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# Theories of theories of mind

*edited by*

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*for*

SIR Q. W. LEE

*Chairman, Hang Seng Bank of Hong Kong*

*– whose vision and generosity made possible this  
and a projected nine further volumes*

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## 9 The modularity of theory of mind

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*Gabriel Segal*

### 1 Introduction

Normal adult human beings are good psychologists. They can explain and, to an extent, predict their own and other people's actions on the basis of a battery of psychological concepts: perception, desire, belief, fear, wonder, doubt, and so on. Let us call the seat of these psychological abilities the 'psychology faculty'. The psychology faculty has been the focus of a great deal of research in experimental, theoretical and developmental cognitive psychology, as well as a fair amount of philosophy.

I believe that this investment of intellectual energy is well worthwhile, since the study of the psychology faculty relates in important ways to a variety of central interdisciplinary concerns. It intersects with questions in the philosophy of mind about eliminativism, knowledge of other minds and our conception of ourselves as human beings. It intersects in interesting and subtle ways with questions in philosophy of language about the semantics of sentences attributing propositional attitudes. And it relates to the most fundamental questions in psychology about concept acquisition and the structure of the mind. In this paper I'll address some aspects of the latter questions.

It is common practice among psychologists, linguists and some philosophers to talk of 'modules' of the mind. But there is a wide variety of quite different conceptions of modularity. In section 2, I will distinguish a few of these which I believe have a good chance of being genuine psychological, natural kinds. I will then go on to ask, in section 3, which ones, if any, apply to the psychology faculty.

### 2 Modularity

There are two different dimensions within which one can distinguish notions of modularity: synchronic and diachronic. The synchronic notions concern the capacity of a subject at a given time. A normal, adult human can, for example, see, use language, and psychologise. One can ask for an explanation of each of these capacities. And the explanations offered may

invoke one or other kind of modularity. The diachronic notions concern the course of development of the capacity from birth (or before) through to maturity. I begin with synchronic notions.

### 2.1 *Synchronic modularity*

Suppose we are interested in a specific psychological competence, such as vision or language. A precondition of any kind of modular explanation of the competence is that we have a reasonably clear idea of its domain of application. Our visual competence enables us to gather information about the surface markings, shapes, orientations and locations of three-dimensional objects in space, from two-dimensional patterns of light on our retinas. Our linguistic competence concerns phonological, syntactic, and semantic properties of our language, and it underlies our ability to produce and understand the physical forms of sentences. These two domains of application are reasonably well demarcated and distinguishable from each other and from further cognitive domains.

There are probably many areas of cognitive competence that do not apply over a well demarcated domain. By contrast with vision and language, there is presumably no well demarcated domain for the competence to go shopping for Xmas presents or to execute a spying mission behind enemy lines. There are competent shoppers and competent spies. But there is not yet, and probably never could be, a detailed and precise theory of the domains of application of these competences. Or, to put the same point another way, the ability to shop and the ability to spy are not to be explained in terms of isolable competences at all.

Once we have reason to believe that there exists a genuine competence with a definite domain of application, we can ask for an explanation of the competence. And it is here that modularity enters the picture. A module is a component of the mind, or brain, a mechanism, a system or some such that explains the competence. To put it crudely: where there is something definite that we can do, we can ask if there is something definite within us that enables us to do it.

Different conceptions of modularity arise from different explanations of competences. I will distinguish four different notions of synchronic modularity. These almost certainly do not exhaust the field. But they are at least clear and clearly distinguishable, and will be enough to ground the discussion of the psychology faculty.

#### 2.1.1 *Intentional modularity*

The first notion might well fall under the heading 'component of the mind'. Sometimes we can explain a competence in purely intentional terms by

positing a specific body of psychological states that underlie it. I call the kind of modularity that arises from this, 'intentional modularity'. The idea of an intentional module is present in an early form in the work of Sigmund Freud, and has been further articulated and deployed by Noam Chomsky (see e.g. Chomsky, 1980, 1986). According to Chomsky, our linguistic competence consists in (largely unconscious) knowledge of a body of linguistic rules. The knowledge concerns a self-contained array of interrelated concepts (Phrase, Noun, Verb, Anaphor, Quantifier etc.) that fit together somewhat in the manner of a scientific theory, forming generalisations and so on.<sup>1</sup>

It would be pointless, however, to count any appropriately inter-related body of psychological states as an intentional module. Mere knowledge of a theory isn't likely to be a psychologically interesting category. But some of Freud's and Chomsky's theoretical posits have further interesting features. In particular, there may be a one- or two-way filter to information. In Jerry Fodor's (1983) terminology, intentional modules may be 'informationally encapsulated': some of the information in the subject's mind outside a given module may be unavailable to it. For example, information in the conscious mind is often not available to the Freudian unconscious. And, going the other way, intentional modules may exhibit 'limited accessibility': some of the information within a module may be unavailable to consciousness. For example, we are not conscious of most of the contents of the language faculty. As is often pointed out, that is one reason why linguistics isn't easy. Somewhat stipulatively, I suggest that if a set of appropriately related psychological states exhibits either informational encapsulation or limited accessibility, then they constitute an intentional module.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.1.2 *Computational modularity*

