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The Theory of Mind is Part of the Theory of Society, Both Being Integrated into the World Reality Thesis

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Abstract

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The theory of mind is a way of relating consciousness to a certain dimension of the world, namely to its social region, being an essential element for the social existence and ensuring the foundations of mutual understanding. The theory of mind is the most important social integrator, the face of this integration being the theory of the society, as a particular form of aggregation of mind theories that govern the relationships with others; thus, to the theory of mind a theory of the society corresponds. From an evolutionary perspective, the essence of the theory of mind is the survival strategy centred on the ability to predict the behaviour of other people, namely on the anticipation specific intentionality; it is the gateway to the complexity of social relations, the third degree representations ensuring the highest level of integration due to the ability of anticipation and prediction that it brings along. The theory of mind is a specific form of intent, characterized by mentalization: orientation to identifying mental states. The world reality thesis shall be applied to the theory of mind: we do not “issue a theory” at every reunion with a known person, but we use the previous one every time, possibly updated in the light of our further experiences / comments / interests. Any theory of mind is “a reality thesis.” The world reality thesis has a stabilizing function, generating a reference context in a multitude of possibilities.

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Keywords: Theory of mind; mentalization; theory of society; world reality thesis; consciousness; intentionality.

1. Introduction

In this article, we will discuss the following:

- a) The theory of mind is an intentional system, guided by evolutionist values;
- b) The theory of mind is a social integrator;
- c) The theory of mind involves a theory of the society. In the first definition, the theory of society refers to all the assumptions on which each individual's social position is based.

d) The theory of mind is the specific form of the world reality thesis, sharing its characteristics. In this capacity, it has the function of cognitively stabilizing the social environment and is continually updated, providing the information needed for specific positioning of the survival strategies. The article is based on a fundamental assumption: knowing / acknowledging the existence of other minds requires special competence, which is called the theory of mind. The *theory of mind* formula seems to suggest the existence of a theoretical coagulation which is responsible for certain mental states such as beliefs, desires, hopes and intentions. At the same time, however, the concept justifies its (slightly pejorative) meaning of *theory*, since other people's mental states cannot be perceived directly, but inferred from particular types of behaviour (correlated with a form of empathy). What is debated is the ability of a person to "feel" the presence of another mind or, more precisely, the ability to attribute mental states to others, as the existence of a theory of the mind is an essential argument for the ability of being aware of the existence of another mind, namely of another self. An important aspect is that this ability may have different values depending on several variables, the first of which is age; another important aspect is that the level of education also creates variables when it comes to this ability. These assumptions, once confirmed, can have significant consequences on the social existence. The reference framework for research is the theory of evolution. The theory of mind is analysed especially from the perspective of the main variable reported in this context: the survival strategy. This perspective explains the frequent deviations from the traditional meaning of the word "theory". In other words, we are mainly interested in the adaptive behaviours determined by the existence of other minds, which show the theory behind them.

1.1. *Theory of mind: limit or opening?*

Is it relevant to talk about understanding other minds in the context of the theory of mind? What are the limits of such a possibility? Qualia seem to be a landmark indicating the boundaries of direct knowledge and the need of a theory of mind.

If the theory of mind is a prerequisite to seeing / understanding other mind / consciousness, then it seems that we should consider two alternatives:

- The theory of mind is our limit, as it focuses only on understanding some things about the human mind (and others of the kind). From this perspective, to "see" other mental typologies, we should upgrade the theory. OR
- The theory of mind is a window to other minds, and all that we see exists around us.

But maybe this is a wrong perspective, since, in the context of the theories on the theory of mind, we have to narrow our interpretations to what we are able to know. A brief "epistemological incursion" in

the significance of scientific theories could also provide a clearer perspective on the mundane theory of mind.

1.2. *Predictability does not confirm ontological theories*

In this case, what would justify the term “theory” with reference to the theory of mind, given that we tend to revolve around the scientific or pre-scientific behaviour?! In other words, is the idea of theory justified?

