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Narrative competency and the massive hermeneutical background[1]

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Children come into formal educational settings already possessing a huge amount of background knowledge and know-how about how the physical world works and about how other people behave. Most of this knowledge is implicit. For purposes of successful educational practice, it is important to have a good understanding of what this background knowledge is and how it informs more explicit cognitive processes. In this chapter I focus on the kind of background knowledge or know-how that enters into intersubjective processes involved in understanding other people.

In the field of hermeneutics the topic under discussion in this chapter is referred to as intersubjective understanding or simply the understanding of others; in different contexts and disciplines such as philosophy of mind, psychology, and the cognitive sciences, this general area of research is referred to as social cognition or theory of mind. I'll begin with a brief review of theories that fit under the heading 'theory of mind', and I'll focus on a specific problem that they share, which I call the "starting problem." The solution to this problem, I'll suggest, requires an alternative way of looking at issues concerning intersubjective understanding and background knowledge.

Theory of mind

The two standard accounts of how we understand other people are known as the "theory theory" of mind (TT) and simulation theory (ST). These theories have been developed in philosophy of mind and psychology, and more recently have guided research in social neuroscience. They are generally referred to under the heading 'theory of mind' (ToM).

TT contends that our everyday way of understanding others is based on folk psychology, a common-sense set of rules, principles, or platitudes that explain how people normally behave. We use folk psychology to infer or

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"mindread" the other person's beliefs and desires, which in turn explain their behaviors. ST, in contrast, contends that we do not need a theory because we can use our own mind as a model to simulate what must be going on in the other person's mind. We simply put ourselves in their shoes, imagine what we would think, and then project our pretend beliefs and desires into the other's mind.

Both of these approaches share a number of problems (see Gallagher 2007a; 2007b), but one of the most difficult problems comes at the very beginning of the mindreading process. Neither theory has a good explanation of how the process gets off the ground – or more precisely, what ground we stand on as we engage in the process.

For example, the theory theorist will claim that we simply apply our folk-psychological theory by appealing to some specific rule that will explain the other person's behavior. But that seems to assume that we already know what the appropriate rule is for the specific situation. For example, as I drive down the road I see my neighbor raise his hand as I approach. I somehow interpret this as a wave of hello from someone I know. My neighbor *wants* to say hello. I wave back. In another case, however, as I drive down the road I see a police person hold up her hand. I know that if I simply waved back I would likely get a traffic ticket since it is quite apparent that she *wants* me to stop and *believes* that waving her hand will signal that I should stop. How do I know which rule to apply to interpret this signal? After all, the rules of folk psychology are rather abstract – they supposedly apply to human behavior in general, and, in part, that's what makes them theoretical. The application of such rules may be especially troublesome in ambiguous situations, for example, when my neighbor is the police person. Does she want to say hello, or does she want me to stop? The issue is this: faced with a particular situation, how do we know which rule to apply?

The situation is no easier for the simulationist. One can see this, for example, in Alvin Goldman's description of the steps involved in running a simulation routine.

> First, the attributor creates in herself pretend states intended to match those of the target. In other words, the attributor attempts to put herself in the target's 'mental shoes'. The second step is to feed these initial pretend states [e.g., beliefs] into some mechanism of the attributor's own psychology … and allow that mechanism to operate on the pretend states so as to generate one or more new states [e.g., decisions]. Third, the attributor assigns the output state to the target …" [e.g., we infer or project the decision to the other's mind]. (Goldman 2005, 80-81.)

The first step seems tricky. How do I know which pretend state (belief or desire) matches what the other person has in mind. Indeed, isn't this what simulation is supposed to explain? If I already knew what state matched the target, then the problem, as defined by ST, would already be solved.

