Origins of Mind:
Philosophical Issues in Cognitive Development

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The Challenge

Explain how humans come to know about objects, causes, words, numbers, colours, actions and minds.[11,29]

What will I learn about?

Recent scientific breakthroughs about the emergence of minds in development, and the philosophical issues arising from these.

Also issues like innateness, modularity and prelinguistic cognition.

How is it organised?

The course will be organised around domains of knowledge. Topics to be covered, in varying depth and not necessarily in exactly this order, include:

1. The Question and Its Theoretical Background
2. Objects and How They Interact
3. Seeing and Talking about Colours
4. Words and Other Communicative Tools
5. Innateness
6. Actions: Teleology and Motor Awareness
7. Joint Action
8. Minds: Processes and Representations

Do I have to know something about science?

No but you will learn to read scientific papers papers, and consume quite a bit of developmental psychology. You will also learn to integrate philosophy with psychology.

Is there a web page?

http://origins-of-mind-umea.butterfill.com

Currently this page contains slides and handouts from an earlier version of the module. I will update it before the course and continue to update it as the module progresses.

Can you suggest some reading?

There's a list on the back of this handout. Or maybe you'd like to read about a particular topic …

Reading Suggestions by Topic

These are some of the topics which may be covered in the module.

1. The Question

How do humans first come to know about—and to knowingly manipulate—objects, causes, words, numbers, colours, actions and minds?[11,29]

2. Objects and How They Interact

What is the nature of infants' earliest abilities to track physical objects and their interactions? Do these abilities involve knowledge of objects, or representations of some other kind?[1,28,25,16]

3. Seeing and Talking about Colours

How do children acquire colour concepts and colour words—concepts and words for red, blue and green, say?[26,12,13]

4. Words and Other Communicative Tools

What comes first in development, knowledge or language?[32,3,24,15]

5. Innateness

What would count as evidence for the existence of innate knowledge in humans or other animals? What evidence for innateness do we already have?[23,21,8]

6. Actions: Teleology and Motor Awareness

How do infants in the first nine months of life identify actions and track the goals to which they are directed?[4,9,22,2]

7. Joint Action

According to a leading account,[7,30] humans' joint actions in the second year of life already involve shared intentions as characterised by Bratman[5,6]. What are the consequences of this account? Is it well supported by evidence? If not, is there a better alternative?[20,31,14]

8. Mindreading

What is involved in representing belief?[19,27,17,10,18]

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