'Folk psychology' is not folk psychology

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Abstract. This paper disputes the claim that our understanding of others is enabled by a commonsense or 'folk' psychology, whose 'core' involves the attribution of intentional states in order to predict and explain behaviour. I argue that interpersonal understanding is seldom, if ever, a matter of two people *assigning* intentional states to each other but emerges out of a context of interaction between them. Self and other form a coupled system rather than two wholly separate entities equipped with an internalised capacity to assign mental states to the other. This applies even in those instances where one might seem to adopt a 'detached' perspective towards others. Thus 'folk psychology', as commonly construed, is not folk psychology.

Key words: extended cognition, folk psychology, interaction, intersubjectivity

What is 'folk psychology'?

The term 'folk psychology' is employed in philosophy and cognitive science to mean our commonsense, everyday ability to understand each other and negotiate the social world. Its main ingredient is usually taken to be an ability to assign intentional states (especially beliefs and desires) to humans and other organisms, in order to predict and/or explain their behaviour. For example, Scholl and Leslie state that "a theory of mind refers to the capacity to interpret, predict, and explain the behaviour of others in terms of their underlying mental states" (1999, p. 132).[1] Frith and Happé (1999) similarly describe it as the ability to attribute "mental states to self and others in order to predict and explain behaviour" (1999, p. 2). And Garfield, Peterson and Perry state that folk psychology "is the cognitive achievement that enables us to report our propositional attitudes, to attribute such attitudes to others, and to use such postulated or observed mental states in the prediction and explanation of behavior" (2001, p. 494).

There is much debate concerning the kinds of mental process that facilitate folk psychological understanding, how they develop and how they evolved. For example, theory-theorists claim that folk psychology is the ability to deploy a partially tacit, systematically organised body of knowledge. Simulation theorists claim, in contrast, that it is a practical ability, which involves somehow employing our own mental state and behaviour generation mechanisms in order to ascertain what we would do in another's situation. There are many different versions of theory and simulation theory. In addition, various

hybrid accounts have been suggested, incorporating aspects of both positions. To further complicate matters, there is considerable disagreement concerning how folk psychological abilities evolved and how they arise during development.[2]

Underlying this diversity is a common conception of what folk psychology is. Most simulation and theory approaches adopt 'predicting and explaining others by ascribing intentional states' as their initial description of interpersonal understanding and, without further ado, proceed to the question of how this is achieved.[3] But why should 'folk psychology' (FP),[4] as commonly described, be accepted without question as the primary explanandum for philosophical and scientific theories of intersubjectivity?

The simplest response is that the core constituents of commonsense psychology are readily apparent to commonsense and so FP is in no need of defence. This position is implicit in many recent discussions, which just assume that FP plays the primary role in facilitating interpersonal understanding and social life. For example, Currie and Sterelny (2000, pp. 145–146) assert without argument that "our basic grip on the social world depends on our being able to see our fellows as motivated by beliefs and desires we sometimes share and sometimes do not [. . .] social understanding is deeply and almost exclusively mentalistic". Frith and Happé similarly remark that "in everyday life we make sense of each other's behaviour by appeal to a belief-desire psychology" (1999, p. 2). And Langdon et al. (2002, p. 74) describe FP as "a cornerstone of everyday social interactions".

Despite such assertions, FP is not simply a commonsensical description of how we understand each other, upon which laypersons will converge after brief reflection. Last year, at the beginning of a lecture series on intersubjectivity, I asked a seminar group of fifteen second-year undergraduates the question 'what does our ability to understand other people consist of?' Despite explaining the question carefully and phrasing it in several different ways, I was met with silence and then a few vague suggestions along the lines of 'they're like me', 'I know they're consciousness' and 'they've got feelings'. Even after twenty minutes of trying to steer them in the direction of FP, nobody mentioned beliefs, desires, intentional states, prediction or explanation.

FP is generally claimed to be central to all or at least to the vast majority of our social interactions, rather than just those few cases where we make explicit assertions such as 'X believes p and so he will most likely do q'. If applicable solely to such utterances, it certainly could not be regarded as the 'core' of our social abilities, or even a commonplace constituent. However, as my students illustrated, we are not explicitly aware of employing FP during the majority of our interpersonal interactions or even upon reflection. Hence FP cannot be a piece of unadulterated commonsense. So what is it? Stich and Ravenscroft (1996) distinguish two alternatives. FP could refer to an internal ability

that facilitates our social competence. Alternatively, it could be an external systematisation that philosophers impose upon commonsense practices. The theory/simulation literature presupposes the former understanding. If FP were a philosophically useful systematisation of everyday life, rather than something that individuals actually do, there would be no sense in asking how they do it or in arguing over whether it is enabled by an innate cognitive device or module.[5] My focus here will be on the 'internal' conception of FP. However, my conclusion will also entail that, if FP is an external systematisation of commonsense, it is not a very informative one.

Regardless of whether FP is a systematisation of commonsense or an ability that underlies it, statements of what it consists of will presuppose an understanding of commonsense, given that FP is taken to systematise or underlie *something*. However, interpreting and describing commonsense is not an easy task. Consider, for example, Husserl's (1960, 1970) attempt to articulate pre-reflective experience. He does not simply 'introspect' or do a bit of casual anthropology but, in adopting the standpoint of the epoché, suggests that a radical perspectival shift is required in order to make explicit the taken-for-granted structure of world-experience. The structure disclosed through the epoché is not evident to everyday thought but should both the epoché and what it discloses be excluded from an interpretation of 'commonsense'? To make a convincing case for this, one would have to specify a perspective or stance from which commonsense is legitimately articulated. However, a multiplicity of phenomenological stances and different interpretations of everyday life are available to choose from. For example, Heidegger (1962) adopts a spiralling hermeneutic to disclose a world of practices and purposes, from which we can never fully detach ourselves. Adoption of a detached perspective, according to Heidegger, serves to obfuscate rather than reveal the nature of our being-in-the-world. This differs markedly from Husserl's (1960) emphasis on objects, essences and the theoretical, detached epoché. Even if one finds nothing of worth in either strategy, such divergent stances and findings serve as an illustration of the problems associated with interpreting commonsense.