Starting the process seems to be a problem for both TT and ST. Let's call this the *starting problem*. To address this problem some theorists have pursued

a hybrid version of theory of mind, that is, a combination of TT and ST. For example, I'm in a position to take the first step in the simulation process precisely because I already have a folk psychology that allows me to make a supposition about what the other person is thinking. Theory helps me to get my simulation off the ground. Or perhaps I know what rule of folk psychology to apply because I begin by simulating the other person's situation. It seems to me, however, that these hybrid approaches simply push the problem back a step; one ends up in a questionable circle that turns from abstract rules to unsure suppositions and then returns to abstract rules. This circle, I will argue, is not hermeneutical, precisely because, at least in terms of the TT or ST accounts, it seemingly lacks the right kind of particularistic or contextual knowledge that would be the ground for getting it off the ground.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that theorists of TT and ST would deny that both folk psychology and simulation depend on what I will call, following terminology suggested by Bruner and Kalmar (1998), a *massive hermeneutical background* (MHB). But neither theory says much about it; they don't explain how we get this background, what sort of thing it is, or how precisely it comes into play when we attempt to use folk psychology or simulation.

On a nativist view of TT, which contends that a certain innate theory-of-mind module for social cognition simply comes online (around age 4 years) and allows us to reason our way into an understanding of others (e.g., Carruthers 1996; Scholl and Leslie 1999), solutions to the starting problem remain entirely mysterious. We simply have the capability and start using it when our brain is sufficiently developed. On a more empiricist view of TT one might argue that there is a natural connection between what I'm calling the MHB and folk psychology (FP). On this view one might conceive of FP as a set of generalizations based on the MHB. We gain the MHB in lots and lots of observations of others, and from such experiences we simply abstract, through an inductive process, the general rules or theory of human behavior that constitutes FP. Gopnik and Meltzoff (1998), for example, argue that young children are like scientists, constantly doing experiments (having experiences, playing, observing others) and generalizing across those experiments. FP, then, would be considered an abstract set of principles generated from the particularities of the MHB. Accordingly I can simply draw on that background – the kind of very particular knowledge which comes from our experience of how people behave – to set the stage for the application of FP rules.

One might make a similar argument about simulation skills. On this view we could consider the MHB to consist in a learned set of skills or practical knowledge of how to deal with people. Thus, for either TT or ST, I know what rule or principle to apply, or what simulation to run, for any particular situation, because I draw on the particular knowledge or set of skills I have in the MHB.

Two conceptual problems follow from this way of thinking. First, if these empiricist accounts are accounts of how we acquire the MHB to support FP or, *mutatis mutandis*, simulation skills, they seem to presuppose that already within the MHB there is an implicit understanding of others. On the one hand, if there is not an intersubjective understanding already implicit in the MHB, then it's not

clear how we could rely on it to specify a relevant FP rule or how it could be the basis for activating a simulation. That is, it is not clear how this would solve the starting problem. On the other hand, if there is an intersubjective understanding already implicit in the MHB, then it undermines the typical universal claim that normally goes along with TT or ST – namely that FP or simulation, or some hybrid form of mindreading is the primary and pervasive way that we understand others.[2] Rather, this intersubjective understanding that is already implicit in the MHB, would be developmentally primary. Moreover, if we rely on the MHB to get FP or simulation off the ground, then MHB would be as pervasive as FP or simulation. In that case, rather than primary and pervasive, FP or simulation may be secondary, and may be put into use only in situations where our interactions with others break down and the resources of the MHB are not sufficient to deliver a good understanding of others.

Second, if there is already an intersubjective understanding implicit in the MHB, it is not clear whether mindreading is simply a continuation of this kind of understanding, or constitutes something different, and if the latter, what that difference is. Is the application of FP a way of breaking away from this primary understanding, or a continuation of it? Are simulation skills of a different nature than the intersubjective skills implicit in the MHB, or if not, does that mean that the MHB is already a matter of simulation – simulation all the way down?

These issues motivate the following investigation into the nature of the MHB. The aim of this paper is to take a close look at the MHB and to ask about its status in our everyday interactions with others. I will argue that the kind of understanding of others implicit in the MHB is not simply a precursor that is somehow replaced by FP or by a set of simulation skills (see e.g., Baron-Cohen 1995; Currie 2008; Gallagher 2008), nor is it a form of theoretical inference or simulation, but is closely related to a set of ongoing embodied processes and narrative practices that characterize most of our everyday encounters with others. Much of what I have to say here, in the context of education, applies to very basic informal aspects of educational contexts, which nonetheless pervade any formal educational situation.