The second notion of module is that of a computational system, classically conceived. A computational system is a representation processor.<sup>3</sup> A representation is a physical configuration of some kind, with syntactic and semantic properties. A computer receives representations as inputs, produces representations as outputs and, usually, produces intermediate representations along the way. What makes a representation processor a computer is the role of syntax: which output representation it produces for any given input is entirely determined by the syntactic properties of that input. That is to say, there exists a function from the input representations to the output representations that is specifiable in purely syntactic terms.

A computer, in the relevant sense, is also a physical system. This means that it must be constructed so that the actual causal processes initiated by

the input representation and culminating in an output representation do ensure that the syntactically defined function is instantiated. And a computer is also a semantic, or intentional system. The representations have meanings. If the computer is to do anything interesting, then the output representations must be reasonable in the light of the input representations. A genuine inference machine has the special property of being truth-preserving: if the inputs are true, then the outputs are true. But computers need not have that property. It may be that their inputs and outputs don't represent propositions, hence do not have truth values at all, as in a chess-playing computer. Or the computer may implement a heuristic: its outputs will usually be true, given true inputs, but not always.

It is very plausible that the early visual system is a computer. It takes pairs of representations as inputs, each one representing the pattern of light on one retina. And given an input pair it constructs a single output, representing the shapes, orientations etc. of objects in space. A complete theory of the visual system as a computer would specify all the relevant physical, syntactic and semantic properties of the representations, the processes that mediate them and the relations among the three kinds of properties. (See Marr 1982 for a detailed study of the computational theory of vision.)

It is likely that every computational module realises an intentional module. That is because there exists a self-contained and definite description of what it does in purely intentional terms. The only further requirement is that it exhibit either informational encapsulation or limited accessibility. The former is almost inevitable, since any computer will have a characteristic set of inputs. And it is unlikely that any computer in someone's head has a range of inputs that allows it access to all the information in that head.

By contrast, there is no reason to think that every intentional module is realised by a computational one. In understanding Chomsky it is very important to see that his account of linguistic competence is framed only in terms of an intentional module. It is true that he sometimes calls the language faculty a 'computational system'. But by that he doesn't mean 'computational system' in the sense I've just defined it. He just means that the rules we unconsciously know are recursive.

Purely intentional modules can co-exist with computational ones. For example, a number of linguists believe that a variety of computational modules have access to and deploy the information in the language faculty, the latter being conceived of as a purely intentional module, a body of knowledge. A parser, for instance, may be conceived of as a computational module that deploys the information in the language faculty to build up representations of the syntactic and semantic properties of physical sentence-forms.

It is also possible that at least some cognitive competencies are explained by intentional modules without the help of computational modules. There must, of course, be some explanation of how the contents of an intentional module (knowledge or whatever) are deployed in the execution of tasks. But this explanation might not invoke any computations, as I have defined them. Connectionist systems provide one alternative model. And there are surely others.

### 2.1.3 Fodor modularity

The third kind of module is also computational. But it has an array of further distinguishing properties. This notion is articulated by Jerry Fodor (1983). A 'Fodor module' is a computer which has the following properties: (1) Domain specificity (2) Informational encapsulation (3) Obligatory firing (4) Fast speed (5) Shallow outputs (6) Limited inaccessibility (7) Characteristic ontogeny (8) Dedicated neural architecture (9) Characteristic patterns of breakdown.

While every Fodor module is computational, there is no particular reason to suppose that every computational module is Fodor. As yet we do not have a well worked out theory of any computational module other than the early visual system, and this appears to fit Fodor's criteria rather well. But it is not unlikely that some other psychological competencies are explained by non-Fodor, computational modules. Acquired skills like driving or tennis, for example, may be computational while not having a characteristic ontogeny, though they do exhibit a number of other Fodor features. (Cp. Karmiloff-Smith, 1992.) And perhaps some acquired cognitive competencies, such as symbolic logic or chess are slow and have deep outputs.

### 2.1.4 Neural modules

The fourth kind of module is neural. A neural module is a functional component of the brain, describable in purely neurological terms.

A neural module need not also be intentional or computational. It may be, for example, that a specific competence, like the ability to construct and use cognitive maps, is fully explained by some neurological system (involving, say, sinusoidal waves in the dendrites of the hippocampus), without the system being a computer or containing (or realising) any body of knowledge. (See O'Keefe and Nadel, 1978.)