Despite such concerns, supporters of FP have provided no account of what they take 'commonsense' to be or of the methods and assumptions they employ in interpreting it. Furthermore, descriptions of FP are remarkably inattentive to our everyday social phenomenology. It is often stressed that FP is a pervasive feature of everyday social life:

> The currency of our mental lives consists largely of propositional attitudes, even when we are interpreting the behaviours of others [. . .] If you see a person running to catch up with a just-departing train, for example, you interpret the person as an intentional agent, who *believes* that there is a just-departing train, and who *wants* to get on it. (Scholl and Leslie 1999, p.131)

However, such statements do not start with a phenomenology of social life and show how FP is incorporated into it. They just describe all instances of interpersonal understanding in FP terms and assume that such descriptions adequately characterise what is going on. A greater receptivity to everyday experience is required of any account that claims to be of 'commonsense' psychological understanding. It cannot simply be taken for granted that one's ability to understand the predicament of a person running towards a train centrally involves an ability to assign internal, propositional attitudes in order to explain or infer the likelihood of certain behaviours. And, in what follows, I will suggest that FP's description of the structure of interpersonal understanding is mistaken.

Deflating the role of intentional psychology: Gallagher on interaction

Even the most enthusiastic proponents of FP acknowledge that there is more to understanding others than assigning propositional attitudes. For example, Baron-Cohen (1995, Chapter 4) postulates three devices that facilitate a pre-propositional awareness of others:

(a) A perceptual 'intentionality detector'.
(b) An 'eye direction detector' that, amongst other things, triggers arousal and affective response when somebody else is looking at you.
(c) A 'shared attention mechanism' that enables an appreciation that one is looking at the same object as somebody else.

These mechanisms are postulated as developmental precursors to FP, which continue to play a role in supporting adult FP abilities. However, Gallagher (2001a) ventures a different interpretation and argues that early perceptual and affective abilities are not only developmentally prior to FP but remain the *primary* source of interpersonal understanding in adults, FP being only a specialised, marginal ability. Gallagher's critique of FP begins with the observation that FP places excessive emphasis on a certain kind of interpersonal stance. FP conceives of interpersonal understanding in terms of one person looking upon another from a detached point of view. Given the adoption of such a stance, the idea of one person assigning mental states to another person might seem plausible. However, Gallagher notes that most of our interpersonal relations have a very different character. For the most part, we engage with others not as 'he', 'she' or 'it' but as 'you'. Second-person understanding is not a detached, theoretical process but a form of interaction. In approaching someone in the second-person, one is seldom aware of assigning intentional states and one is not explicitly attempting to explain or predict their behaviour.

Taking the second-person stance as primary in understanding others, Gallagher suggests that abilities such as "imitation, intentionality detection, eye-tracking, the perception of intentional and goal-related movements, and the perception of meaning and emotion in movement and posture" (2001a, p. 90) are sufficient to sustain the majority of social interactions. The cognitive skills of FP are called upon only occasionally. Gallagher thinks of intersubjectivity as a kind of embodied practice, which does not require one to 'mind-read' by inferring unobservable propositional attitudes but to 'body-read'. Intentions, goals and actions are not *inferred* from body movements and facial expressions but are *perceived* during interaction, facilitating a "direct, pragmatic understanding" (2001a, p. 86). An ability to *perceive* intention in action accords with our phenomenology and Gallagher also cites a considerable body of experimental evidence in support of there being a non-inferential, perceptual-affective attunement to the intentions, actions and emotions of others. For example, he considers the discovery of 'mirror neurons' in the cortex of monkeys and humans, which discharge when one performs a certain kind of action and also when someone else is observed performing a similar action. These cells seem to respond to similarity of goal or intention, rather than similarity of movement. For example, they might discharge when someone is perceived attempting to grasp a cup but not when the same arm movements are perceived in the absence of a target object. Gallagher suggests that mirror neurons contribute to an inter-modal bridge between a proprioceptive sense of one's own bodily capabilities and perception of others' behaviour, facilitating a non-inferential, non-propositional perception of agency (2001a, p.101).[6]

Gallagher does concede that FP, in the form of theory, simulation or both, will still have a (greatly reduced) role to play in understanding others. He distinguishes between strong and weak pragmatic claims on behalf of FP, the former being that FP is always primary and the latter being that it plays some role sometimes, and states that his argument applies only to the former:

> I do not want to deny that we do develop capacities for both theoretical interpretation and simulation, and that in certain cases we do understand others by enacting just such theoretical attitudes or simulations. Such instances are rare, however, relative to the majority of our interactions. (2001a, p. 85).

One response on behalf of FP is that, although the attribution of intentional states is not *phenomenologically* pervasive in first- to second-person interactions, it nonetheless occurs at a tacit level. Gallagher considers this and concedes that phenomenology alone cannot rule out subpersonal processes. However, it can, he suggests, repudiate FP's claim that the primary role of interpersonal understanding is prediction and explanation. We would surely have some awareness of explaining or trying to predict somebody.[7] But intersubjectivity

more usually involves interaction and evaluation (2001a, pp. 94–95). It could be added that, if theory and simulation are primarily about enabling prediction and explanation, the phenomenological absence of prediction and explanation also constitutes a case against the subpersonal operation of FP in the form of theory or simulation.

