed strong evidence of deferred imitation. Infants who had previously watched the peer produced significantly more of the target acts than did controls — this despite the displacement in time (a two-day delay), space (the home context differed from the lab), and associated cues (the adult experimenter who tested the child at home was different from the experimenter used in the lab). This type of flexibility in observing others and then applying this knowledge in new settings is characteristic of normal infants. It seems quite likely that children with autism would be more context-bound and would be less likely to generalize to novel situations anything they managed to pick up from another's modelling.

In these cases of deferred imitation, children not only map perceived movements on to their own internal proprioceptive sensations and motor plans, they also do so with reference to objects. Not only do they seem to think 'this person is like me', but also to think that their responses to this object ought to be like the other person's. This suggests the beginnings of a shared attitude toward objects, in a way that is similar to the social referencing (Campos and Stenberg 1981; Klinnert *et al.* 1983) and joint-attention behaviours (Butterworth 1991; Butterworth and Jarrett 1991) that also appear at about this age in normally developing children. This synchrony in development may not be fortuitous.

MUTUAL IMITATION GAMES: A TEST OF 'LIKE ME' RECOGNITION IN INFANTS

Thus far we have shown that infants, from birth on, respond to the behaviour of others by producing similar behaviour of their own, and we have sug-

gested that this indicates a mapping between the behaviour of the other and the infant's own behaviour and internal states. If this is true the process should, as it were, run both ways. That is, infants should not only imitate adults, but should also recognize when the adult is imitating them. It is, after all, equally true in this case that the infant's behaviour and the adult's are equivalent.

A series of experiments were conducted in which an adult purposely imitated the child, with the goal of determining if the child could recognize that his or her own behaviour was being adopted by the adult (Meltzoff 1990b). We wanted to know if fourteen-month-old infants could recognize such self-other correspondence, and if so, the psychological basis for this recognition.*

There were three converging experiments. The first investigated whether or not infants showed any interest in seeing that their own behaviour was adopted by another person. Two adults sat across a table from the child. All three participants were provided with replicas of the same toys. Everything the child did with his toy was directly mimicked by one of the adults, who had been assigned as the imitator. If the child slid the toy on the table, the imitating adult slid his toy on the table in the same manner. It was as if the adult were tethered to the child, a puppet under the child's control. The second adult was not so tethered. This adult sat passively, holding the toy loosely on the table top.

We thought that if children could recognize that their actions were being matched, they would prefer to look at the imitating adult and also smile at him more. We also thought that children would investigate this relationship between the self and the other by experimenting with it. For example, children might modulate their acts by performing sudden and unexpected movements to check if the imitating adult was still conforming to their actions. This is a way of 'catching the adult out', a way of experimenting with the relationship between self and world.

The results showed that infants had an overwhelming preference for the imitating adult over the non-imitating adult. Infants looked significantly longer at the imitating adult, there were more smiles directed toward the imitating adult, and infants directed more 'test' behaviour at the imitating adult. Of course, this study alone does not establish that infants can recognize the self-other equivalence engendered when another human acts just 'like me'. Infants may simply be attracted to any adult who actively manipulates a toy, without invoking any detection of like-me equivalence.

* In a loose sense, we set up an experiment in which we could study infants' reactions to what Searle (1983) calls 'world to mind' relationships. The world (the imitating adult) could be modified and manipulated in accordance with the child's whim. Is the infant interested in this? What criteria does the child use to determine that the events in the world correspond to the child's own action: temporal contingency information, or the structure of the action?

In a follow-up study, the general procedure was similar to that of the first study, but the control experimenter did not remain passive. Instead, this adult actively manipulated the toys. Furthermore, we wanted the adult not only to be active, but to do 'baby-like' things with the toys, so that no preference for the imitating adult could be based solely on a differentiation of adult versus infantile actions. We accomplished this by putting two TV monitors behind the infants, one monitor displaying the current infant and the other displaying the video record of the immediately preceding infant. The job of each adult was to mimic one of the infants on the TV monitors. Both adults performed in perfectly infantile ways, but only one matched the perceiving infant. Could the infants recognize which adult was a reflection of themselves, and which was acting like another baby? The results again showed that infants looked longer at the person who acted just like them, smiled more often at that person, and directed more testing behaviour toward him.