Evidently, though, a neural module can also realise any or all of a Fodor, computational and intentional module. Any of the other kinds of module might be realised in a neural module. But they needn't. It's at least *a priori*

possible that distributed, global characteristics of the brain, rather than modular ones, realise computational or intentional modules.<sup>4</sup>

I think that, for present purposes, one might as well group distributed connectionist networks together with neural modules. The two could be distinguished. But they share the important properties of being able to realise the other types of module and of being able to stand alone, explaining a competence without realising another type of module.

## 2.2 *Diachronic modularity*

I move on, now, to the diachronic notion of modularity. This originates with Chomsky. Chomsky compares the development of the language faculty during an individual's maturation to the growth of an organ or limb. The idea is that there is a genetically determined pattern of growth. The language faculty develops – grows within an individual – along a definite and predetermined path. Like an organ, the faculty will only grow, or only grow normally, in an appropriate environment. If one's limbs and organs are to grow, or grow normally, one needs food, air, room to move and so on. The language faculty only grows given appropriate linguistic stimulation in an environment free of excessive trauma.

It is true that the mature state of different language faculties differs across individuals: people speak different languages. However, according to Chomsky, it does not vary very much. Different human languages are alike in deep structural respects and differ only in what might be considered peripheral details. Further, language only varies along specific dimensions (for example lexical items and word order). And the variation is confined within strict and definite limits. For each dimension of variation, there is a limited number of options available. To some extent, this is even true of the choice of lexical items.

Collecting these last two points: variation is parameterised. There is a specific parameter, one for each dimension of variation, and the number of settings a parameter may take is limited. Finally, the way the parameters get set according to experience is determined by species specific genes. Put two individuals in the same environment, however much they differ in other psychological respects, their language faculties will end up much the same.

Acquisition of language is task-specific. Children don't acquire language using general learning processes that can apply in various domains. Rather, the language faculty deploys very specific principles, suited only for learning language. In fact, this follows directly from the parameter approach. Parameters are options specifically for the alteration of Universal Grammar (UG). UG is a sort of language schema: it is what you get when you remove certain specifics from actual languages. Setting the parameters

just specifies what UG leaves unspecified. Obviously, setting parameters of UG is not a process that would work in any other domain.

This is the modular conception of development. One can think of the module, as Chomsky sometimes does, in terms of a box that takes experience as input and produces knowledge of linguistic rules as output. The box is a diachronic intentional module. It has intentional contents (innate knowledge of language), and a set of language specific principles that restrict and determine the possible paths of development. And, importantly, the module has been genetically determined in its specifics. Just as we have specific genetic characteristics that determine that we grow hair and not horns, so we have specific genetic characteristics which ensure that we grow a language faculty.

There are, presumably, diachronic analogues of the computational and neural modules. But matters are complicated enough as it is, so I won't go into those.

## 3 *The psychology faculty*

I am going to assume a 'theory-theory' of the psychology faculty. Since the theory has been well articulated and well defended elsewhere (e.g. Josef Perner, 1991a; Henry Wellman, 1990) I will not discuss those issues here. Suffice it to say that psychological competence consists in knowledge of a psychological theory which deploys concepts like perception, desire, and belief within a network of causal-explanatory generalisations.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.1 *Synchronic modularity*

The psychology faculty certainly appears to be an intentional module. The faculty has a definite and self-contained body of knowledge that is framed in terms of a specific network of interrelated (and indeed, highly sophisticated and logically intriguing) concepts. Further, it appears to exhibit a degree of informational encapsulation. Watching a good actor can generate a sort of theory-of-mind illusion: even though one knows that he is not really in pain, or in love, or trying hard to solve a problem, it still seems to one that he is. It appears, then, that relevant information about the actor's real psychological states fails to influence the workings of the psychology faculty.<sup>6</sup>

Is the psychology faculty a computational module? Many of the theorists in the area offer purely intentional accounts of the faculty, with no explicit commitment to a computational theory: see for example, Perner (1991a), Wellman (1990), Gopnik and Wellman (1992), Meltzoff and Gopnik (1993). On the other hand, the accounts provided by Leslie



(see e.g. Leslie and Roth, 1993; Leslie, 1994a) and Baron-Cohen (see e.g. Baron-Cohen and Ring, 1994a; Baron-Cohen, 1994) are at least proto-computational.

There is little direct evidence that bears on the question. Since we do not yet have any worked out computational theory of the psychology faculty, there are no specific tests that can be carried out to confirm or refute such a theory. However, there is a rather general argument that can be applied to this particular case. Fodor has argued that any systematic competence is almost certainly computational. I believe that when the argument is articulated with care and in depth, it is very powerful. It would take considerable space to spell it out properly. For that reason, and because it has been expressed in other places, (e.g. Fodor, 1975, 1987) and is reasonably well known, I will just provide a very quick sketch.

