Folk psychologies and social cognition

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1. Introduction

The word "folk psychology" (and related words such as "mindreading", "theory of mind", etc.) has been used in many different ways. Not necessarily a bad thing, but can be confusing.

Three main uses, which are related (Laanpere 2016, Mölder 2016):

1. FP as a *practice* of attributing mental states. Attribution may be overt or covert (private).
2. FP as the *ability* to understand or at least track mental states of others (Butterfill 2019).
3. 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.

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:

SP_1 : Communicative practices involving such locutions as:

I *like* you.	Why are you *angry*?	He did it *on purpose*.
I don't *mind*.	What do you *mean*?	She's *considering* it.
I *feel bad*.	*Think* about it.	They *agree* on that.
I *forgot* to do it.	*Look!*	They are one *mind*.
I lost my *sense of smell*.	You're *stupid*.	Her *soul* is pure.
I wasn't *expecting* this.	You don't *understand*.	He *suspects* it will rain.
I did it against my *will*.	You don't *love* me.	Her *memory* is fading.

- SP_1s are thoroughly interactive (Clark 1996). Speech acts require addressees and addressees need to be responsive. Uptake, agreement, backchannel cues.
- There are important differences between SP_1s associated with different languages/cultures (Lillard 1998), and even between populations sharing the same language.

SP_2 : Non-communicative practices involving mentalist locutions

– A says to herself: "He seems angry."
– B asks himself: "Why am I so nervous?"

- Non-communicative talk derives from communicative 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-communicative talk: self-addressed speech acts (as in these examples), rehearsing speech, memorisation, etc. (Winsler 2009, Gregory 2016, Geurts 2018)
- Non-communicative 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 becomes 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 the same.

- 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_3s occur in other species and may be genetically determined to a large degree.
- Examples: dogs, gaze following, attribution of basic emotions (Goldie 2002).

3. "Frameworks"

MTM? (Butterfill and Apperly 2013), ToM, Geurts (2021)

4. Social cognition

Abilities vs. "mechanisms".

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