Background conceptions

There are a number of conceptions of what we are calling 'background' or the MHB. Searle (1978; 1992), for example, considers the "Background" to be a set of capacities, abilities which constitute a general know-how and which allow us to function in everyday life. For Searle, intentional phenomena "such as meanings, understandings, interpretations, beliefs, desires, and experiences only function within a set of Background capacities that are not themselves intentional" (1992, 175).

[2] The frequently made claim is that in all cases when we encounter others we attempt to explain or predict their behavior by inferring or simulating mental states, or that such theoretical or simulation stances are the default. See, e.g., Baron-Cohen (1995: 3-4); Goldman (2002: 7-8).

The idea that the background capacities are themselves not intentional (understood in the Brentanian sense of intentionality) is motivated by the following thought. Any one intentional state (e.g., having a belief) is always part of a larger network of intentional states, but neither an intentional state on its own, nor a set of intentional states is self-interpreting or self-applying. This is similar to what I am calling the starting problem, which is similar to what in AI is called the "symbol grounding" problem or the frame problem. The question Searle is trying to answer is: what determines the conditions of satisfaction for any intentional state or any network of intentional states? His intuition is that the conditions of satisfaction for any intentional state are determined by a non-intentional set of capacities, for example, a set of sensory-motor capabilities. Searle offers an example from Wittgenstein. We look at a picture of a man walking uphill; but nothing in the picture itself specifies that the man is walking uphill rather than sliding back down the hill. What grounds our interpretation is our own experience of walking. If an intentional state is not cashed out in terms of some background capacity, skill or practice, it would lead to an infinite regress in terms of trying to understand the meaning of the intentional state, much in the same way that in using a dictionary one can be led from the meaning of one word to the meaning of another, and from there to the meaning of another word, etc. etc. *ad infinitum*.

Searle's argument is based on linguistics and most of his examples come from language use. "Sally gave John the key, and he opened the door" (1992, 181). This, like any sentence, is underdetermined with regard to its meaning. We understand the sentence to mean that Sally first gave John the key, and he then used it to open the door. But this understanding involves unstated content that we seemingly have to add to the sentence to make sense of it. This cannot be accomplished by adding more words to the sentence; that would simply introduce more underdetermined elements. Rather, the meaning is fixed by our practices and our know-how about how keys and doors work. Practices and know-how are not simply other sentences; they involve moving around the world and doing things.

There are some issues here that I will set aside for purposes of this chapter, but let me note that Searle changes his mind about the non-intentional status of the background (1992, 186ff); the background includes both intentional and non-intentional states. For our purposes we'll set this issue aside and simply say that the background includes all kinds of capacities, practices, skills, and some finite range of knowing-how and knowing-that. Whether we want to say that all of these things are intentional (on a wide definition that would include things like motor intentionality) or not, shouldn't matter for our purposes here.

Another issue concerns the question of whether we should think of the background as somehow reducible to brain processes. *Contra* Searle, I want to argue that the background, which includes cultural elements, is not reducible to

neurophysiological capacity.[3] One way to see this is to think of how the background comes into our everyday practices. In this regard Bourdieu's (1990) notion of *habitus* is useful. We can think of *habitus* as an individual's particular background. As such, *habitus* is a system of long-term, acquired dispositions (habits, schemas) of perception, thought and action. These cognitive and somatic dispositions are not consciously manifest in our practices, but they function prenoetically, that is, they shape our experiences without our being aware that they are doing so. They are formed in response to physical and social environmental factors, and this respect, they are not reducible to neurophysiological states.

Consider some basic somatic aspects of *habitus*. Physical skills, for example, are not unrelated to posture and gait. The latter, however, are not simply a matter of a functioning basal ganglia and connected brain areas, but depend in essential ways on specifics of the body – flexibility of the joints, muscle tone, bone structure, etc. – as well as immediately present and long-term factors of the physical, social, and cultural environments (Gallagher 2005). These factors – brain, body, environment – are all part of one system. If I live in the mountains or teach at Cornell, my physical condition and way of moving may be very different than if I live in the desert or teach at NYU. If I live immersed in a hip-hop culture, it is very likely that my gait is affected by a cultured movement; if I am a ballet dancer, or a military officer, my posture is likely quite different from that of the general population. More generally, what I am able to do and the particular skills I have are enabled and limited by the particular culture that I live in, which contributes to and in specific ways sets my *habitus*. It may be that the basal ganglia, and possibly other areas of the brain, of the ballet dancer are somewhat different from the same areas of the Cornell cosmologist, or the desert dweller. But it is not that difference that would constitute the full story of one's posture or gait or specific capabilities and skills. One's movement history is not inscribed like a text in the motor areas of the brain – no one can simply read it off of a perfect brain scan – although it is clear that one's movement history has literally (physically) shaped parts of the brain and have specified some of the details of how they function.