Any theory is an attempt to find an explanation for a phenomenon, and this explanation should provide a cognitive match in reality, which should be appropriate enough to be consistent with the overall knowledge and to allow predictions. Assessing the accuracy of predictions is the main way of evaluating the theory. However, confirming the predictions does not necessarily prove that the theory is true, but only that it allows predictions with a high degree of adequacy. In other words, there may be several theoretical enunciations of the same phenomenon, which allow predictions with a similar level of adequacy. The same is true for coherence: the coherent framing in the description of the world is possible for many different types of descriptions. For a proper understanding of this issue, we shall continue to analyze it in the context of intentionality, which is relevant to the mental dimension of existence.

2. **The theory of mind is an intentional system that is guided by evolutionist values**

We shall prove that the analysis of the theory of mind should be done from the perspective of the intentional attitude, as the theory of mind is basically an intentional system. The evolutionist values refer to the two fundamental paradigms of the analysis – the survival and the perpetuation of the species, as they are general orientations on which the entire structure of the intentionality vectors is based.

2.1. *The theory of mind as specific intentionality*

We believe that the theory of mind is largely an issue of intentionality: *mentalization* can be described as the orientation towards identifying other minds or other mental traits, while *mentality* refers to the forms in which we are prepared to understand the “mentalization results”. We shall further show that the theory of mind is a specific form of intentionality.

As indicated above, the intentionality that is specific to the theory of mind can also be called *mentalization* – orientation towards understanding the encountered existences as having a mind. Mind reading is different from mentalization: the former attitude is specific orientation (applicable to the existences considered to have a mind) towards reading thoughts through behaviour, while the former is a general guideline, characterized by the assumption that mental forms exist.

For the general problem of interest here, that is the social role of the theory of mind, one of the challenges seems to be provided by the evidence on the existence of a theory of mind in primates (Premack, & Woodruff, 1978), even if the evidence is not always conclusive (Call, & Tomasello, 2008). We shall try to put this difficulty aside by postulating an unconscious dimension of the theory of mind, whilst considering that, depending on the encountered types of mental, we can speak of the

existence of several degrees of intentionality. We believe that an argument in this respect is the fact that the orientation towards a theory of mind is also visible in our unconscious interpretation of the social environment, as the reception of certain alarm signals that catch our attention can be interpreted as a possible proof of the unconscious dimension of the theory of mind.

The importance of the intentionality for our topic is determined by the dual affiliation of the theory of mind to the intentionality system, as this theory is, simultaneously, a coping strategy (based on intentionality) and an intentional (sub)system. From the perspective of intentionality, the theory of mind involves a set of orientations meant to provide the best solutions in relation to what we know or assume to be the key feature of the mental. The theory of mind is part of the survival strategies, as this is its basic orientation, defining its results depending on which its efficiency can be assessed.

The perspective that we consider questionable is the part discussing the consequences of assuming a rational perspective in the criticism made by Alvin Goldman (Goldman, 2012, pp. 8-9) on one intentional approach to theory of mind and on the intentional attitude proposed by Daniel Dennett. As stated earlier (Rotilă, 2015), intentional attitude involves referring to something as if it were rational – this is rather an indication meant to clearly define intentionality, and not its fundamental prerequisite. In this context, the classification of intentional attitude as “a theory of the rational mind” (based on the interpretation of rationality) is inadequate with respect to Dennett’s intention, as intentionality provides a sufficient explanation. In other words, the intentionality of the theory of mind has another intentional attitude as expectation / anticipation.