One paradigmatic group of systematic competences are those involving propositional attitudes themselves: competencies to form beliefs on the basis of evidence, to reason through practical syllogisms and so on. Such competencies have an open-ended character. There are infinitely many beliefs we might form, given only enough time, patience, memory and so on. The most attractive explanation of the open-ended character of the competences is that they are explained by possession of a finite stock of concepts that can be put together in a finite number of structures. Thus the concepts of lions, crocodiles and chasing can form the thought that lions chase crocodiles, by combining the two nominal concepts with the binary predicative one. Combining the same concepts in the same general structure but a different order gives one the thought that crocodiles chase lions. This thought can then be entertained, believed, doubted, desired-true, etc.

Given this general hypothesis, we can provide a powerful and elegant explanation of the open-ended nature of the competence. Any failures to form thoughts that are potentially determined by the competence are then explained by performance limitations: limited memory space and so on. Further, the hypothesis explains the systematic patterns we find among our thoughts: anyone who can think that lions chase crocodiles can also think that crocodiles chase lions. Why is this? Because once you have the concepts and can combine nominals with binary predicates, you can have both thoughts. Thus, what explains your capacity to have one thought, automatically explains your capacity to have the other.

Suppose, then, that each thought is made of isolable concepts that can recombine in different configurations. This already makes thought look rather like language: concepts are like words, thoughts are like sentences, modes of combining concepts into thoughts are like linguistic semantic structures. But now note that the actual production of thoughts is itself highly systematic: if you believe that *p* and you believe that if *p* then *q*, you

will very likely be caused to believe *q*. If you desire *q*, and you believe that doing *A* is the best way to bring about *q*, and you believe you have no reason not to do *A*, then you will probably decide to do *A*. It looks, to put it simply, that the transitions among occurrent thoughts are rule-governed.

Computers come into the story when we ask how a physical system, such as a brain, could realise a systematic competence. To cut a long story short: if the concepts were syntactic objects, physically realised in the brain, then the brain could realise the competence. Moreover, as it seems, this is the only currently available precise and detailed theory that bears the explanatory burden. We know exactly what it means to say that a competence is realised by a computational system, and we can see exactly how the hypothesis explains the competence. No other theory or model has yet achieved this status. Obviously that doesn't mean the hypothesis is true. But it does mean that it is a good idea to pursue it in optimistic spirits until it is shown to be wrong, or until an alternative supplants it.

It is now obvious why one might think that the psychology faculty is a computational module. For our psychological competence is systematic in just the required sense. For each thought one can have, one can think that someone else believes, or doubts or entertains it. Hence it is open-ended. And the faculty's capacity to represent attitudes exhibits patterns, also mimicking those exhibited by the attitudes themselves. Finally, thoughts about desires, beliefs and so on, follow one another in systematic and apparently rule-governed ways: if you believe that Dee-Dee believes *p*, and that she believes that if *p* then *q*, then you will probably believe that Dee-Dee probably believes that *q*. All of this follows more or less directly from the theory-theory.

Is the psychology module also a Fodor module? At present it seems to fit the criteria reasonably well, but not entirely. It does appear to be domain specific, informationally encapsulated, to fire obligatorily, to be reasonably fast and to have a characteristic ontogeny (of which more below). It is not yet clear whether it has dedicated neural architecture (but see below). It's also not clear whether any of its contents are inaccessible to consciousness. On the whole, they seem to be accessible; but maybe there's more there than we know about. Further, the faculty's outputs are definitely deep, rather than shallow. But it may be that this last is not really an essential feature of Fodor modularity. Finally, it's also not clear whether it exhibits a characteristic pattern of breakdown. Autistic people are certainly impaired in their capacity to psychologise. But they seem to lack the faculty altogether, and so wouldn't provide evidence of characteristic breakdowns within it. See Baron-Cohen (1994) for further discussion.

Is the psychology faculty a neural module? At this stage the evidence is inconclusive. Baron-Cohen and Ring (1994a) cite some evidence, both from

deficits and from SPECT scans, that the Orbito-Frontal Cortex is implicated in theory-of-mind tasks. This doesn't yet show neural modularity. However, the evidence is at least suggestive, and begins to point in that direction. Lacking any general arguments either for or against an expectation of neural modularity, we must await further developments before drawing a conclusion.

### 3.2 *Diachronic modularity*

Gopnik and Wellman (1994) present a carefully formulated version of the theory-theory, and argue that it is incompatible with the modularity of the psychology faculty.<sup>7</sup> They argue further that their version of the theory-theory provides the empirically more accurate account of the two.