Likewise, one's life narrative is not inscribed like a text in one's brain, yet the details of one's life, in broad strokes, do have serious effects on various aspects of neural function. What precisely does the pre-frontal cortex look like in a person who was raised in an apartheid regime and told throughout his life that he is incapable of helping himself, and, as a result, has become convinced by this message and is unable to see any other possibilities? The complete structure of this way of being-in-the-world is not something that can be explained by neurophysiology.

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[3] Searle is an internalist who thinks that all factors that contribute to cognition must be cashed out in neurophysiological terms; he writes: "The occurrent ontology of those parts of the Network that are unconscious is that of a neurophysiological capacity, but the Background consists entirely in such capacities" (1992, 188).

The background, having its effects through an individual *habitus*, is a normative force that plays an essential role in regulating social practices, and contributing to social reproduction. Through deep educational processes, including formal educational practices which are themselves shaped by background conditions, individuals learn to act in ways that are appropriate to the possibilities provided for them. On Bourdieu's analysis, they learn to expect nothing different. Such dispositions tend to generate the same dispositions in others, and thus a certain normative order.

The background, considered not as narrowly neurobiological, but as widely embodied and embedded in practices that are not only physical, but also social and cultural, is hermeneutical, in the sense that it shapes the way that individuals interpret their experience. The shaping process is both constraining and productive, reflecting hermeneutical principles well defined by the hermeneutical tradition (see Gadamer 1989; Gallagher 1992).

In the following sections I'll argue that the MHB, as it relates to an individual's capacity for intersubjective understanding, finds its beginning as an individual *habitus* in interactive intersubjective practices, and, through narrative practices, is further built up to include social and cultural norms.

First-order intersubjective interactions

To bring the conception of the MHB to bear on the starting problem in social cognition, I want to point to two areas of research that are equally important for educational contexts. The first (discussed in this section) involves developmental evidence about how infants in the first two years of life interact with others. The second (in the next section) involves the development of narrative competency from the age of two years onward. I want to suggest (in the concluding section) that especially with regard to the questions raised in the first section about TT, ST, and the MHB, there is an alternative approach, based on both embodied processes of interaction and the acquisition of narrative competency, that provides a better account of our understanding of others and a better answer in regard to the role of the MHB in resolving the starting problem.

The beginning of this alternative account is to be found by looking at the first months of post-natal life. Although on the classical accounts of theory of mind, the child has to wait until the age of four years for important cognitive capacities for understanding others to kick in, on the alternative account the capacities for human interaction and intersubjective understanding are already accomplished in certain embodied processes that start early in infancy. These processes are emotional, sensory-motor, and perceptual. They include imitation (including neonate imitation), the parsing of perceived intentions (Baldwin et al. 2001), emotional interchange (Hobson 2004), and generally the processes that fall under the heading of primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen 1979). These are embodied practices that constitute our primary access for understanding others, and they continue to do so even after we attain our more sophisticated abilities in this regard (Gallagher 2005).

A primary, perceptual sense of others is already implicit in the behavior of the newborn infant. The newborn is able to imitate the facial gestures (e.g.,

tongue protrusion, mouth opening, pursing of the lips) presented by others (Meltzoff and Moore 1977). In neonate imitation infants are able to distinguish between inanimate objects and human agents (Johnson 2000; Legerstee 1991). This depends not only on a contrast between self (minimally, a proprioceptive registration of one's own body) and non-self, but also on a responsiveness to the fact that the other is of the same sort as oneself, reflected in an intermodal relationship between the proprioception of one's own body and the perceived face of the other person (Gallagher and Meltzoff 1996). Thus, for the infant, from the very start, the other person's body presents opportunities for imitative action and expressive behavior. There develops, from this initial kind of primary-intersubjective interaction, a common bodily intentionality that is shared by the perceiving subject and the perceived other, something which Merleau-Ponty called 'intercorporeity' (1969).