These effects cannot be explained as simple reactions to activity, for both adults were active. Nor can they be explained by saying that the infants recognized a generic class of baby-like actions, for both experimenters were copying the acts of babies. It would seem that the subjects are recognizing the *relatedness* of the actions of the self and the actions of the imitating other.

What is the basis for recognizing this sort of interpersonal relatedness? Two kinds of information are available, temporal contingency information and structural equivalences. On the first alternative, the child need only detect that whenever he does X the adult does Y. The child need not detect that X and Y are in fact equivalent, only that they are temporally linked. The second alternative is that the child can do more than recognize the temporal contingency between self and other. In particular, the child may be able to recognize that the actions of the self and other have the same form — that the adult is behaving 'just like me', not 'just when I act'.

To distinguish these alternatives, a third study was conducted in which the purely temporal aspects of the contingency were controlled by having both experimenters act at the same time. This was achieved by having three predetermined pairs of target actions. Both experimenters sat passively until the infant performed one of the target actions on this list. If and only if the infant exhibited one of these target actions, both experimenters began to act in unison. The imitating adult performed the infant's act, and the control adult performed the other behaviour that was paired with it from the predetermined target list. What differentiates the two experimenters is not the purely temporal relations with the acting subject, but the structure of their actions *vis-à-vis* the subject.

The results showed that the infants looked, smiled, and directed more testing behaviour at the adult who imitated them. Thus even with temporal

contingency information controlled, infants can recognize the structural equivalence between self and other. In a very real sense, infants can recognize the reflection of themselves in an 'other'.

Normal children's games with their parents are often reciprocal in nature. The infant bangs a table top, the parent bangs in return, and so on. Theorists have emphasized the *temporal patterning* of these exchanges, the conversation-like turn-taking they embody (Bruner 1975, 1983; Stern 1985; Trevarthen and Marwick 1986). Without minimizing the importance of timing, our experiments highlight the importance of the *commonality in the structure of the bodily movements*. The new data show that when temporal contingency information is equated, young children still can detect which of two adults is conforming to the child's own behaviour. Moreover, these data demonstrate that when normally-developing children are given a choice, they preferentially attend to the adult who is matching them, and also smile more at this adult. The children respond socially, with increased looking and smiling, to an adult who is acting in the same way/manner/form that the infant is. Even before spoken language, normal infants seem to notice and appreciate this 'meaningful contact' with an other.

It is possible that children with autism have, among other deficits, an impairment in the capacity for recognizing the cross-modal isomorphisms between their own body movements and the movements of others; this would be compatible with Rogers and Pennington's (1991) theory of autism. If so, such children might find such interactions less predictable and enjoyable than normally developing children. This would be unfortunate, because mutual-imitation games are a unique and important constituent of early interpersonal growth. Adults are both selective and interpretative in the behaviour they reflect back to the child. They provide interpretative imitations to their infants: reflections that capture aspects of the infant's activity, but then go on beyond it to read in intentions and goals to that behaviour. The infant may wave an object, but the parent interprets this as waving in order to shake, and therefore waves intensely enough to shake the toy and produce a sound. This, in turn, leads the infant beyond his or her initial starting-point. Likewise, selected actions, especially those that are potentially meaningful in the culture, will be reflected back more often than others, as part of a larger process that Bruner (1975, 1983) has called 'parental scaffolding'. Children who had a disturbance in the ability to recognize interpersonal sharing at the level of motor imitation would not profit from such scaffolding in the same way as normally developing children. Thus impairments in motor imitation and/or the supramodal body scheme that underlies it could have extended developmental consequences.

IMITATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY –
DOWN'S SYNDROME AND AUTISM

Unlike autistic children, children with Down's syndrome seem quite social; they smile at people and seem to enjoy interactions with them. Imitation has rarely been tested experimentally in this population (but see Dunst 1990), and the capacity for deferred imitation in particular has not been assessed.* Rast and Meltzoff (1993) adapted Meltzoff's deferred-imitation paradigm so that it could be used with young children Down's syndrome. A total of 48 children between the ages of twenty and forty-four months old were tested. A five-minute delay was used between the modelling period and the test of imitation. All the children were also given object-permanence tests to evaluate relations between the emergence of deferred imitation and high-level object-permanence skills.

