

Origins of Mind

Seminar Tasks: MA/MPhil Version

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Warning

This document may be updated during the course. Tasks might change. Please always check you have the latest version from <http://origins-of-mind.butterfill.com> before completing a task. This version was last edited October 16, 2013.

Essay 1

Suggested question

What is puzzling about 6-month-olds' abilities to track physical objects' causal interactions? How might the puzzle be resolved?

Peer review

This essay will be subject to peer review. Another student in your seminar group will be assigned as your reviewer. You should send the essay to your reviewer by 6pm two days before your seminar.

Hint

In this essay you might:

1. review some of the evidence that infants can track causal interactions (see readings, Spelke et al. 1992a or Leslie and Keeble 1987);

2. consider findings that are hard to reconcile with the claim that infants' simply know that barriers stop objects (see Hood et al. 2000, 2003)
3. attempt to resolve the conflict (potentially useful sources include Haith 1998; Keen 2003)

Reading

Spelke, E. and Van de Walle, G. (1993). Perceiving and reasoning about objects. In Eilan, N., McCarthy, R., and Brewer, B., editors, *Spatial representation: problems in philosophy and psychology*. Oxford University Press, Oxford

Hood, B., Carey, S., and Prasada, S. (2000). Predicting the outcomes of physical events: Two-year-olds fail to reveal knowledge of solidity and support. *Child Development*, 71(6):1540–1554

Further reading

Spelke, E. S., Breinlinger, K., Macomber, J., and Jacobson, K. (1992b). Origins of knowledge. *Psychological Review*, 99(4):605–632

Leslie, A. and Keeble, S. (1987). Do six-month-old infants perceive causality? *Cognition*, 25:265–288

Hood, B., Cole-Davies, V., and Dias, M. (2003). Looking and search measures of object knowledge in preschool children. *Developmental Science*, 29(1):61–70

Santos, L. R., Seelig, D., and Hauser, M. D. (2006). Cotton-top tamarins' (*saguinus oedipus*) expectations about occluded objects: A dissociation between looking and reaching tasks. *Infancy*, 9(2):147–171

Haith, M. (1998). Who put the cog in infant cognition? is rich interpretation too costly? *Infant Behavior and Development*, 21(2):167–179

Keen, R. (2003). Representation of objects and events: Why do infants look so smart and toddlers look so dumb? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(3):79–83

Fodor, J. (1983). *The Modularity of Mind: an Essay on Faculty Psychology*. Bradford book. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass ; London

Butterfill, S. (2007). What are modules and what is their role in development? *Mind and Language*, 22(4):450–73

Where to find the readings

All the readings are available online unless otherwise noted.

One fast way to find a paper is to copy its title into google scholar and search. To download the paper from the journal website, you may need to select 'log in' or 'institutional log in'.

If you have trouble locating a resource, check the list of journals available here:
<http://fs6jr8lx8q.search.serialssolutions.com/>

Citations

When citing articles in your essay, use the same system that my handouts and nearly all the readings use. That is, put author-year in the main text (e.g. 'Spelke et al have argued that ... (Spelke et al 1993, p. 22).') and include the full citation in a list of references at the end.

A bibliography manager like Zotero can save you a lot of time.

Length

Your essay may not exceed 2500 words. Essays longer than this words may be rejected without review.

Shorter is better, all things being equal.