The early capabilities that contribute to primary intersubjectivity constitute a form of interaction that is not equivalent to mindreading, as construed in classical ToM accounts. Infants, notably without the intervention of theory or simulation, are able to see other people as agents, and to perceive bodily movement as goal-directed intentional movement. Infants at 10-11 months are able to parse some kinds of continuous action according to intentional boundaries (Baldwin et al. 2001). Infants in the first year of life develop the ability to follow the other person's eyes, and to perceive various movements of the head, the mouth, the hands, and more general body movements as meaningful, goal-directed movements. Such perceptions provide non-conceptual, action-oriented understandings of the intentions and dispositions of other persons; as such, they do not involve mindreading or inferences about beliefs or desires understood as mental states (Allison, Puce, and McCarthy 2000; Baldwin, 1993; Gallagher 2001; Johnson 2000).

Affective coordination between the gestures and expressions of the infant and those of caregivers with whom they interact is also an important part of primary intersubjectivity. Infants "vocalize and gesture in a way that seems 'tuned' [affectively and temporally] to the vocalizations and gestures of the other person" (Gopnik and Meltzoff 1998, 131). Infants at 5 to 7 months detect correspondences between visual and auditory information that specify the expression of emotions (Walker 1982). Again, this does not involve taking a theoretical stance or creating a simulation of some inner mental state, but is a perceptual experience of an embodied comportment. In seeing the actions and expressive movements of the other person one is already perceiving their meaning; no inference to a hidden set of mental states (beliefs, desires, etc.) is necessary. In primary intersubjectivity, there is a common bodily intentionality that is shared across the perceiving subject and the perceived other. As Gopnik and Meltzoff indicate, "we innately map the visually perceived motions of others onto our own kinesthetic sensations" (1998, 129).[4]

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[4]This idea is fully consistent with both recent neuroscientific evidence about mirror neurons and Husserl's views on the phenomenology of kinaesthesis (see Gallagher 2005).

With these early capacities for human interaction, intersubjective perception and emotional resonance we begin to implicitly pick up the huge amount of social knowledge and intersubjective know-how that constitutes the MHB and shapes our *habitus*. It is important to keep in mind, however, that primary intersubjectivity is not primary simply in developmental terms. It does not characterize a stage that we go through and then leave behind. These capacities are not precursors to the "real thing"; they are the "real thing"; they constitute important aspects of social cognition; they remain primary across all face-to-face intersubjective experiences; and they continue to characterize adult interactions. They contribute to the MHB not simply by providing factual information about others, but by constituting the on-going implicit skills that we continue to use in our everyday dealings with others. As such, they underpin those developmentally later, and rare, practices that may involve theorizing about or simulating mental states in others.

The face-to-face interactions that characterize primary intersubjectivity, however, do not exhaust the possibilities of intersubjective understanding. Expressions, intonations, gestures, and movements, along with the bodies that manifest them, do not float freely in thin air; we find them situated in the world. At around one year of age (possibly as early as 9 months), especially with the onset of joint attention, infants start to notice how others interact with the surrounding things in the physical environment. They begin to tie actions to pragmatic contexts, and acquire capacities of 'secondary intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen and Hubley 1978). They enter into *contexts* of shared attention – shared situations, shared interactions – in which they learn what things mean and what they are for. Behavior representative of joint attention begins to develop around 9-14 months (Phillips, Baron-Cohen, and Rutter 1992; Reddy 2008). Infants begin to see that another's movements and expressions are often mediated by the surrounding world. They see the other person's actions as meaningful and as framed in pragmatic contexts.

In joint attention the child alternates between monitoring the gaze of the other and what the other is gazing at, checking to verify that they are continuing to look at the same thing. The child also learns to point at approximately this same time. Eighteen-month-old children comprehend what another person intends to do with an instrument in a specific context. They are able to re-enact to completion the goal-directed behavior that someone else fails to complete. Thus, the child, on seeing an adult who tries to manipulate a toy and who appears frustrated about being unable to do so, quite readily picks up the toy and shows the adult how to do it (Meltzoff 1995).