As expected, the children were delayed in their understanding of object permanence. On average these children passed the A-not-B task (passed at about one year of age in normally developing children), and failed more complex tasks. Despite this retardation on object permanence, there was strong evidence for deferred imitation within the sample. We also divided the sample into 'young' (20–24 months) and 'old' (25–43 months) children. Deferred imitation was strongly evidenced in both age-groups. It is highly relevant for Piagetian theory that the young group showed strong evidence of deferred imitation, because not one of the young children passed high-level object-permanence tasks typical of 'stage 6' functioning (serial invisible displacements).

This pattern of results is quite baffling for classical theory, which postulates that deferred imitation (re-enacting a now invisible action from memory) and high-level object permanence (determining the location of a now-invisible object) emerge contemporaneously and are developmentally interdependent (Piaget 1952, 1962). On classical theory, one is led to ask why deferred imitation should be spared in Down's syndrome children and object permanence retarded. At a more general level, such a pattern of results would support the idea of 'deviance' in Down's syndrome children, inasmuch as two achievements that are synchronized in normally-developing children are broken apart in this syndrome. On this view, Down's syndrome children do not progress through the normal stages in a slowed-down manner, but

* There are many studies of object permanence, play, categorization, memory, and other infant skills in Down's syndrome children, but fewer experimental studies of imitation. In the studies that have assessed immediate imitation, controls of the type discussed in the foregoing sections have not been used, which means that it is difficult to distinguish true imitation from simpler types of social learning (see Meltzoff 1988d for a detailed discussion of the necessary controls for isolating true imitation versus social facilitation, stimulus enhancement, and so on).

rather show selective retardation in some areas (object permanence) and not others (deferred imitation).

Looked at from the viewpoint we have developed here and elsewhere (Meltzoff 1990a), however, the Down's syndrome pattern does *not* show 'deviance' from the normal pattern. We have presented evidence that the classical theory had profoundly underestimated imitative capacities which were once thought of as late to emerge, are actually building-blocks for development, and occur far earlier than has been assumed. In particular, we found that deferred imitation did not first arise in the 18–24-month age-group, but could be readily elicited in 9–14-month-old children. What this means is that the Down's syndrome results match the pattern found in normally-developing children quite closely: infants can perform deferred imitation well before solving 'serial invisible displacement' tasks on object permanence, and this appears to be true both in the normal and in this atypical population.* This underscores the necessity for interdisciplinary collaborations between those working with normal and atypical populations (Cicchetti 1989, 1990; Rutter and Garnezy 1983). If we are misinformed about the 'normal pattern' of psychological growth, we may mistake delay for deviance, and obscure underlying developmental patterns.

This immediately raises the question of autism, which does seem to be a case of developmental deviance. In relation to matched controls (often Down's syndrome children), autistic children show an impairment in social relations and communicative functioning. Autism seems to be a syndrome in which there are specific deficits, and not merely general retardation, although there is debate about the specificity of the impairments, as well as their origins and development (Baron-Cohen 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991a; Dawson and Lewy 1989a,b; Frith 1989; Hobson 1989, 1990a,b,c, 1991; Leslie 1987, 1988, 1991; Rogers and Pennington 1991; Mundy and Sigman 1989; Sigman 1989; other chapters in this volume). As frank 'outsiders' to the field, we tread with caution; none the less, there does seem to be something that can be added to the current debate by taking seriously the lessons from normally-developing and Down's syndrome children that have here been discussed.

In particular, we have presented data and thoughts as to the foundational role that imitation and cross-modal coordination play in the normal development of social and cognitive abilities. In a nutshell, we have proposed that the first act of common-sense psychology is the perception: 'here is something like me.' A disturbance to this primordial sense of kinship should

* Indeed the nine- to fourteen-month-old normally developing children who solved our deferred imitation tasks would be predicted to be at about the A-not-B stage of object permanence, just as was found in the Down's syndrome population. For a discussion of differences between object permanence and deferred imitation, see Meltzoff 1990a.

have cascading consequences for social-communicative development. Might autistic children have such a deficit?

This question is particularly relevant because the new data on normally-developing infants show that the perception of 'like me' relatedness to other human beings has a biological basis. Normal children are innately endowed with the capacity to imitate others. This provides a social bridge between the newborn and caregivers. It is as if humans are provided with an innate mechanism for social learning. This Janus-like quality of imitation, its biological basis coupled with its social implications for linking self with other, make it a key capacity to explore in autism.