However, there is a further response that could be ventured in support of the claim that FP tacitly enables second-person interactions. Churchland (1998) argues that clear distinctions between theoretical deployment of an ability and practical interaction are untenable. For example, scientific theories are routinely employed for numerous practical purposes that do not explicitly involve prediction or explanation:

> Theory is regularly an intimate part and constituting element of people's second-by-second practical lives [. . .] Consider geometry in the working day of a carpenter. Musical theory in the working day of a composer or jazz musician. Chemical theory in the working day of a drug engineer. Medical theory in the day of a physician. Optics in the day of a camera lens designer. Computer science in the day of a programmer. Metallurgy, mechanics, and simple thermal physics in the day of a blacksmith. (1998, pp. 33–34)

Theory and practice are intimately associated even in scientific contexts, and theories can serve myriad practical purposes.[8] So *use of a theory* cannot be identified with *adoption of a theoretical stance to predict and explain phenomena*. Applying this to FP, it is arguable that FP is an ability that is integrated into numerous different stances towards others. In some cases, it will facilitate the first- to third-person task of prediction and explanation. And, in first- to second-person cases, it will enable interaction, evaluation, communication and co-ordination. Just as the phenomenology of employing a scientific theory may differ from one occasion to the next, so too there may well be different stances through which an ability to attribute intentional states is phenomenologically manifested.[9]

The question therefore arises as to *how* a first- to second-person stance differs from a first- to third-person stance in such a way as to preclude its translation into FP terms. The answer, I will suggest, is that personal understanding is not a pre-given ability of individuals that enables interaction with others. The ability to understand is partly constituted *through* the interaction. In what follows, I will describe how interaction is constitutive of interpersonal understanding and, in so doing, show why FP fails to accommodate its phenomenological and cognitive structure. I will also suggest that phenomenological considerations alone are sufficient to block the claim that FP is still going on at a phenomenologically inaccessible, subpersonal level. In the next section, I will focus on first- to second-person interactions and support Gallagher's rejection of the strong pragmatic claim. In the concluding section, my argument will be generalised so as to accommodate even first- to

third-person cases, suggesting that FP is not only limited in scope but absent from everyday social life. Hence even a weak pragmatic claim on behalf of FP should be rejected.

Interaction as constitutive of understanding

The nature of FP's phenomenological implausibility with respect to first- to second-person interactions can be made explicit through the everyday example of a good conversation. When meeting somebody for a chat, we seldom have a pre-prepared, exhaustive list of discussion topics and viewpoints. Indeed we very often do not have a clue what we will talk about. Instead, the conversational narrative takes form through our interactions with each other. Facial expressions, body movements and verbal tones interact in intricate ways and seem to flow in harmony with the words spoken. Mutual interpretation is constrained by this interaction and by the shared narrative that unfolds. The flow of conversation is not simply facilitated by two discrete thinkers interpreting each other by ascribing internal mental states. My ability to interpret you is partially constituted by your interactions with me. You are a part of the interpretive process.

The intricate interactions required to sustain commonplace conversational narratives can be made explicit through reflection on certain cases where conversation breaks down badly. One sometimes finds oneself with a person who does not engage in the usual interplay of eye movements, does not bring his body into the conversation, holds it rigid, or fails to tune it to a subtle dance of co-ordination with one's own. He may fail to laugh, smile, or interject at crucial moments. On such occasions, the conversation tends to rapidly deteriorate or never even gets going. One not only finds it hard to interpret the other but also to sustain a coherent chain of thought oneself. Coupled with this is a pervasive negative affect, directed not just at the other, who so obfuscates one's efforts to be sociable, but also to one's self. There are strong feelings of discomfort, disorientation, inadequacy and an alteration of one's 'sense of self', a heightened sense of unpleasant self-awareness, awareness not of the everyday self but of a modified, all too present, somehow diminished self.[10]

It might be maintained that a tacit FP enables conversational interaction and social interaction more generally. However, there is considerable evidence suggesting that things are the other way round. For example, Bruner and Feldman (1993) claim that an appreciation of intentional states does not *underlie* an ability to engage in interactive narrative construction but emerges through it. They argue that normal two- to three-year olds have an understanding of intentional states, which is exhibited in their ability to construct stories. This understanding cannot be extricated from the narrative context that 'scaffolds'

it. Even in younger children, the activity of play has a narrative structure (pp. 273–274). The social impairment evident in autism is, according to Bruner and Feldman, best characterised as a deficit in the interactive construction of narratives, as opposed to absence of an internalised ability to assign intentional states. Autistic children do not interact with others in the generation of conversational narratives. They do not build on a speaker's previous comment and lack a sense of conversational direction, failing to interject with anything novel or relevant to the conversation (p. 274).

It is also evident that interpersonal understanding depends substantially upon perceptual and affective factors, which operate *through* the interaction and are not internalised abilities that precede it. Cole's (1998, 2001a, b) work on the intersubjective role of the face serves to make clear the importance and intricacy of perception and affect in structuring interaction. The role of the face is ordinarily taken for granted but can be brought to light by the kinds of experiences had by individuals with facial problems, such as Möbius syndrome (which involves paralysis of the facial muscles and a consequent lack of facial expression), or facial disfigurement. Cole observes that normal conversational interaction is phenomenologically "effortless" (2001a, p. 56). However, people with facial disfigurement tend to become socially passive, responding to others but failing to take the conversational initiative. And people with facial problems more generally report an altered sense of their own subjectivity. In normal conversation, one's sense of self can become largely absent, as one's attention is absorbed in interaction with the other, as opposed to being directed both internally at oneself and externally at a separate, discrete subject. Cole reports that people with facial differences, "being aware of their visibility, may never experience such an absence. But they do have other and more distressing absences; absences of confidence and, at times, absences of relatedness and relationship with others" (2001a, p. 56). The social effects of facial problems cannot simply be attributed to one person's impairment. It is the interaction itself that is modified, an interaction of perception, expression and affect that is constitutive of the ability to 'tune' ourselves to each other. Alterations in that attunement not only change one's interactions with others but also alter, in various ways, one's own sense of self. As Cole (2001b, p. 478) puts it:

> Those with facial problems describe a loss of social relatedness leading to profound social isolation and to an impoverished sense of self. (p. 478) The face [. . .] is not only a visible expression of emotion, but to some extent the self is constituted in the face and is developed and experienced in the interactions between faces. (p. 482)

Similar phenomenological observations can be made with respect to bodily interactions more generally. One is receptive to and co-ordinates with the other's

flow of movements, as is exemplified by pastimes such as dancing or playing football, where perception of and co-ordination with others are phenomeno-logically inextricable. Such observations are complemented by Rizzolatti and Arbib's (1998) account of the role played by the mirror system in humans. They hypothesise that mirror neurons facilitate a complex perceptual-motor dialogue between individuals, a kind of direct, bodily understanding. When observing another person's actions, one's own motor system will sometimes be activated, resulting in movement. This is perceived by the other, whose own motor system reacts, and so forth (1998, pp. 190–191). The ability to voluntarily regulate inhibition of one's motor response allows structured in-teractions to take shape, a mutual bodily understanding that is not expressed through but constituted by interaction.

The claim that interpersonal understanding is constituted by interaction can also be applied to talk of beliefs and to an understanding of one's own and others' beliefs. In first- to second-person interaction, one might say 'You believe X, do you?' However, such utterances need not imply an internal ability that A has to assign beliefs to a discrete and passive B. The attribu-tion is partly enabled by a mutually constituted narrative context and may be very difficult to make sense of without that context. Furthermore, there are many occasions when a belief that one expresses has not been worked out or even explicitly considered beforehand. It just 'pops up' in the con-text of a conversation and can be something that one is surprised at, as one pauses to exclaim 'Do I really believe that?' or 'Did I just say that?' Phe-nomenologically speaking, one's own beliefs do not always seem to reside in oneself beforehand and the other's beliefs are seldom explicitly assigned. The process is not that *of A finding out about B* but of *A and B construct-ing* the conditions for the interpretation and creation of belief through their interaction.

Consider the example of viewing a house with the possible intention of buying it. If one looks at it with someone else, one's assessment is not inde-pendently formulated and *then* socially mediated but structured from the start by interaction with one's companion. It is not simply a case of 'A thinks X and I think Y, so I'll settle for one, the other, or something in between'. It is more often a case of evaluations emerging through the interplay of mutual gaze, expression, 'hmms' and 'ahhs' and, of course, comments. The assessment that one leaves with is neither that of A nor B nor a mixture of what A thought and B thought. It emerges from the interaction between them. This interplay is not restricted to evaluative judgements but applies to beliefs more generally. When giving a philosophical talk and maintaining that claim X is true or most likely true, to be met by sneers, gasps of astonishment or shaking heads can add up to a *feeling* that one is wrong and maybe to a more general breakdown in the coherence of one's thinking, presentation and ability to interact with questioners. Or perhaps one 'realises' that one didn't actually believe it at

all. A belief is, phenomenologically speaking, not always a pre-given internal state of self or other that is expressed, assigned or figured out during conversation. Our 'beliefs' are more like potentialities that are realised or completed in various ways through contexts of interaction.[11] Interaction with others not only structures explicitly uttered beliefs but also one's perception of the surrounding world. Consider walking along a riverbank on your daily route home from work. The same things 'pop out at you' every day and eventually you stop noticing them. Then you take a leisurely stroll along the same bank with a partner or friend. Her eyes move from A to B, her head turns, her gait is inquisitive and, as your own movements respond, triangulating gaze, and co-ordinating expressions, the riverbank takes on a new significance. Things that had disappeared into the background surface again, aspects of the scenery you had never noticed beforehand become present and things organise themselves into different patterns of salience.

Examples of interaction illustrate that interpersonal understanding is not always phenomenologically describable as A attributing internal states to B or even A interpreting B. It is constituted by the interaction between them. B is not just interpreted by A but is also constitutive of the process through which A interprets A, B and the relationship between them.

I suggest that an interactive, practical process cannot be re-characterised in terms of an individual's internalised abilities, regardless of whether one is engaged in phenomenological description or attempting to characterise 'underlying' cognitive processes.[12] To see why, consider the idea of 'embodied, embedded' or 'extended' cognition, as discussed by Clark (1997, 2001) and Clark and Chalmers (1998), amongst others. Extended cognition starts with the observation that perception and action are incorporated into cognitive processes. We often act upon the world so as to change what we perceive and, in so doing, enhance our cognitive abilities. Clark and Chalmers argue that the external structures manipulated and the perception-action dynamic involved should not be regarded as external additions to cognitive processes but as part of them. Clark considers the activity of assembling a jigsaw puzzle, during which one moves the pieces around in order to simplify the task one is faced with. Manipulation of external structures enables one to complete the puzzle (1997, p. 36). Such "epistemic actions" (Clark and Chalmers 1998, p. 8) not only assist thought; they are a part of the thought process. Without the practical ability to manipulate jigsaw pieces, perceive the transformations and manipulate further, one's ability to complete the puzzle would be lost or substantially impaired.

Clark also gives the example of an artist, who uses a sketchpad as part of the creative process. She draws on the sketchpad, perceives, alters the drawing and so forth. Internal mental images could not replace the role of a pencil and pad. One cannot look upon them, interact with them and alter them in quite the same way as a drawing. So the pad is not merely a prop that assists the artistic

process but a constituent of that process. Interaction with it is not additional to the artist's ability but is a part of that ability. As Clark put it:

> The sketch-pad is not just a convenience for the artist, nor simply a kind of external memory or durable medium for the storage of particular ideas. Instead, the iterated process of externalizing and re-perceiving is integral to the process of artistic cognition itself. (2001, p. 133)

Such examples illustrate why it is not legitimate to re-interpret practical dealings as the practical deployment of theoretical abilities. One does not *already have* an ability X, which can be applied in a theoretical or a practical context. When an ability incorporates a substantial amount of practical activity, much of the activity is not an expression of the ability but a part of it. In other words, the ability is inextricable from the practical context through which it is manifested. And social abilities, as already noted, incorporate a particularly intricate pattern of practical interactions.