Goldman is trying to show more inadequacies of the intentional attitude “*What about other types of mental states, such as sensations like thirst or pain and emotions like anger or happiness? It is dubious that rationality considerations bear on these kinds of states, yet they are surely among the states that attributers ascribe to others. There must be more to mind reading than imputed rationality*”. (Goldman, 2012, p. 8). Reducing the intentional attitude to the identification of rationality impermissibly limits the definition of intentionality. For example, it does not matter if somebody is agitated because he or she is thirsty or because of an elaborate mental state, as long as their behaviour is relatively similar in the two cases and can be interpreted effectively from an identical perspective, thus providing a prediction with a high degree of probability and adequacy in relation to their own survival strategies. The presence or absence of rationality does not matter as much as the probability of the predictions made on the basis of behaviour and related information. For this reason, efficiency or rationality, understood as orientations for survival, represent accurate frames for analysis. Goldman’s doubt, even if based on a justified differentiation between certain mental states and rationality (understood in the traditional sense), is flawed from the perspective of all those orientations: “*there are kinds of mental states and mind reading contexts that have nothing to do with rationality or efficiency. People ascribe emotional states to others (fear or delight, disgust or anger) based on facial expressions. How could these ascriptions be driven by a principle of efficiency?*” (Goldman, 2012, p. 9). Ascribing emotions must be understood in the wide context of the orientation that underlies them, which is part of the intentional system. That fact that such ascriptions are not necessarily conscious does not change their status, as they are simultaneously part of the intentional system and anticipations based on intentional schemes.

The intentional attitude should be considered in terms of a system of analysis, of a framework orientation that guides the possibilities of interpretation. Relating to something *as if there were mental states involved* would generate a scope of understanding, which would help ascribing different purposes intended to provide useful information for predicting its behaviour. From this perspective, the scientific adequacy of ascribing various mental states is not as important as the predictions mediated by them, since the validation is done in terms of efficiency, from the perspective of the survival strategy. In other words, the incorrect ascription of mental states is irrelevant as long as they are located within a framework that generates accurate predictions (which, in turn, ensure the survival). It is obvious that the dependence on the context can sometimes hide instances of misinterpretation: inappropriate ascriptions, considered separately, may generate erroneous predictions that are, however, covered (their effects are removed) by contexts that diminish the consequences of errors. Moreover, survival often tends to be thought statistically, generating an additional source of error. For example, a community can survive for a long time if its culture (understood as the entire set of survival strategies of the community) contains numerous theories of the inadequate mind (relative to another community) due to the favourable context in which that community is located. Environmental conditions generate specific conditioning or specific adaptation solutions, including in terms of the theories of mind (available in a culture).

Intentionality also acts in another way, which is directly proportional to the complexity of a society. Paradoxically, in today's society individuals are increasingly lonely while people are increasingly present through artefacts. *Derived intentionality* explains this intensity of the presence of the world and simultaneously maintains the world reality thesis (including the theory of society) throughout the periods of loneliness for the individual. The forms in which the mental is present through the objects in the world and their impact on the theory of mind can be a fruitful research direction.

2.2. *The unconscious dimension hypothesis of the theory of mind*

The assumption that a person is rational is not a sufficient basis for accurately predicting that person's behaviour; such an idea can be considered a partial argument against intentional attitude as it significantly reduces the effectiveness of interpretations. Additionally, another shortcoming of such an approach derives from what it implies: the conscious anticipation of the behaviour, given that, as we have seen, ascriptions often take place unconsciously. In other words, what we usually call *the unconscious* is present both "in the mind that is the subject of the theory" and in the mind that resorts to the theory of mind. While the theory of mind tends to force a discursive form of understanding by shifting the issue to the realm of rationality and attention, mind reading could have a broader perspective, especially if we also include the possibility of reading other minds. In the absence of such an extension of the analysis frame, phenomena such as mirror neurons are at risk of being excluded.

2.2.1. *Mirror neurons and the theory of mind*

One of the hypotheses of this article presumes that mirror neurons, discovered by mediate the knowledge of other minds. Rather, it should be a pattern of behaviour, an automatism as a form of adaptation to the presence of others, which tends to show our preoccupation whenever we relate to

them. This line of investigation offers an argument for the fact that the theory of mind is not always a theory in the discursive sense of the term, as the integration of the unconscious aspects is ensured, as we shall see, through the world reality thesis.

