

Folk psychologies and social cognition

Bart Geurts
Stephen Butterfill

1 Introduction

The word folk psychology (and related words such as mindreading, theory of mind, etc.) has been in many different ways. Not necessarily a bad thing, but can be confusing. Three main uses, which are related (Laanpere:2016, Molder:2016):

1.FP as a practice of attributing mental states. Attribution may be overt or covert (private). FP as the ability to understand or at least track mental states of others [?]. FP as a framework of mentalist concepts, which may be like a theory in some respects.

These uses are related. If you endorse more than one, you're treating folk psychology as a polysemous word.¹

Issues:

- The first sense draws together (at least) two uses that are fundamentally different: psychological (covert/private) vs. social/communicative (overt).
- Moreover, the former is often viewed as underpinning the former, which may be true, but is hardly a theory-neutral assumption.
- Underlying these two practices are abilities that may overlap, but are clearly distinct.
- Our proposal incorporates these uses, but redraws the general picture. Key dichotomy: social practices (SPs) vs. social cognition (SC). Will propose subdivisions within each domain.

- It is not our ambition to define terms like folk psychology, social practice, and so on. More like clearing the terrain by trying to make tentative distinctions that look promising; more promising, at any rate, than the distinctions that have been made so far. (When Newton began to ponder why things always fall downwards and in a straight line, his first order of business was not to define what that might mean; the question was sufficiently clear for the kind of pondering that needed to be done. The questions that have thus far been raised about folk psychology and its kin haven't reached that stage yet.)

2 Social practices

Within the domain of social practices, at least three types may be distinguished:-
1

SP₁ : Communicative practices involving such locutions as:

I like you. I don't mind. I feel bad. I forgot to do it. I lost my sense of smell. I wasn't expecting this. I did it against my will.	Why are you angry? What do you mean? Think about it. Look! You're stupid. You don't understand. You don't love me.	He did it on purpose. She's considering it. They agree on that. They are one mind. Her soul is pure. He suspects it will rain. Her memory is fading.
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- SP₁s are thoroughly interactive [?]. Speech acts require addressees and addressees need to be responsive. Uptake, agreement, backchannel cues.
- There are important differences between SP₁s associated with different languages/cultures [?], and even between populations sharing the same language.

SP₂ : Non-communicative practices involving mentalist locutions

–A says to herself: He seems angry. B asks himself: Why am I so ner-

vous?

- Non-social talk derives from social talk. SP_2 derives from SP_1 , but is obviously not interactive in the same strict sense.
- There are many forms and uses of non-social talk: self-addressed speech acts (as in these examples), rehearsing speech, memorisation, etc. (Winsler:2009a, Gregory:2016, Geurts:2018)
- Non-social uses of language need not be accessible to consciousness.
- Some of our SP_1 -practices are about SP_2 -practices. E.g., A said to herself that B seemed angry.
- Mental/non-mental divide problematic.

SP_3 : Non-communicative practices that don't involve mentalist locutions:

–B is crying and A is trying to comfort him. A sees B approaching with a gloomy look on his face, and tries to avoid him. Approaching each other in a narrow corridor, A steps to the right, and B does too.

- This family of social practices is hard if not impossible to characterise in positive terms.
- In each of these cases, it is natural to represent B's actions in SP_1 -terms, regardless whether these terms figure in B's cognition or not.
- Whereas SP_1 and SP_2 are language-dependent and the prerogative of our species, at least some SP_3 s occur in other species and may be genetically determined to a large degree.
- Examples: dogs, gaze following, attribution of basic emotions [?]

3 Frameworks

MTM [?], Geurts:2021

4 Social cognition

Abilities vs. mechanisms.

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