Clark and Chalmers recognise that interactive, world-involving cognitive processes are at play in social life. They also suggest that extended cognition might be applicable more specifically to the relationship between self and other: "Could my mental states be partially constituted by the states of other thinkers? We see no reason why not, in principle" (1998, p. 17). Although they do not pursue this idea further with respect to the interaction between individuals, I suggest that extended cognition comprises a cognitive science theoretical framework in whose terms the phenomenological intermingling of self and other, outlined earlier, can be couched. And this framework can also be invoked to illustrate *why* such interpersonal abilities are not reducible to FP. In order to claim that FP operates in first- to second-person interactions, one has to be able to decouple it from a theoretical explanation-prediction stance. However, examples of extended cognition illustrate why abilities cannot be so easily dissociated from the standpoint through which they are manifested. Consider:

1. My applying FP by adopting a theoretical stance.
2. My applying FP by adopting an interactive stance.

This distinction between FP and the stance through which it is deployed is not legitimate. One cannot suspend a practical stance and preserve an underlying ability because the stance is constitutive of the ability. For example, nobody would attempt to account for an ability to play football without taking any account of the practical dynamics of the game. Similarly, one cannot separate the 'posits' of FP from the manner of their application. So the phenomenological difference between detached observation and first- to second-person

interaction translates into a cognitive difference. Intersubjectivity does not 'seem' like an internal capacity that is deployed upon others and we do not 'appear' to use wholly internal processes to postulate mental representations that are assigned to others. Once the interactive nature of practical cognition is recognised, there is no reason to suggest that the appearance of openness towards each other, mutual permeability and various kinds interdependence is anything other than it seems.

Hence, in the case of interactive I-you understanding, FP is phenomenologically implausible and also misdescribes the cognitive processes involved. Even the claim that FP is a wholly tacit, subpersonal process is unacceptable. A tacit FP is posited as an explanation of how we do something. That 'something' is characterised at the level of everyday, commonsense social interaction and, if it's not what we are doing at all, to postulate a subpersonal FP is to answer the wrong question.

One might object that, given my argument, FP is inapplicable only to personal understanding of the I-you variety, which is best characterised in terms of interaction. Much of our understanding of others does incorporate a more detached, theoretical perspective, from which one assigns beliefs to a 'he', 'she' or 'it'. Thus, at best, I have supported Gallagher's rejection of the strong pragmatic claim for FP. And even this much is debatable. The cases I have discussed are arguably in the minority. Not many interpersonal exchanges are as interactive as my examples of phenomenological mingling. So the scope of FP could still be fairly extensive.

However, I will argue in the next section that *all* instances of interpersonal understanding are interactive. A wholly detached, theoretical I-he/she/it stance is something that is never adopted towards persons. Even third-person stances are interactive and should not be identified with the impersonal stance of scientific enquiry.

The pervasiveness of interactive understanding

Intersubjectivity is not just a choice between two different stances, the 'I-you' and the 'I-he/she/it'. These stances may epitomise the contrast between detachment and engagement but there are many other structures of personal interaction that may well be reducible to neither. Consider 'us looking at you (singular/plural)', 'us interacting with you (singular/plural)', 'you and me interacting with each other, whilst theorising about her', 'us watching you interacting with her/them' and so forth. Some of these seem to involve a theoretical stance, others a practical stance and others both. In the case of 'us discussing her', it might seem that a theoretical stance is being adopted. However, it could also be argued that the interaction between us facilitates the conditions required for us to interpret her and so interaction underlies what

looks like theory. To argue that *no* instances of interpersonal understanding have the structure of 'A attributing internal, intentional states to B', I will focus on the example of one isolated individual apparently adopting a detached stance towards another isolated individual, who remains as 'she' and is not, at any point, addressed as a 'you'.

It is worth noting just how rare such encounters are. There are very few cases where I-you interaction is not part of personal understanding. When one adopts the third-person stance towards another, one almost always does so against a backdrop of interaction with others, with whom one forms an 'us'. Take gossip for example. Talk of the other's beliefs, desires, intentions and projects often makes sense relative to the background of *our* mutual concerns and purposes, which the other might contribute to or obfuscate: 'Can she be trusted? Will he pay up? How will it affect us if she does that?' Even in classic examples of theorising about and manipulating others, a context of interaction is evident. Iago does not just observe and manipulate Othello from a distance. He interacts conversationally with him, turning to engage the audience whilst voicing his malevolent intentions.

However, there surely are cases where I alone observe, predict and explain your behaviour from a detached perspective, with no others present. Consider somebody watching a neighbour doing the gardening, staring out through the window, attributing beliefs, desires and intentions to him, predicting his actions.

Even in such cases, I suggest that attribution of intentional states does not carry the primary burden of interpretation, prediction and explanation. In most instances of both I-you and I-she understanding, we interpret each other within a shared context of established social practices, which incorporate social norms (what 'one does' in situation x) and standardised artefact functions (what 'one does' with artefact x). One need not explicitly adopt an interpretive stance towards the other at all, or *attribute* characteristics such as rationality. As McGeer notes, the attribution of rationality is, in any case, far too specific a constraint and does not capture the scope of social normativity, the extent to which tacit assumptions about 'what one does' can constrain interpretations of behaviour:

> Our ways of organizing our environment, our ways of conducting ourselves in spatial orientation to one another, our ways of using voice and body, our ways of dressing, all come to be normatively guided, conveying our thoughts and feelings to one another as much as our explicit communicative acts (2001, p. 117).

McGeer suggests that such constraints on interpretation should not be couched in terms of propositional attitudes. They involve a kind of practical, perceptual, affective understanding; we "feel it in our bones" (McGeer, 2001, p. 121).