There are no studies of neonatal imitation in autistic children. In part this is because of the recency of the discovery that neonates imitate; but it is also because children who will later be diagnosed as autistic are not born with genetic markers (at least not ones yet discovered) identifying themselves. One can study neonatal imitation in Down's syndrome children because they are genetically identifiable; but it would take broad-based screening and later follow-up testing to discover the actual neonatal status of later-identified autistic children — not an altogether uninteresting project (cf. Gillberg *et al.* 1990; Rogers and DiLalla 1990).

Is there any empirical support for the notion that children with autism might indeed have imitative deficits? There is accumulating evidence for an imitation impairment in autistic children (Rogers and Pennington 1991). A review of seven empirical studies done between 1972 and 1989 makes the point.

DeMyer *et al.* (1972) assessed imitation in autistic and mental-age-matched retarded children. The study compared imitation of pure body movements with actions on objects. Autistic children performed more poorly than the controls on both types of imitation tasks, but were particularly impaired on the imitation of simple body movements. Curcio (1978) tested autistic children using the Piagetian-based Uzgiris and Hunt (1975) scales. The study is of interest because of the sharp divergence between the children's performance on object-permanence and imitation tasks. Although 83 per cent of the subjects solved object-permanence tasks of the type passed by normally-developing 18-24-month-olds (serial invisible displacements), 5 of the 12 children did not imitate at all, and the majority could not imitate simple facial gestures, tasks we have shown to be within the capacity of normal newborns. Dawson and Adams (1984) also reported extreme deficits in motor imitation in autistic children who showed high levels of object-permanence understanding. Sigman and Ungerer (1984) tested imitation, general sensorimotor intelligence, and play in autistic, mentally retarded, and normal children. In relation to the mental-age-matched controls they found poor performance on imitation and play in the autistic children. The authors argued that these were specific impairments inasmuch as the results

showed no differences in general levels of sensorimotor intelligence between the groups. Moreover, the normal and mental-age-matched retarded children did not significantly differ from each other in imitation.

Jones and Prior (1985) compared the imitation of simple body movements in autistic and chronological- and mental-age-matched normal children, and, in line with the foregoing studies, the autistic children showed significantly poorer imitative performance. Ohta (1987) reported a study of Japanese autistic children. In relation to control groups the autistic children showed an impairment in body-movement imitation, and when there were imitative attempts, children often performed odd, partial versions of the adult's display, as if they did not register human actions within the same body-scheme framework as normally-developing children. Hertzog *et al.* (1989) found imitative impairments, especially for imitating affect-related actions of people, in autistic children in relation to appropriately matched normal and non-autistic mentally retarded children.*

In contrast to these studies of imitative deficits in the gestural realm is the classic finding of inappropriate verbal echoing in children with autism (Rutter 1983), which occurs as part of a more general pattern of deviant language. There are many reasons why vocal imitation may differ from gestural imitation, including the obvious point that language is a highly canalized system that recruits specialized neurophysiological mechanisms.

At a more psychological level, it is intriguing to consider the possibility that the self-other mapping in the verbal sphere is quite different from that in gestural acts. For vocalizations, the actor can hear both the model and the self-productions. The behaviour of the self and the other are both picked up through the same modality, and are directly comparable. In the case of certain body gestures—for example facial acts, or even bringing objects to the head and so on—the child cannot make a direct comparison between self and other, because self and other are perceived through different modalities. The subject can see the model, but cannot see his or her own face, neck, back, etc. The imitation of these acts involves cross-modal mapping, and implicates a body scheme to coordinate the intercorporeal correspondences. Moreover, gestural imitation entails a kind of primitive perspective-taking that is quite unlike vocal imitation. Even in the case of non-facial body acts, such as manipulating an object, there is a kind of *perspective-taking in action*, because you see your own acts literally from a different perspective than you see the bodily act of the other. It is relevant to theories of mind that normal infants perform this motor-level perspective-taking with facility. The cross-modal nature of gestural imitation and the

* Some literature suggests that elementary imitations can be elicited in some children, but that there is a special, intensified difficulty in imitating more 'symbolic' gestural acts (Bartak *et al.* 1975; Curcio and Piserchia 1978; Hammes and Langdell 1981; Riguet *et al.* 1981).

primitive perspective-taking it entails may contribute to the imitative impairment in children with autism.