Gopnik and Wellman operate with a single and very general notion of modularity. They mention Fodor, Chomsky and Leslie in one sentence. This runs together Fodor modules with diachronic and synchronic intentional modules (Chomsky) and computational modules (Leslie). However, they focus mainly on development, and their arguments bear directly on the issue of diachronic modularity. The arguments are subtle and stimulating, and deserve discussion.

The developmental aspect of their view holds that theory of mind is developed by a general theory-forming capacity, much like that deployed by adult scientists. They provide the following account of a fairly typical series of stages in theory change in science, and argue that it is mirrored in the child's developing theory of mind: (a) The theorist holds an initial theory which is confronted by counterevidence. When first presented with the counterevidence, the theorist may ignore it, treat it as noise. (b) Often the next stage is to bring in new theoretical apparatus, but use it only in auxiliary hypotheses, allowing the retention of the guts of the original theory. (c) The third stage is to use the new theoretical apparatus in other parts of the theory, but only apply it in limited contexts, still keeping the original theory on centre stage. (d) Finally the new apparatus becomes central, and a new theory is organised around it.

According to Gopnik and Wellman, the process of developing a theory of mind between the ages of two and five years follows that pattern. Very briefly: two-year-olds appear to use two basic mentalistic concepts, which are proto-concepts of perception and desire. These differ from the adult analogues in that they are not really representational. Desires are drives towards objects. Perceptions are rather simple causal relations between objects and persons. Crucially, two-year-olds don't have the idea of misperception: one cannot see an object yet be mistaken about some of its visual properties. At around three, an early concept of belief appears. But

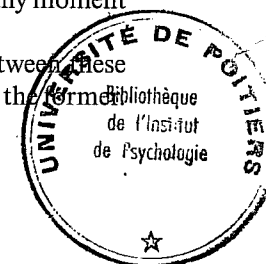
this also is non-representational: it is as if what one believes is just a copy of a real state of the world. The 'false-belief' tests pioneered by Wimmer and Perner show that three-year-olds typically cannot grasp the idea that one has a mistaken belief about an object. If one believes anything about it, then what one believes is true. By four or five, children have the adult conception of beliefs and other representational states and attitudes.

The development of a theory of mind exhibits the typical pattern of theoretical change. (a) Denial: three-year-olds do sometimes deny counterevidence: if a cup is blue and an adult says 'I think it is white', three-year-olds tend to insist that the adult thinks it is blue. (b) New theoretical concepts appear first in auxiliary hypotheses: three-year-olds do begin to show understanding of genuinely representational states. But this understanding first shows up only in relation to desires and perception, and doesn't extend to other core concepts of their theory. (c) New concepts used only in limited contexts: it appears that three-year-olds can come up with explanations in terms of false beliefs – hence a representational concept of belief – when there is enough pressure. If confronted with someone who has clearly acted in a way that fails to satisfy their desires, the children do sometimes explain this by false beliefs. However, they still tend to fail the standard false-belief tests, and don't seem to use the representational concept of belief in normal circumstances.

In fact it is not easy to see why there should be any conflict between the developmental theory-theory and diachronic modularity. The diachronic modularity thesis construes maturation of the psychology faculty as a process of setting parameters. Given certain stimulations from the environment, there automatically results an intentionally characterisable change in the faculty. Consider, for example, the much discussed change that typically occurs between the ages of three and four. At three children typically fail false belief tests, at four they pass them. Let us suppose, as Gopnik and Wellman do, that this change involves a genuine case of conceptual development.<sup>8</sup> They acquire a new concept, one that they lacked before. For convenience I'll adopt Perner's terminology. Thus the three-year-old begins with a concept of 'prebelief' and ends up with a concept of belief.

According to the diachronic modularity theory, what has occurred is that there is, as it were, a switch in the diachronic module. The switch is labelled 'prebelief-belief', and it moves from one setting to the other. This move may be caused by mostly exogenous factors. Or it may be caused more endogenously, by an internal clock or some such. One point of the switch metaphor (or the term 'parameter') is just to register the idea that there are a very limited number of conceptual changes that can occur at any moment in the developmental process.

The reason why it looks hard to find any incompatibility between these two accounts is that the latter could easily be seen as a model of the former.



The idea would be that the maturation of the psychology faculty is a cognitive process, rather like developing a theory on the basis of evidence. And, further, developing this theory is a matter of the setting of parameters in a diachronic module. Indeed one might even have much the same views about the development of scientific theories. Thus the process of conceptual change described by the developmental theory-theory, the move from a prelie theory to a belief theory, just is the setting of a parameter in the diachronic module.

But there is a genuine conflict. It concerns the specificity of the acquisition process. On the developmental theory-theory the processes involved in acquiring a theory of mind are general, the same ones that apply in other domains. On the diachronic modularity theory, the processes are specific to theory of mind and owed to a genetic programme that severely constrains the pattern and endpoint of development.