In understanding of the actions of others we understand actions at the most relevant pragmatic, (intentional, goal-oriented) level. In our everyday interactions we clearly ignore possible sub-personal or lower-level descriptions. But, for the most part, we also ignore interpretations in terms of beliefs, desires, or hidden mental states. Rather than making mindreading inferences to what the other person intends by starting with visible behaviors, and moving thence to

the level of mental events, we see actions as meaningful in the contexts of the physical and intersubjective environment. We interpret the actions of others in terms of their goals and intentions set in pragmatically or socially contextualized situations, rather than abstractly in terms of either their muscular performance or their mental states. Accordingly, the situation is never perceived neutrally (without meaning), either in regard to our own possible actions, or in regard to the actions and possibilities of others. As Heidegger's (1962) analysis of *Zuhandenheit*, and Gibson's (1979) theory of affordances suggest, we see things enactively, primarily in relation to their possible uses, and as such we are not passive observers. Likewise, our perception of the other person, as another agent, is never of an entity existing outside of a situation; rather we perceive the other enactively, as an agent with whom we can interact.

The capabilities for understanding others that define primary and secondary intersubjectivity – the embodied, sensory-motor (emotion informed) capabilities that enable us to perceive the intentions of others (from birth onward), and the perceptual and action capabilities that enable us to understand others in the pragmatically contextualized situations of everyday life (from 9-18 months onward) – are not themselves sufficient to address what are clearly new developments that come online around the ages of 2, 3 and 4 years. Quite obviously, language starts to play an important role around the age of 2 years. But language development itself is something that depends on some of the capabilities of primary and secondary intersubjectivity. In turn, language carries these capabilities forward and puts them into service in much more sophisticated social contexts that involve communicative and narrative competencies.

Narrative competence

How do we get the more complex and nuanced understandings of why people do what they do? Together we live in the frameworks of important institutions – educational, legal, cultural – and we engage in complex social practices. To understand others in these situations and to engage in such practices we need something more than our basic perceptions, emotions, and embodied interactions, even those that are defined in pragmatic and basic social contexts. Is this where we need to turn to folk psychology or simulation? I'll suggest in this section that we extend our developed abilities for understanding others, through communicative and narrative practices, rather than throught the employment of theory or simulation. My focus here will be on narrative. The pervasive presence of narrative in our daily lives, and the development of narrative competency, can provide, not only a more parsimonious alternative to theory or simulation approaches, and a better way to account for the more nuanced understandings (and mis-understandings) we have of others, but also an account of how the MHB gets built up.

Again, we can learn a great deal from developmental psychology. As we saw, around the age of two, children possess capacities for embodied and contextualized understandings. Young children are practiced in understanding things as other people understand them in pragmatic contexts, and when the

capacities associated with primary and secondary intersubjectivity are combined with several other newly acquired capacities (including language use and episodic memory), young children are ready to understand things and people in emerging narrative structures. Narratives, made available to the child by caregivers, for example, or generated in interactive contexts by others, and eventually by the child, are, in the first place, stories about actions and interactions. They often include reasons for acting. That is, they tell us about people in specific situations, what they do, how they interact with others, and they sometimes indicate the motives that people have for doing what they do. Each *persona dramatis* is represented with their own dispositions and traits, and is situated in particular surroundings that evoke certain emotions. The way a person's story unfolds will depend on his or her unique history, overarching projects and interactions amongst other characters involved. Through such narratives we gain interpretive insights into the actions of others. As a result, these insights are added to the growing body of background knowledge (the MHB) that we have about others.

Narratives, however, give us more than their contents. They give us a form or structure that we can use in understanding others. That is, we learn from narrative how to frame an understanding of others. We start to see others, engaged in their actions, not simply in terms of the immediate and occurent context. We start to see them as engaged in longer-term projects (plots) that add meaning to what they are doing. Just as an isolated gesture (a gesture that has no context) has little meaning, but gains in meaning as we see it in context – a waving hand on it's own might mean a variety of things, but will take on a specific meaning when a police person is waving at me as I drive toward her – so also a specific context for which we have no narrative framework may have less meaning than a context that fits into an extended and storied pattern of activity.