Over and above the imitative deficit *per se*, we are intrigued by the strikingly deviant pattern of mental organization that emerges if we compare the foregoing studies with autistic children to the results we found with Down's syndrome and normally-developing children. Our results with Down's syndrome and normal children reveal essentially the opposite mental make-up from that reported from children with autism: in the former populations, imitation (both simple body movements and deferred object-related tasks) is readily accomplished far in advance of any signs of 'stage 6' object permanence (serial invisible displacements); yet several of the studies with autistic children show the reverse pattern: object permanence in advance of imitation. This is generally compatible with the view that autistic children have deficits in social cognition.

Imitation after a significant delay — deferred imitation — has not been investigated in autistic children. It would be useful to compare autistic, Down's syndrome, and normally developing children on both object-permanence tests and Meltzoff's (1988a,b) new deferred-imitation paradigm. Children with autism show robust memory for *objects* that are no longer in view (object permanence); what of their capacity to imitate human *actions* that are no longer in view (deferred imitation)? Moreover, even if some children with autism can imitate in some tasks, it seems likely that extending the tests recently developed with normally-developing infants to this population would yield more refined information than is currently available.

For example: (a) children with autism may be limited to duplicating familiar routines and not perform deferred imitation of novel behaviours as exhibited by normally-developing infants Meltzoff 1988a; (b) they may be further handicapped by not generalizing actions they observe in one context to their own behaviour in a new context (cf. the Hanna and Meltzoff, 1993, laboratory-home generalization study); and (c) they may be disrupted by 'symbolic distancing' and not be able to use a representation of a human form as a model for their own actions (cf. the Meltzoff, 1988c, TV imitation in normal fourteen-month-olds). We expect that within the autistic population there will be individual differences in imitative functioning and, for the population as a whole, success will vary according to the precise nature of the task. Three imitation tasks that draw on differentiable psychological mechanisms and therefore may vary in children with autism are the following: pure body-movements, object-manipulations, symbolic gestures. All three could be assessed in immediate versus deferred tests and with or without changes in context. Systematic tests along these lines would deepen our grasp of the nature and extent of the imitation deficit that exists in people with autism.

CONCLUSIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Mutual imitation as a 'tutorial' in early common-sense psychology

Imitative games between parent and child have been reported in widely differing cultures. Do they serve any psychological function over and above the shared enjoyment that is experienced? As one parent expressed it to us: 'After playing these games I feel so happy — like I've been able to reach my baby and communicate with her.' Is there anything to this intuition about child-rearing?

We suggest that mutual-imitation games provide children with a kind of 'primer in common-sense psychology', a private tutorial in person-related versus thing-related interaction. Physical causality in the ordinary world of middle-sized objects has both spatial and temporal characteristics; there is physical contact between the cause and effect. In the imitation game the child 'causes' the adult to move in a particular way, but there is no physical contact between child and adult. Why does the child perceive his own actions as the cause of the adult's movements if there is no physical contact? It is because of the way that the parent arranges the game. The causal nature of the interaction is heightened not only because of the Hume-like temporal contingencies, but because of the cross-modal structural information of the parent's *imitation*. The child may interpret this 'action at a distance' — the cause-effect perception that is devoid of physical contact — as something like 'psychological control', or even communication. This ascription of communication might be especially motivated when the agent is the self and the recipient is another like-me human who can move just as I move. Just as hitting objects and watching them bump provides opportunities for exercising and enriching the child's naive physics, the imitation game provides opportunities for the exercise and development of the child's naive psychology.

A child who lacked the aboriginal capacity for perceiving self-other equivalences in such games might enjoy them less. Certainly, the game of predicting the adults' actions (which can be known, within limits, because they are copies or transformations of the child's own acts) would yield fewer successes. Rather than a tutorial in sharing and in predicting human behaviour, such interactions could easily become overwhelming. Children with autism may have a disturbance in the core mechanism for detecting the commonality in body movements between self and other. To the extent that mutual-imitation exchanges are tutorials in common-sense psychology, their absence or diminution might lead to deficits in social understanding and communicative functioning.

