

From Ecological Perception to Mirror Self-Recognition: Why First Person Perspective does not entail Self-Representation

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Abstract

In this talk I will argue that in order to provide a naturalistic, non-reductionist account of the gradual emergence of self-awareness, the bottom level of the egocentric perspective should not be considered as an instance of a minimal form of self-awareness, for the self is not represented in every step of the ontogeny, nor in every conscious experience.

I wonder if the possibility to identify the empirical counterpart of the aforementioned minimal self-consciousness can be provided by the scientific research on subjectivity, in particular by the ecological theory of perception (Gibson, 1979), the developmental psychology (Amsterdam, 1972), and the cognitive ethology (Gallup, 1970; Povinelli *et al.*, 1996). I will discuss the philosophical interpretations on the behavioral technique of mirror self-recognition (Gallup, 1970; Povinelli, 1996), and in particular the relation between self-awareness and self-recognition as it is made possible through the perception of one's own image in a specular image.

The detection of the different degrees in which the first person perspective is held by an organism, and the attempt to find a ground for the higher and more complex forms of self-consciousness that emerge during its development, suggest that a «*weak*» form of first person perspective (Baker, 2012) has to be considered as qualitatively different from self-awareness.

I will conclude that in order to maintain the “folk” as well as philosophical intuition according to which a subjective component is necessarily involved in phenomenal consciousness (Kriegel, 2009), it has to be maintained that albeit conscious experience carries information relative to the organism, the self is not always part of the representational content of the experience (Musholt, 2015).

References

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