In fact, a context of normative constraints is not, at the phenomenological level, something that one imposes on others at all. It is the way the world is phenomenologically given. As Baker argues, the world we experience is not just a physical, causal world with a few social norms here and there: "The commonsense conception is riddled with intentionality and normativity through and through" (1999, p.13). We already find ourselves in a world of standardised artefacts, normative institutions and ways of doing things. All one has to do is take for granted that others share the same world and one's interpretation will be significantly constrained. The neighbour just 'does what one does when one is gardening'. Assignment of internal states is not necessary.

As an understanding of artefacts and social norms is essentially practical and seldom made explicit, extended cognition arguments can be applied here too. We do not wholly internalise social norms but tune ourselves to them, off-loading much of the cognitive burden onto the social environment.[13] Clark (1997, pp. 182–184) applies extended cognition to several aspects of the social environment, suggesting that action is sometimes so constrained by external, social, normative scaffolding that interpreting another person amounts to assigning them a simple either/or choice or perhaps no choice at all. Interpreting others in such cases requires a largely practical understanding of social institutions, rather than FP. More generally, a tacit, practical involvement with 'how things are done' shoulders most of the interpretive work.

Still, it might seem possible that FP, although supported by a grasp of normative practices, does exist as a distinctive component of our more general social ability. However, I suggest that not even this much can be sustained. Even in first- to third-person scenarios, one is seldom wholly 'detached' from the other person. This does not bode well for theory-theory, which suffers from phenomenological implausibility with respect to all cases of personal understanding:

> According to [Theory theory] other people are objects in our environment, and the task of understanding them is no different, in principle, from the task of understanding the behaviour of other, more inert, objects . . . (Stone and Davies 1996, pp. 126–127)

But others only strike us as mere objects in those contexts where interpersonal understanding is wholly absent. Although trampling over screaming bodies in order to reach the fire exit of a burning theatre may amount to regarding them as objects, one is not, in that context, seeing them as persons at all. A 'third-person' understanding is not an 'objective' understanding, in the sense of regarding somebody as a mere thing, to be viewed with indifference (Goldie 2000, pp. 181–182). In fact, the 'third-person perspective' arguably conflates many different stances. One might adopt a third-person stance to-

wards somebody out of dislike, as a refusal to engage with them as 'you'. One might do so because communication is physically impossible. One may retain a distance out of respect, fear or shyness. One can also regard another person with the aim of manipulating them, one may sympathise with them, feel pity for them or adopt a stance of curiosity towards their behaviour. The 'third-person' grouping fails to do justice to the numerous different stances or attitudes that one might adopt towards another. In none of these cases is the other simply experienced as a kind of 'object'. There are many modes of distancing oneself from others but the neutral, objectivist stance through which one might examine a quartz crystal captures none of them. This would constitute indifference to personhood, an absence of intersubjectivity.

Simulation theories might seem to fare better, given their acknowledgement that employing one's own cognitive resources in order to attribute intentional states may elicit feelings similar to those of the other person. Gordon notes that simulation is a "hot" methodology, which engages our own emotional, motivational and practical reasoning resources, as opposed to a "cold" methodology that allows us to remain detached from the object of study (1996, p. 11). Thus simulation might account for our sense that others are not just objects but also 'like us'. This difference between theory and simulation is made vivid by Ravenscoft's description of observing a distressed climber. One watches the increasingly exhausted climber reach in desperation for something to hold on to, knowing full well that a fatal fall is imminent. Each time his hand slips, he tries again, knowing that his predicament is growing increasingly dire. Ravenscroft points out that, as one watches the climber, one's phenomenology is wholly unlike that of a theorist:

> When we empathise with the distressed climber we do not merely hold a series of propositions about his mental life. We personally experience states very much like his. Our situation is not at all like that of a scientist. . . . (1998, p. 172)

In understanding another in this fashion, we experience 'what it is like to be him'. Hence simulation is, according to Ravenscroft, a more phenomenologically acceptable account than theory. However, one's understanding of the climber cannot simply be characterised as *feeling what it is like to be someone else*. Goldie (2000, Chapter 7) points out that there are a number of different ways in which we 'identify' with others. One could 'put oneself in their shoes' and imagine how one would feel in their situation. Alternatively, one might empathise with them and try to imagine what it is actually 'like for them', rather than how it would feel if 'if you were them'. This is distinct from sympathy, which involves feeling 'for them', rather than 'like them'. In addition, one might have a more general understanding, which involves constructing a personal narrative around another's predicament, and one may also experience

emotional contagion, which, Goldie suggests, is not really a way of relating *to* the other. So what does one experience when one watches the climber? The experience seems to incorporate aspects of all these responses. One might experience an overwhelming desire to somehow assist, a feeling of intense fear in one's own chest, a recollection of the overwhelming panic one experienced in a similar situation. One might also 'catch' a pervading emotion, as gasps from the surrounding crowd 'seep in'. And one might also be aware of the context of practices through which the situation arose and through which the climber is interpreting it, a shared context of practical meaning, involving various techniques and items of equipment.

There is a lot more going on than 'identification' and what one experiences is not adequately characterised in terms of simulation. One has a complex of different relations with the distressed climber. And, I suggest, those relations are essentially practical and involved, rather than detached. One does not simply 'look upon' the climber. One perceives his movements, makes slight movements in response, clenches one's fists, grimaces and engages in an intricate, albeit one-sided bodily dialogue with him. It is partly through this dialogue that one is *open* to the climber's predicament.

As argued in the previous section, any account of FP must be sensitive to the stance through which others are encountered, given that (a) practical abilities cannot be dissociated from the context of their manifestation and (b) interpersonal abilities incorporate a great deal of complex, structured interaction between self and other. And I suggest even first- to third-person interactions incorporate a phenomenology of practical interaction. They cannot be characterised in terms of one discrete individual assigning states to another, regardless of whether that assignment is enabled by simulation or theory.