Imitation, empathy, and emotions

Emotions are mental states that have intrigued philosophers of mind, and their place within the theory of mind literature has been considered especially by Harris (1989; Harris and Gross 1988), Wellman (1990), Perner (1991), and Hobson (this volume, Chapter 10). There are no definitive answers, certainly no simple answers, to the questions of how and when children become able to 'give meaning to' the emotional expression of another and feel empathy with him or her. One is not surprised that models range from learning theories to innate pattern-decoders. The aim of this section is not to review these alternatives, but to highlight the special role that imitation might play. The particular idea we wish to discuss is that infants' imitation of facial movements is the substrate for early empathic reactions. A connection between imitation and empathy was early championed by Lipps (1906); the new empirical findings allow us to elaborate interesting developmental implications.

It has long been thought that there may be deep connections between body and mind in the case of human emotions (Darwin 1965 [1872]; James 1844; Tomkins 1962). The nature and strength of these connections has recently been analysed in an interesting series of converging studies. The importance of this new empirical work is that it goes beyond the ordinary claim that causation runs from subjective state (underlying emotional feeling) to behavioural expression. That has been known at least since Darwin's (1872) insightful claim about the innateness and cultural universality of certain basic emotional expressions. The importance of this new work is the empirical demonstration that causality runs in the opposite direction as well: the adoption of certain facial poses actually causes the corresponding mental states and physiological reactions.

For example, Ekman *et al.* (1983) discovered that if people produce certain facial muscular actions — certain muscle contractions around the eyes, brows, and mouth — this results in the corresponding emotion-specific physiological changes that naturally go with those facial patterns. Zajonc *et al.* (1989) measured self-reported emotional states directly after the subject was asked to produce a speech sound that brought his or her face into accord with a smiling position (saying the vowel 'ee') versus a different face. The results showed that adopting a facial pose influenced the underlying felt emotional state.

Thus, in the case of emotions, the body configuration does not just indicate or express or specify (depending on one's theory) how one feels, but can actually influence it. In this sense, emotions are quite different mental states from 'beliefs'. One can hold the belief that 'the chocolate is in the blue cupboard' regardless of one's facial expression or bodily configuration. For beliefs, the body does not mould the mind, at least not to the extent that a

certain facial configuration can 'reach inside the mind' and alter the mental state. But this is just what happens in the case of emotions. The face bone is connected to the mind bone.

There is as yet no definitive research indicating that the bodily configuration influences emotional state in infants, but there is no compelling reason to dismiss this idea. Infants are known to produce basic emotional expressions in appropriate contexts — they smile when stroked, show fear faces at monstrous toys, produce disgust faces to bitter liquid, and so on. This suggests that there are connections between certain basic emotional states and facial expressions. This much does not have to be learned, and there is no reason to think that the bi-directionality of this connection is solely a product of learning.*

The question is, of course, how any of this would help to account for infant empathic reactions — feeling sadness when they see another being sad or feeling fear when they see another's fear. The view typically held is that this *emotional contagion* is somehow direct and unmediated. It has been said that there is an innate decoder for the meaning of basic emotional expressions, or an innate sympathy for conspecifics, or maybe a Gibsonian innately-based 'direct pick-up' of the distal variable, the emotional state. Nativism abounds.

Darwin (1965, p. 358) taught us that some sort of emotional-empathic reactions occur surprisingly early in development, and may have an innate basis, with the following observation of his infant son:

When a few days over six months old, his nurse pretended to cry, and I saw that his face instantly assumed a melancholy expression, with the corners of the mouth strongly depressed; now this child could rarely have seen any other child crying, and I should doubt whether at so early an age he could have reasoned on the subject. Therefore it seems to me that an innate feeling must have told him that the pretended crying of his nurse expressed grief; and this through the instinct of sympathy excited grief in him.

One reason the unmediated empathy view is put forward is that young infants were classically thought to be incapable of facial imitation. If they cannot imitate the expressions they see, then they have no way of connecting the facial expressions-as-seen in another with the corresponding mental state. The other's facial expression is 'out there' in space and publicly available to be seen. But the other's emotional state is 'inside', invisible. The only way they could make this emotional state their own was if there was 'direct perception' of the invisible mental state (the Gibsonian solution), or some sort of direct stamping of emotion into the heart of the baby via 'innate sympathy'.

* We do not wish to imply that the precise tuning of young infants' emotional-state categories is identical to that of adults or that there is no sharpening or learning involved in the development of emotions.