This doesn't mean that our understanding of others requires an occurrent or explicit narrative story telling: but it does require the ability to see/to frame the other person in a detailed pragmatic or social context, and to understand that context in a narrative way. As Alasdair McIntyre (1981) suggested, for an observer, or for a participant, an action has intelligibility when it can find a place in a narrative.

Young children exposed to narratives (about others, about imaginary characters, about themselves, etc.) learn to "frame" other persons (as well as themselves) and the relevant contexts in narrative. When children listen to stories, or see them enacted (in various media), or when they themselves play-act[5] (and the same applies to adults who are exposed to parables, plays, myths, novels, films, television, etc.) they become familiarized with sets of characters and with a range of ordinary or extra-ordinary situations, and the sorts of actions appropriate to those situations. All of this helps to shape their

[5] "Children's first narrative productions occur in action, in episodes of symbolic play by groups of peers, accompanied by – rather than solely though – language. Play is an important developmental source of narrative" (Nelson 2003: 28; also see Richner & Nicolopoulou 2001).

expectations. An education in narratives of many sorts provides knowledge of what actions are acceptable and in what circumstances, what sort of events are important and noteworthy, what accounts can account for action, and what kind of explanations constitute the giving of good reasons. In other words, narratives instil norms and shape our understanding of what we and others are doing.

Children are clearly supported in this process by caregivers and teachers. They are often provided with running commentaries on stories that teach them not only which actions are appropriate in particular situations but also what reasons for acting are and are not acceptable. Narratives provide the standards by which we judge an action's appropriateness. Even if, as often happens, in time such standards are challenged and overturned, that critical process is almost always accomplished within the medium of further narratives. Stories – even in their particularities, whether real or fictional – teach us what others can expect from us, but just as importantly, what we can expect from others in certain situations. Through narratives we not only come to know what others ought to (and thus are likely to) do, but also what they ought to (and thus are likely to) think and feel, and this is indexed to the particular kind of person they are. Through the pervasive narratives of our childhood, and through the continuing narratives of adult life we learn the *norms* associated with social roles encountered in our everyday environments – in the shops, restaurants, homes, theatres, and various social and cultural institutions in which we live and do what we do.

That narratives engage our interpretive abilities means something more than simply the exercise of a cognitive ability, or a passive appropriation of content. Our engagement with narratives presupposes a wide range of emotive and interactive abilities. To appreciate such stories children must be capable of the sort of emotional response found in basic social engagements (Gallagher 2006). The kind of emotional resonance that one finds in primary intersubjectivity, for example, plays an important role in narrative practice. Evidence for this can be found in a recent fMRI study (Decety and Chaminade 2003). Subjects were presented with a series of video clips showing actors telling sad and neutral stories, as if they had personally experienced them. The stories were told with either congruent or incongruent facial expressions of emotion. Subjects were then asked to rate the mood of the actor and how likable they found that person. Watching sad stories versus neutral stories was associated with increased processing activity in emotion related structures (including the amygdala and parieto-frontal areas, predominantly in the right hemisphere). These areas were not activated when the narrator showed incongruent facial expressions, however. Conflict between what we sense as the emotional state of the person, simply on the basis of seeing his face and expressive actions, and the narrative content he presents, is disruptive to understanding. Whatever is going on in the brain correlates not simply to features of action and expression (and the subjectivity) of the person we are trying to understand (the narrator in this case), but to the larger story, the scene, the circumstance recounted in the narrative, and how features of the person's action and expression match or fail to match those circumstances.

In gaining an understanding of another person, then, it is not always (and perhaps not frequently) a matter of characterizing the other's mental life, understood as a kind of hidden inner life, but simply the other's life as it unfolds in response to worldly/situational contexts. Such things are best captured in a narrative form. Coming to understand another's reasons should not be understood as inferring or simulating their discrete 'mental states', but as grasping their action-oriented attitudes and responses as whole situated persons. I encounter the other person, not abstracted from their circumstances, but in the middle of something that has a beginning and that is going somewhere. I see them in the framework of a story in which either I have a part to play or I don't. The narrative is not primarily about what is going on 'inside their heads'; it's about what is going on in their world, or in the world that we share, and the way they understand and respond to it.