Consider a scenario where one is not even in perceptual contact with another person but, instead, anticipating what that person will do when one encounters him. One's experience is seldom, if ever, that of simply 'hopping into his head' or 'putting oneself in her position' but of imagining a kind of interaction. When one 'simulates' what another will do, one often plays the part of oneself and imagines one's interactions with them. One simulates one's own words and actions as much as theirs and is sometimes surprised by what one does. One constructs interpersonal narratives, which play a role in structuring one's interactions in actual cases. On other occasions, one may, in some sense and to some degree, adopt their perspective. However, in so doing, one still simulates interaction between them and other people. The phenomenological structure of solitary simulating is not 'A as B' but several permutations of 'A with B'. Take the example of simulating one's own future possibilities: "If I pretend *realistically* that there is an intruder in the house I *might* find myself surprisingly brave – or cowardly" (Gordon, 1995, p.63). Even though this is proposed as an example of self-simulation, it is actually an example of

simulated interaction. One imagines an unfolding form of interaction between oneself and the burglar, an interaction that contributes to one's interpretation of both self and other. Imaginative understanding of others is generally interactive and dialogical, as opposed to a transfer of thoughts or situation from the other to oneself.[14] Simulated interaction also has a perceptual, bodily and affective quality. Often, when 'simulating', one becomes aware of changing one's facial expressions, moving one's tongue, lips and jaw as one imagines speaking, clenching one's fists, moving one's body in a communicative fashion, smiling, nodding or even laughing. What is going on here? I suggest that interaction with others is our primary mode of interpersonal understanding. When reflecting on others from a solitary perspective, we do not adopt a theoretical stance but internalise interaction in order to generate thought, often engaging in actual movements and expressions as part of the cognitive process. Interaction is cognitively and phenomenologically primary and the self, in interpreting others from afar, does not simply assign beliefs but generates a kind of understanding through imagining and, sometimes, enacting interpersonal engagement. Clark makes a similar point with respect to mathematical abilities. It is arguable that we do not use external props to aid already existing internal abilities. The external abilities come first and are then, to some degree, internalised: "We can mentally simulate the external arena and hence, at times, internalize cognitive competencies that are nonetheless rooted in manipulations of the external world" (1997, p. 61).[15]

I do not deny that we often talk of beliefs, desires, intentions and such. However, FP is not generally employed as a label with which to group certain explicit utterances but as a deeper, more general account of what interpersonal understanding consists of. The mere fact that we sometimes say 'A thinks that x, so he'll probably do y' does not support FP, at least on the assumption that ontological commitments cannot be crudely read off everyday discourse.

The question remains of how to account for the considerable body of experimental and clinical evidence that is cited in support of FP. However, much of this evidence amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Experiments focus solely on the capacity for first- to third-person attribution in artificially constrained scenarios and thus abstract from the dynamics of social interaction which, I have argued, are ordinarily constitutive of interpersonal understanding. Evidence for FP is drawn largely from variants of the false belief task (Wimmer and Perner, 1983). However, the very name 'false belief task' suggests that an FP interpretation is already written into this experimental paradigm. It is simply assumed that the abilities measured by such experiments should be interpreted in terms of an ability to assign true or false beliefs. This interpretive bias is evident in the design of experiments. False belief tasks generally examine first- to third-person attribution in a social context unfamiliar to the child and ignore the role of the child's interaction with others, including the experimenter. As Gallagher (2001a) observes, it is curious that three-year old

children fail to assign appropriate third-person beliefs on the basis of obser-
vational evidence but have no problem at all understanding the second-person
experimenter as they interact with her. The dependence of understanding on
contexts of interaction is also observed by Bloom and German (2000, p.
29), who observe that children as young as two years old, in their everyday
surroundings, understand pretence in others, engage in pretence themselves,
assign goals, imitate both intended and completed actions, and grasp atten-
tion from eye direction. Given the differences between children's everyday
abilities and an ability to assign beliefs in an experimental context, Bruner
and Feldman (1993, p. 269) suggest that "to equate grasping other minds
with getting a False Belief Diploma on Graduation Day is to oversimplify its
form and function." Although the test measures some kind of ability, this is
not sufficient to imply that FP constitutes the best description of everyday
interpersonal understanding. In fact, it is seems that considerable interper-
sonal abilities must already be in place before children can even comprehend
the task. Garfield et al. (2001) note that language and complex social skills,
which are first manifested in a context of interpersonal interaction with family
members, are both prerequisites for the ability to attribute beliefs, rather than
enabled by that ability. They also criticise the second strand of evidence for FP,
the claim that autistic people are best understood as having a domain-specific
FP deficit. This deficit is allegedly evident from the dissociation between
their inability to cope with simple variants of the false belief task, despite dis-
playing normal levels of intelligence in other domains (see e.g. Baron-Cohen
1995). Garfield et al. argue that autism should be attributed to a deficit in
linguistic and social skills that are presupposed by FP abilities (2001, p. 507).
Hence it is more a failure of interactive abilities than absence of a detached
ability to assign internal states, as illustrated by a similar trait in deaf chil-
dren with hearing parents (pp. 505–512), whose interpersonal interaction is
impaired.

The social impairments characteristic of autism are also associated with
sensory-motor deficits and abnormal affect, which take on greater significance
when one thinks of intersubjectivity in terms of a perceptual, practical and
affective dialogue with others. For example, Gerrans observes that "if the
infant's sensory, affective perceptual and motor systems are abnormal her
motivation and ability to engage in the type of behaviour necessary to acquire
mind reading will be disrupted from the very beginning" (2002, p. 317).
McGeer (2001) is also critical of the commonplace divide drawn between
autistic 'mind-blindness' and the various sensory deficits that accompany it.

