

“Ethical Responsibility and the Knowledge of Other Minds,” in process. Targeted Journal: *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*.

Abstract

This paper will contribute to recent challenges to traditional solutions concerning how we understand the intentions of other minds, particularly, Theory Theory and Simulation Theory. Following the lead of Ratcliffe (*Rethinking Commonsense Psychology*, 2007), Hutto (*Folk Psychological Narratives*, 2008) and Gallagher (*How the Body Shapes the Mind*, 2005), who find sufficient “scaffolding” in our interactive experience with others (whether environmentally, behaviorally or through narrative competence) to understand their intentions without having to lapse into mind reading, I wish to bring to the table to notion that our sense of the agency of the other is partially grounded phenomenologically in our awareness of our own obligations to the other. Furthermore, this sense of agency and responsibility is not based on the predictability of the other’s behavior, but rather on its irregularity and unpredictability. The fact that we are often surprised by the behavior of others is an indication of their autonomy and hence at the basis of the distinction between persons and things that serves to help direct intentions at “other minds,” rather than merely at other bodies or other things. This paper will be partly drawn from the thought of Emmanuel Levinas, who is quite visibly absent in discussions involving the use of phenomenology in cognitive science.

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