I think that the diachronic modularity view has a strong lead over the developmental theory-theory. There are at least four reasons for this.

First: as Leslie and Roth (1993) point out, the developmental theory-theory sees the child not just as a theorist, but as a quite brilliant theorist. The concepts of propositional attitudes are highly sophisticated and logically complex (as philosophers of psychology and language are painfully aware). And the theory is brilliant in its simplicity, explanatory power and breadth of application. In fact it is so good that its essential explanatory framework of states with causal powers mirrored by representational properties is retained in cognitive psychology. Children are good at developing theories in some other particular areas: e.g. some aspects of folk physics and folk biology. But they don't appear to be brilliant theorists across the board. For example, it takes them longer to come to grips with the intuitively rather simple concepts of preservation of magnitude and density than with the representational concept of belief. This suggests that specific areas of children's theory development, including psychology, involve special processes rather than general ones.

The point is not conclusive since there may be further factors that determine the rate of development. In particular there may be more pressure on children to learn about psychology than about preservation or density, in part because it's more important to them, in part because of the influence of adults. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that representational concepts of propositional attitudes are so sophisticated that unless children were pre-programmed to come up with them, it is hard to believe that they would do so within roughly their first four years.

Second: the pattern and end point of development do seem to be remarkably similar across individuals. As Gopnik and Wellman concede, the few cross-cultural studies that have been done suggest that the pattern is iden-

tical across the species. They respond to this by suggesting that if adults converge on the same theory in different cultures, then we would not expect much cross-cultural variation in children. But this is not a good response. First, we might ask how the adults happened to converge. The obvious answer is that they converged as children. And that brings us back to modularity. Secondly, it is not clear how large a role adults can play on Gopnik and Wellman's own theory. Their emphasis is precisely on the idea that children alter their earlier theories in the face of their inadequacies and failures. Adults would seem to be rather incidental to such a process.

If Gopnik and Wellman are to accord a greater role to adults as teachers, then they need to show how this role is to fit with their emphasis on the resemblance of the ontogeny of the psychology faculty to theory change in science. When people are taught theories, the pattern of change does not typically match that of development in science: there is no rejection of counterevidence, appearance of the new concept in auxiliary hypotheses and so on. Indeed, acquisition by teaching appears to be a possibility alternative to both modularity and Gopnik and Wellman's developmental theory-theory (see Astington, this volume).

Further, there does seem to be enough evidence from the many studies that have been done in the West, to show that development of a theory of mind has special characteristics that differentiate it from normal theorising. What is so striking is the similarity of development, after the starting point, across children. Most of them do come up with the same theory at roughly the same time. Moreover, at least as far as one can tell from anecdotal evidence, history, and literature, it appears that every normal human being from every culture, apart from very small children and genetically defective individuals, deploys some sort of belief-desire psychology.

By contrast, it is surely not the case that if one collected a few million scientists who started out with the same initial theory, then gave them the same counterevidence, that nearly all of them would arrive at the same revised theory – within roughly the same time span. And this is particularly so if they differ in general intelligence, in learning ability, in psychological well being and so on, the way children do. Indeed, we already know that psychologists disagree over the truth of the core aspects of belief-desire psychology. These points strongly suggests that acquiring a theory of mind involves a special acquisition process rather than a general one.<sup>9</sup>

Third: there is an important disanalogy between theory change in science and development of theory of mind in children. One of the processes driving theory change in science is explicit meta-theoretical reflection. Presumably, when a scientist is confronted by counterevidence, she begins to worry that her theory is false, and this causes her to look for alternatives. But very young infants do not appear to have the conceptual sophistication

to formulate this worry: it is unlikely that they are aware that they hold a theory, that it is confronted by counterevidence and that it is therefore probably false. So it seems that at least one of the processes responsible for theory change in science does not play a role in acquisition of a theory of mind.<sup>10</sup>

The fourth, and most compelling reason to favour modularity is Williams Syndrome. This is a rare genetic disorder resulting in certain characteristic facial features and physical problems as well as a unique and particularly striking cognitive profile. Subjects are retarded, with an average IQ of around 50. They are also particularly impaired with respect to arithmetical and visual-spatial abilities. However they exhibit an unusually high level of linguistic ability, with a particular penchant for sophisticated and unusual vocabulary items. And, crucial to the present issue, they have often been noted for their relatively high degree of social skills.

A recent study conducted by Helen Tager-Flusberg, Kate Sullivan and Deborah Zaitchik presented a group of Williams Syndrome children (aged 4;4 to 11;2) with standard false-belief tests, as well as a series of simplified versions of the tests and a task that 'tapped children's ability to use mental states to *explain* action.'<sup>11</sup> They found that with the exception of the two youngest children, who lacked the linguistic ability or attention span to handle the tests, all the subjects passed the tests. These results indicate that children with Williams Syndrome have an intact psychology faculty.