The discovery that young infants can imitate facial movements affords us another interpretation of Darwin's report. Perhaps infants do not begin by directly experiencing the emotional state of the other, but at first merely imitate the other's facial movements. A conservative view would be that they could perform such motor imitation even without (before) recognizing that it was an emotional expression *per se* that was being copied. For example, infants might even imitate components of the facial expression – just the lip position or the brow position, which is well within their capabilities. Motor imitation is not dependent on their knowing that the facial configuration carries emotional information and specifies an underlying emotional state in the other. Having imitated, having conformed their faces to the emotional expression, would then influence the child's own emotional state (as was the case with adults).

Thus imitation of the visible behaviour could be the avenue by which the invisible emotional state is transmitted. In other words, imitation of behaviour provides the bridge that allows the internal mental state of another to 'cross over' to and become one's own experienced mental state. Such a mechanism was untenable as an account of Darwin's observation of empathy in early infancy, if one adopted the traditional view that facial imitation was a late achievement. We now see that facial imitation is present in newborns. We are not postulating that imitation is the sole mechanism for empathy, especially in adults, but the findings of infant imitation make it plausible that it is one primitive mechanism for the interpersonal transfer of affect between parent and child.*

Children with autism show a relative lack of empathy – little indication that another's sadness touches them, that another's joy makes them feel happy. Children with autism also have an impairment in imitation. These two characteristics, lack of empathy and a deficit in behavioural imitation, may be causally related.

Imitation, autism, and two kinds of nativism

The empirical and theoretical issues here addressed have implications for recent proposals about the innate basis for common-sense psychology and a 'theory of mind'. The existence of a profound deficit in autistic children's theory of mind (see for example Baron-Cohen, Chapter 4, this volume) and the new data on infancy discussed here, provide evidence that *some* aspects of common-sense psychology are innately determined. One-hour-old infants map behaviour on to internal phenomenological states; you certainly cannot

* Something like the proposed process could occur in adults, as Lipps (1906) foresaw, because adults clearly can imitate facial expressions; the new information is that facial imitation is innate, and therefore could underlie empathic reactions right from the earliest phases of infancy.

get much more direct evidence of innate capacities than that. However, the more delicate problem is the question as to which particular aspects of common-sense psychology/theory of mind are innate, and the form that that innate knowledge may take.

For Leslie (1987, 1988, 1991; Chapter 5, this volume) the innate aspect of theory of mind involves the maturation of various metarepresentational abilities, particularly the representational 'decoupling' found in symbolic play of certain kinds. If taken at face value, this would predict that simple imitative abilities, which are non-metarepresentational in character, would be relatively unaffected in autism. In contrast, the aspect of common-sense psychology/theory of mind that we suggest is innate is not its referential or representational character, but the very idea of mentalism itself. At a very primitive level, normal children seem innately to map behaviours on to internal states; this is a starting-point for the later elaboration of common-sense psychology in the normal case. Children who lack this primitive sense of mentalism may well develop along different paths than normals because their construal of interpersonal encounters will be so very different.

A distinction can and should be drawn between two different forms of the nativist position – 'modularity nativism' and 'starting-state nativism' (Astington and Gopnik 1991; Gopnik and Wellman, in press). On the modularity view, well represented by Leslie's (1991) postulate of a 'theory of mind module', there are innate constraints on the form that a theory of mind may take. Certain kinds of cognitive architectures are innately determined, and represent indefeasible and unchanging constraints on the form of a final theory of mind. On the starting-state view, children are innately equipped with certain kinds of information about the nature of persons. In particular, we have here adduced data to show that they innately apprehend other human beings as 'like me' in fundamental ways. On the starting-state view this information itself may be modified or revised as the child learns more about the world and the people in it.

Modularity nativism and starting-state nativism lead to rather different views of the nature of the 'theory of mind' deficit discovered in people with autism. On the first view, the deficit represents a failure of the growth of a particular piece of cognitive architecture, in Leslie's account of the growth of a 'decoupler'. One might think of children with autism as psychological thalidomide victims, in whom a particular mental organ (to use Chomsky's phrase) fails to mature. On the second view, the absence of the initial starting-state means that the evidence available to children elaborating their understanding of mind is seriously limited in a way that it is not for normally developing children. Children with autism, on this view, might be seen as more analogous to astronomers who try to develop theories of the stars without telescopes. There appear to be innate mechanisms that allow newborn infants to accumulate particularly relevant kinds of evidence about

mental life. In particular, these innate mechanisms allow them to map at least some of their internal states on to the behaviour of others. These mechanisms provide an important beginning point for constructing notions of mind and persons, even if they do not specify the final state of those notions (Gopnik and Meltzoff, in press).