From the perspective of the links between mirror neurons and the theory of mind, Gallese and Goldman, referring to the research on primates, have suggested that the two interpretative variants of this ability of reading other minds or of theory-theory (reading the mind as a naive version of the theory of mind) and the simulation theory (automatic adoption of other people's perspectives), the latter can predict such behaviours (Gallese, & Goldman, 1998).

We believe that, in the case of mirror neurons, it is difficult to speak about brain simulation: what can be seen is a set of neurons which copy the behaviour, with no evidence of identical brain states (e.g., the motivation of the gesture can be different). The main question is: in this case, can we speak about the theory of mind? Or is it rather a coping strategy (part of the survival strategy), characterized by a mechanism that is different from that of the theory of mind (triggered by a fundamental orientation towards the other)? At this point, we agree with Goldman "*If this simulation also generates a mental-state attribution, this would qualify as simulation-based mind reading*". (Goldman, 2012, p. 11). In addition, even if it is not always about the conscious attribution of mental states, we cannot exclude the possibility that this may take place at "a certain level of the unconscious". Mimicking the behaviour we believe is facilitated by the atmosphere of trust generated by the world reality thesis, as it generates the field of action specific to certain unconscious takeovers. Confidence therefore opens the possibility of taking over unconscious behaviours. In fact, the speculation referring to the possibility that the mirror system may be part of or a precursor of a theory of mind based on the principles of the simulation theory, although interesting, is impossible to be proven, since such a behaviour may as well be an effect subsequent to socializing (an adaptive solution).

Even if the ratio of the mirror system and the theory of mind are, as we have seen, problematic, we emphasise the social utility of this orientation of the mind: "mental mimicry is a deep-seated property of the social brain" (Goldman, 2012, p. 13). The role of mirror neurons can be understood particularly from the perspective of the light evolutionist advantage offered by social mimicry (however, one cannot also exclude the possible benefits of copying some of the behaviours of other creatures). The energy it saves could account for its existence. Additionally, mirror neurons are a way of supporting the social integration function of the theory of mind and of defining its relationship with the world reality thesis.

2.3. Machiavellian intelligence as an indicator of intelligent orientation towards survival

Machiavellian intelligence is based on a person's ability to develop strategies meant to mislead his or her opponents, by causing them to think of themselves differently than the reality. It requires the ability of being aware of the goals that the opponent has as compared to own goals and of inducing them false beliefs. For this reason, it was called Machiavellian intelligence. Its connection with the theory of mind has been emphasized: "*the original Machiavellian intelligence hypothesis, namely to what extent cognitively sophisticated mechanisms conferring the ability to 'mind-read' might be involved. Tactical deception, in its strong sense, implies the ability to hold false beliefs and, thus, the*

presence of the ability known as 'theory of mind' (ToM)" (Dunbar, 1998, p. 188). The presence of these abilities in some primates rightfully raised the question of their ability to have a theory of mind.

3. The theory of mind is a social integrator

If we think in terms of a meta-theory of individual reporting to the world, we shall see that this is divided into two distinct areas: the theory of the object region and the theory of the social region, the latter being part of the theory of mind. In this context, it is appropriate to ask questions about the social role of the theory of mind, starting with what seems to be the most solid evidence that support its existence.

3.1. The test of false beliefs

This test indicates the basic form of the inability of "being in someone else's shoes", being focused on discovering the differences between children up to three years old and those over 4 years old. The "ostrich policy" seems to be the rule for children younger than 3 years old; it can be understood as the limitation of the possible perspectives on the world to our own. What happens at the transition from one age to another? Perhaps a change of theory under which cognitive data are placed. In other words, a change of epistemological paradigm. An intermediate explanatory version – children bring an additional a character to the scene. It is about the gradual introduction of additional perspectives on some components of the environment.