By contrast, children with Williams Syndrome seem to suffer general impairments when it comes to the acquisition of theoretical, explanatory knowledge. Although this has not been researched in detail, as far as I know, at least one series of tests confirms the picture. Susan Carey, Susan Johnson and Karen Levine offer the hypothesis that there are at least two kinds of learning processes: 'enrichment processes' which are capable of 'accumulating and correlating information in something possibly like an associative network of knowledge', and 'conceptual change processes ... which actively reorganise knowledge and produce genuinely new conceptual structures'. They assembled tasks designed to diagnose the presence of each of the two kinds of process in the field of naive biology. They found that children with Williams Syndrome matched children of equivalent mental age on the tasks requiring only enrichment processes, but performed significantly worse on those requiring conceptual change processes.

If children with Williams Syndrome are able to acquire theories of mind but are severely impaired with respect to acquiring theories in all or most other areas (barring language), then it certainly appears that the acquisition processes involved in theory of mind are specialised in the way required by the modular conception of development. It is difficult to see how the developmental theory-theory could account for such a phenomenon.

There is a fifth consideration to prefer the modularity theory to Gopnik

and Wellman's. This is not a consideration that favours the truth of the former, but rather its explanatory power. (Unfortunately, explanatory power doesn't argue for truth: they are just different virtues.) Gopnik and Wellman say this: 'the developmental data chart a succession of conceptions of mind each logically related to earlier conceptions'. This makes it look as though the revision of the theory, say, the move from prelieu to belief, has the nature of an inductive or deductive rational process. If that were so, then it would indeed be easy to see the theoretical change as an instance of a general cognitive process that occurs in many other domains. But conceptual development is not like that: no deduction or induction can give one new concepts for old. The process of coming up with new concepts, whether in science or in maturation, is not a logical process. That is why it is so hard to understand.

When a three-year-old is confronted by counterevidence to their current theory, and for the first time deploys a concept of a genuinely representational attitude (perception or desire), something very special has happened. They don't just use some kind of logic to reason through the problem. Rather, a new concept makes its first appearance. How does this happen? Why is it that concept that appears, rather than another, or no new concept at all? The developmental theory-theory does not really help answer these questions.

The modular approach does not fully answer them either. But it does give us a way of looking at them. The concept just grows under those circumstances. And the reason it does is that it is built into our genes. Specifically, just as we are specifically determined to grow hair but not horns. The modularity theory thus reduces conceptual development in childhood to a kind of process that is reasonably well understood in general terms, and applies across a very wide range of phenomena. The developmental theory-theory doesn't achieve anything parallel. One might say that there's no great mystery left on the modularity theory, while there is on the theory-theory.

Gopnik and Wellman point to two aspects of development of a theory of mind that seem hard to account for in terms of modularity. First, they point out that the early theory tends to produce false representations. I take it that they mean that the early non-representational concepts of attitudes are inaccurate, and feature in false claims about psychology. They argue: '[E]rroneous (as opposed to incomplete) representations, which are later modified and restructured, are ... difficult to explain on a purely modular account. Evolution might of course select for erroneous representation, the representation just has to be good enough to survive. But if the representational system is good enough, why, on a modularity account, would it be replaced in later development?'

The second aspect is the resemblance of the development of a theory of mind to typical cases of theory change:

It is, of course, logically possible that a maturational sequence of successive modules might just by accident parallel a theory-formation process, and that the triggering inputs just happen to bear the same relation to the privileged representations that evidence bears to theory. Such a view, however, seems unmotivated. It is easy to see how evolution might have selected for an (approximately) correct innately determined representation of the world. It is much more difficult to see how evolution would have selected for a series of representational systems, each maturing separately only to be replaced by another.

The modularist can meet these points. It is not implausible to suppose that the early theories of mind – the two-year-old's, three-year-old's and so on – are hangovers from phylogenetically prior stages. If this is right, then each new stage can be viewed as a case of what in systematics is called 'terminal addition'. A terminal addition occurs when the ontogenetic sequence of a descendant adds a final stage to the ontogenetic sequence of the ancestor (see Stephen Jay Gould, 1977, see also Povinelli, this volume, for related discussion). The false representations of, say, the three-year-old are a product of a relatively primitive system that was present in the species some while ago. The system was, indeed, good enough for survival. However, the new system, the one that humans now have, and that comes on-line at about four years of age, is a better one, and it was added on as a terminal stage of growth in the ontogenetic sequence.