Our view is closer in this respect to views proposed to account for autism by Rogers and Pennington (1991), Hobson (1990b, 1991), and Baron-Cohen (1991b). For example, Hobson's idea that infants are innately equipped with the ability to see others as persons rather than as objects, and that this capacity is damaged in autism, is one that fits well with what we are proposing here. We suggest, however, that the evidence for that ability, and the mechanism by which it takes place, may be rather different from that proposed by Hobson for autistic children, and by others such as Trevarthen and Stern for the normally-developing child. These accounts rely heavily on evidence of an early 'affective attunement' between infants and others. This attunement is seen as evidenced in the temporal synchrony of early infant and adult behaviours—the coordinated 'conversational dance' or 'proto-conversation' typical of very early mother-infant interaction. Although such behaviours may indeed be the result of an early concept of the person, there is, as we have argued, nothing in the fact of temporal synchrony itself that seems to require such a concept.

Early imitative interactions, on the other hand, require intersubjective attunement in a deeper sense, because they literally involve a mapping of the behaviour of the other and the child's own internal state. In the final analysis, there may be an interconnected web of different proclivities—imitation and 'like me' apprehension being key (or so we would argue), but in conjunction with temporally synchronized action, preferential attention to faces and voices, etc.—that together constitute a 'starting state' in which infants recognize that they themselves, and the others around them, are all persons together.

There is another respect in which imitation informs the debate about innateness and children's understanding of mind. As we have repeatedly emphasized, imitation is not only a sign of certain common-sense psychological capacities, it is also a mechanism by which the understanding of mind might be developed. We have already suggested, for example, how imitation might play a role in differentiating persons and objects, in distinguishing physical and psychological causality, and in establishing empathy. The early existence of this powerful technique for learning about other people may help infants to elaborate a common-sense psychology that goes far beyond their innate endowment.

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Evolving a theory of mind: the nature of non-verbal mentalism in other primates

ANDREW WHITEN

INTRODUCTION: MENTALISM VERSUS BEHAVIOURISM IN WILD BOYS AND WILD APES

By the nature of this volume, I shall assume that the majority of readers are likely to be students of human developmental psychology, perhaps unfamiliar with the social life of non-human primates. They may experience an initial reaction of puzzlement about the very idea that such creatures might utilize anything like a theory of mind (ToM), and accordingly deserve the attention of those who study autistic or normal young children's first steps to mentalism. After all, it can be argued forcefully that children cannot be said to have a true ToM until passing a test of false-belief attribution, which is generally not until they are over four years of age (Perner 1988), following several years of exposure to talk about 'belief' and all the other elements of an elaborate and publicly recognized folk psychology. What chance then has the ape, with no communally discussable system of folk psychology, and only rarely exceeding the cognitive achievements of a three-year-old child (Premack 1988)?

I begin, therefore, by inviting the reader to engage in a thought experiment. The scenario is something of a pastiche of *Lord of the Flies* and *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*. This time, the boys deposited on the uninhabited island are prelinguistic, or at any rate their vocabulary has not yet incorporated any words remotely resembling mental terms. Ripe fruit falls into their laps, and several of the wild boys survive to middle childhood. It is a relatively uncontentious speculation that they would be motivated to interact with each other and form some sort of society. Just what sort of language (if any) they would jointly invent, and what sort of ToM (if any) each would construct, is less obvious. But imagine that these boys reach middle childhood without any linguistic terminology for states of mind. Would that mean that each of them had nothing we would recognize as a child's ToM? To the contrary, I suggest that it is not implausible that such children would, for example, from time to time intentionally create false *beliefs* in their companions, or help them obtain things they were thought to *want*:

1993

UNDERSTANDING OTHER MINDS

Perspectives from Autism

Edited by

SIMON BARON-COHEN

*Lecturer in Psychopathology,
University of Cambridge*

HELEN TAGER-FLUSBERG

*Professor of Psychology,
University of Massachusetts*

and

DONALD J. COHEN

*Professor of Child Psychiatry and Psychology,
Director, Child Study Center,
Yale University*

Oxford New York Tokyo

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