Narrative practices feed and are fed by the MHB. An understanding informed by the MHB does not take the form of grasping a set of explicit FP generalisations about how others will act. Rather, one learns a set of cultural norms and expectations through interactive and narrative practices such that these become second nature, a *habitus*. Furthermore, by learning how certain characters in our bedtime stories behave or ought to behave, and by learning how I ought to behave in such and such a circumstance, I learn how you ought to behave as well. And this provides me with certain guiding expectations about your behaviour (a certain set of possibilities) in so far as you do not behave abnormally, and, by definition, that is the case for most people most of the time. Learning such norms through narrative practice does not take the form of internalising an explicit set of rules (or a set of theoretical propositions). It involves becoming accustomed to particular norms, coming to embody them, or being able to enact them, as it were, through practice and habit.

Conclusions

On one account (Hutto 2008) competency with different kinds of narratives enables us to understand others in a variety of ways, specifically by allowing us to develop a folk psychology. This is what Hutto calls the narrative practice hypothesis.

> The core claim of the Narrative Practice Hypothesis (or NPH) is that direct encounters with stories about reasons for acting, supplied in interactive contexts by responsive caregivers, is the normal route through which children become familiar with both (i) the core structure of folk psychology and (ii) the norm-governed possibilities for wielding it in practice, knowing *how* and knowing *when* to use it (Hutto 2007; see Gallagher and Hutto 2007).

I suggest that we can put this in terms of the MHB rather than in terms of FP. That is, I think that narratives, which are made available to children by their caregivers and are also generated in interactive contexts, and which are, in the first place, about actions and interactions, contribute to the MHB from which our

more sophisticated understandings of others continue to draw sustenance. We can then think of FP as an abstracted version of the MHB, put to use in certain rare situations as one way to understand another's reasons for acting. In line with Hutto (2008), this means that that we should talk about FP practice rather than FP as a theory.

In addition, this view of narrative practice addresses the starting problem. We learn through narratives *how* and *when* to use FP, and we draw on primary and secondary intersubjective skills implicit in the MHB to get the process off the ground. The use of FP – that is, the practice of drawing folk-psychological platitudes from the MHB to explain the actions of others – is, however, relatively rare in our everyday interactions. Primary and secondary intersubjective processes, as well as narrative competencies for understanding others, provide most of what we need for understanding others. In those cases where we may be puzzled by another's actions, or in cases where we are confined to an observational stance, without good access to the context of someone's actions, or where we may have to give an explanatory account of someone's actions, then we may indeed appeal to FP, or to a special set of simulation skills drawn from the wealth of know-how provided by the MHB.

Even if in the unusual case, where we are observers of an unfamiliar action in a strange setting carried out by someone we don't know, and we turn to an explicit use of FP, we never do this outside of a narrative framework. Rather, we attempt to see an action as in some way coherent and meaningful by testing out plot structures, by framing it in a story that would make sense of it. If we are asked to explain it, it is likely that we will explain it narratively, in terms of what the person is doing in what seems to be the situation. There is no other way to get to the more abstract level of discourse in which we attribute beliefs and desires to the person.

In other words, if or when it comes to mindreading -- employing FP or a set of simulation skills – such practices get off the ground only because interactive (primary and secondary intersubjective) capabilities provide a starting point, and narrative competency provides a framework for intersubjective understanding. Both interactive and narrative processes contribute to the formation of the MHB, and the MHB in turn informs narrative and interactive processes.

In this chapter I have argued that interactive processes, which allow us to perceive the feelings and intentions of others in their movements, gestures, facial expressions, and actions, feed into the development of more nuanced intersubjective understandings found in narrative practices. Narratives are complex objects of joint attention, and they can function as such in educational contexts. They emerge out of first-order interactions and reflect those interactions in their content. In most everyday cases, interactive and narrative practices provide all we need for understanding others. Only rarely do we need to appeal to standard theory-of-mind (TT or ST) explanations. In those rare cases, theoretical or simulationist practices get off the ground or find their starting point in the MBH, which finds its beginning as an individual *habitus* in

interactive intersubjective practices, and, through narrative practices, is further built up to include social and cultural norms.

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