Further, it is not implausible that the neural hardware underlying the earlier theories is a necessary developmental precursor of that underlying the later ones. Dendrites and axons are conditioned to grow in certain ways, given certain behavioural successes and failures. These behavioural successes and failures can only come about given the existence of an early theory that leads to them. There is no special reason not to suppose that the particular pattern of growth in these particular conditions is determined by specific genes. Ontogeny often doesn't recapitulate phylogeny. But we shouldn't be amazed if sometimes it does.

Of course the suggestion that the psychology faculty evolved by terminal addition is pure speculation. But at this stage that is all that anyone can provide. And that is all that is required to meet Gopnik and Wellman's challenge.

In conclusion, then, it does seem that as matters stand the diachronic modular theory has a significant lead over the developmental theory-theory.

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#### NOTES

- 1 The notion of intentional modules is akin to James Higginbotham's (1987) notion of 'modules of understanding'.
- 2 The above should be considered only a very quick first sketch of intentional modularity. If one or more genuine psychological natural kinds fall under the concept then a lot of work remains to be done articulating it.
- 3 Unlike intentional modularity, computational modularity has already been well articulated by philosophers and cognitive scientists. See e.g. Haugeland, 1978 and 1982. Note that he commits himself to an account of intentionality that goes beyond anything I say here.
- 4 Technically, I should at this point revise my initial characterisation of modularity. I said that a module is a component of the mind, or brain . . . that explains a competence. Since explanation isn't transitive, a functional component of the brain that realises say, a computational module that explains a competence, might not itself explain a competence. I leave it to the reader to adjust the characterisation so that it covers such components of the brain. Thanks to Scott Sturgeon for the point.
- 5 In fact much of what I shall say is equally applicable to at least some versions of the simulation theory.
- 6 Baron-Cohen (1994) suggests that the psychology faculty is not informationally encapsulated. But I think his reason isn't adequate. See my comments in the same journal.
- 7 See also Gopnik and Wellman (1992) and Meltzoff and Gopnik (1993) for more on the same theme.
- 8 This is not a small concession. Leslie (1994a), argues that three-year-olds have the adult conception of belief, but they can't deploy it properly. If this is right, then the analogy with conceptual change in science is undermined.
- 9 Autism appears to be a genetic defect that results in a fairly specific theory of mind deficit. It might seem as though it therefore provides good evidence for modularity. But it doesn't really. Gopnik and Wellman allow that the child is born with an innate theory which is the starting point for subsequent development. Autism may be explained by lack of this initial theory, rather than lack of a module. See Meltzoff and Gopnik (1993) for a suggestion along roughly these lines.
- 10 I am indebted to Peter Carruthers for this point.
- 11 The work cited here and in the following paragraph was presented at the sixth international conference of the Williams Syndrome Association, at the University of California, San Diego, July 1994. The quotations are from *Building Bridges Across Disciplines: Cognition to Gene*, program and abstracts from that conference.

Language seems the obvious candidate here. I have argued that it would help an individual ontogenetically by helping them label intervening variables/mental states of themselves and others; and it would help it phylogenetically, by the process of developing within a community of adults linguistically communicating about such states. It is not so clear that this phylogenetic scaffolding could be created by a community of creatures busy being self-aware or busy carrying out pretend simulations. Self-awareness and pretence of this kind are intrinsically solitary, whereas we need a social context for the evolution of mind-reading. Language seems to be the right candidate.

The likely importance of enculturation for mind-reading development in chimpanzees fits in well with the postulated role for language. Adult humans, and adult chimpanzees, behave very differently to young chimpanzees. In some ways the latter can benefit from human care-givers; they attend to and manipulate objects more (Bard and Vaclair, 1984), engage in longer bouts of mutual gaze (Bard, 1994), and show richer pretence and can be trained in simple forms of sign language. This demonstrates the powerful nature of the social environment in supporting the ontogeny of mind-reading skills. However they had to evolve too. Even chimpanzees with a lot of exposure to human care-givers (such as Sarah, who featured in the early Premack experiments) don't show unambiguous mind-reading skills. Enculturation in a ToM community is not sufficient for mind-reading. But it is very likely to be necessary; as Tomasello, Savage-Rumbaugh, and Kruger (1993) also suggest, if we could imagine a child being reared by chimpanzees, it might not develop an explicit theory of mind because of deficient enculturation.

In summary, only language seems likely to convince us – or sceptics among us – of mind-reading ability beyond the level of 'very clever behaviourist'; level I, with arguments about level E1, in Karmiloff-Smith's (1992) RR model. Only language would enable an individual to develop this through to explicit mind-reading; consolidating E1 and reaching E2/3. And only a linguistic community would have provided the phylogenetic scaffolding for this to happen. Only if chimpanzees could talk to each other about mental states would they have evolved mind-reading, and only if they could talk to us about mental states would we believe them.

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