The false belief task clearly measures something and autistic people clearly
have some kind of social impairment. However, experimental results only
constitute a more specific case for the existence of FP if they are already in-
terpreted through the lens of FP. There is a tendency to assume the primacy
of a third-person stance and surreptitiously strip away a context of practical

interaction. As a consequence, one is rendered oblivious to the intricate inter-play of perception and action, gaze, feeling and expression, which constitute the setting through which self and other are open to each other.

Given that FP misinterprets everyday social life, the question arises as to why it is so often unthinkingly adopted by philosophers and psychologists as a description of personal understanding. The FP conception of intersubjectivity emerged against a backdrop of philosophical theories and concerns. Church-land (1998a) and Stich and Ravenscroft (1996, p. 118) both credit Sellars (1956) as its originator. Stich and Ravenscroft also discuss the role of cognitive science in cultivating the concept of FP (p. 121), whilst Churchland associates its development with the functionalist theories of Putnam, Fodor and Lewis (p. 7). Hence FP is clearly a philosophically motivated interpretation of com-monsense. And, although the detached stance that FP surreptitiously reads into the self-other relationship is not part of 'commonsense' social life, it may bear greater resemblance to standpoints adopted in the course of philosophical inquiry. As McGeer observes:

> Philosophers and psychologists tend to inscribe their own project of inquiry into our ordinary methods of understanding one another, so that in the context of everyday life we too are presented as navigating our social world primarily by observing, hypothesizing, predicting how creatures like us operate. (2001, p. 118)

It seems likely that FP was constructed through the implicit imposition of scientific standpoints and philosophical theories upon our everyday social phenomenology. Such impositions serve only to mislead. If philosophers want to think of the mind in terms of internally represented propositions and of personal interpretation in terms of propositional attitude assignment, they won't get any help from commonsense.

Notes

1. The term 'theory of mind' can, in this context, be regarded as synonymous with 'folk psychology'. However, it is also employed in a more specific way, to indicate that our intersubjective abilities share certain characteristics with scientific theories.
2. See the essays in Davies and Stone (1995a, b) and Carruthers and Smith (1996) for a variety of different theory, simulation and hybrid positions, and some suggestions on evolution and development.
3. The only clear exception to this is Gordon (1995, 1996), whose simulation theory denies the primacy of propositional attitude attribution.
4. I use the abbreviation FP to refer to 'folk psychology, construed as intentional state attri-bution' rather than 'common sense psychology, whatever it turns out to consist of'.
5. Different views as to whether this core is innate or learned are proposed in the articles by Baron-Cohen and Swettenham, Gopnik, and Segal, in Carruthers and Smith (eds) (1996).

All assume that it is something *possessed* by individuals, rather than a philosophically or scientifically motivated systematisation of social life.

6. See also Rizzolatti and Arbib (1998), Gallagher (2001b) and Gallese (2001) for the claim that mirror neurons enable a pre-theoretical, empathetic appreciation of similarity between self and other. Gallagher (2001b) compares such claims to Husserl's (1960) description of 'pairing' between one's own body and that others. Thompson (2001, p. 9) also notes the similarity between hypothesised functions of the mirror system and Husserlian pairing. Gallese and Goldman (1998) interpret mirror neurons in the context of a more familiar either/or choice between theory and simulation, suggesting that they support the latter.

7. Gallagher's point, although plausible in the case of explanation, is not so convincing with respect to prediction. It could be maintained that subpersonal processes 'predict' events and so, at the phenomenological level, we unthinkingly take for granted that they will happen. Hence, although explanation requires awareness, it is not clear that the same need apply to prediction.

8. Churchland proposes this argument in defence of his own eliminativism with respect to folk psychological concepts. Eliminativism faces the objection that FP is not used for prediction and explanation and so is not sufficiently theory-like to warrant the eliminativist claim that it a flawed theory. However, if theories are used in practical contexts, for many different purposes, the absence of prediction and explanation does not count against theoretical status.

9. In employing the example of theories and their contexts of application, I do not wish to suggest that FP is a theory. Whether FP is enabled by theory, simulation or both, the case can still be made for its being a single underlying ability that manifests itself differently in different contexts.

10. I use the term 'sense of self' fairly loosely here and do not want to suggest that it is a single, unified phenomenon. One's sense or 'feeling' of self is multi-faceted and changeable. All I want to suggest here is that some aspects of this structure can be altered by one's interactions with others.

11. As Gallagher observes, there are reasons "to view beliefs as dispositions that are sometimes ambiguous even from the perspective of the believer" (2001a, p. 96).

12. I will not address the relationship between phenomenology and cognitive science here. However, I do not want to imply that the cognitive science level of description is more fundamental than phenomenology or that scientific descriptions can comprehensively explain phenomenological descriptions. A claim of this paper is that adoption of an objectivist stance, which is often taken to characterise scientific inquiry, is precisely what leads to FP's misinterpretation of intersubjectivity. If 'personal' stances disclose aspect of our being-in-the-world that objectivist stances are blind to, it is arguable that a wholly objective, scientised view of personal relations will be confused or incomplete, as opposed to an 'underlying explanation'.

13. See Ratcliffe (forthcoming) for an account of normative social practices as a species of extended cognition.

14. My earlier rejection of a subpersonal FP also applies to the claim that we have a subpersonal capacity for simulation. An interactive process is completely different from simulation of one person by another and it is unclear how a subpersonal ability to simulate could support it.

15. The view I have outlined is still sympathetic to aspects of some simulation theories. For example, Robert Gordon (1995, 1996) deflates the role of propositional attitudes and their attribution, emphasising instead the perceptual and affective dimensions of interpersonal understanding. And Heal's account emphasises practical know-how: "Our primary competence with content is of the 'know how' variety and [. . .] only a small part of this can be reflected in any theoretical 'know that' about how contents relate (1996,

p. 78)". However, simulation theories still tend to emphasise how one subject interprets another distinct subject and thus neglect the importance of interaction in constituting the conditions through which mutual interpretation is possible.

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