What theoretical justification can we provide to test false beliefs? From an etiological perspective, we must consider at least two key elements involved in the mind's ontology, that is the influence of the context and the change of the "mind support" (i.e., the "socio-genesis" and the ontogenesis). Such an approach has at least the following consequences:

- If we privileged the environment, we are in a situation of a form of maturation of the mind (which intervenes in the relationship between "the given" and the environment; that is, gained through experience) which determines the leap. The increase of the intake of the world could be consistent with this cognitive leap generating the increase of the capacity of prediction of other behaviours, namely the level of social integration. In this case, the mind would answer a request specific to the (social) environment, building a specific neural network. (If we agree to the theory according to which the construction of the mind is based on a process of maintaining a set of connections from a variety of possible variants, which are characteristic of the child's brain, the correct formula is "appearing by reinforcing specific neural networks".)

- A form of maturation of the brain / an area of the brain, which brings an additional competence. For its existence, some evolutionist arguments can be used.

Given the very high overlap of the two explanations, their individual importance is significantly diminished; what is essential is their role of social integration, which is revealed by the existence of this cognitive leap. From an optimistic perspective, the theory of mind could be considered a key element to a fundamental characteristic of humanity: sociability.

3.2. *The theory of mind and the proto-scientific attitude*

If we developed a theory of individual knowledge, this would be divided into two distinct areas: the theory of objectual knowledge and the theory of social knowledge; the theory of mind would be included in the latter. However, we have to point out that, as previously stated, the theory of the mind is part of the world reality thesis, thus assuming that, in a way, the world reality thesis is a theory of the world, namely of its two major areas: objects and other minds.

By proto-scientific theory we do not refer to the meaning given to it by Wilfrid Sellars (Sellars, 1956), referring to the “theory-theory” model, i.e. a theory launched by a mythical ancestor, but try to identify a survival strategy developed in an evolutionist reference framework that could have significant similarities with contemporary scientific theories (the possible confirmation of this hypothesis would lead to a change of the ontological status of science; it could be considered a social fulfilment of a human way of being).

The theory of mind is similar to other scientific theories in terms of its use for prediction, which places it in a proto-scientific area. The ability of predicting other people’s behaviour is the main variable that models the construction and the relocation of the theory of mind. In other words, the theory of mind develops in an experimental context, which includes the possibility to test the hypotheses. The whole culture may include this (largely camouflaged) proto-scientific context of the development and improvement of the theory of mind (in the individual meaning of the term).

For a relevant discussion on this topic, we should establish the definition of the science to which we refer, namely the meaning we ascribe to the theory. We should not exclude the possibility that the name “theory of mind” may be determined by the contemporary way of understanding things, which is essentially a forced attempt to understand a dimension of reality in the contemporary context in which it may take place. The perspective is even more relevant given that it was developed and vehiculated by the people for whom the use of the term “theory” is integrated into their habits.

What is a theory? It is a hypothesis on a sequence of reality, which has a good predictive capacity of its behaviour under determined circumstances. Does the theory of mind exercise such a function? In terms of prediction, we can take “yes” for an answer, as evolution directs it this way. The fact that it is part of the world reality thesis confirms its predictive nature (stabilization – generated by the world reality thesis – means prediction). The problem seems to be its highly general level: it applies to a very wide category of things / events. If we look at it from the perspective of its proto-scientific nature, we cannot tell for sure if we can carry out further checks such as falsifiability, but we can surely consider it in terms of a paradigm, even if it is difficult to indicate the time of “revolution”.

From an evolutionary perspective, the essence of the theory of mind is its predictive ability (of other people’s behaviours), since it is a cognitive tool, based on a probabilistic relation. As shown above, the theory of mind, with its proto-scientific nature, develops in an experimental context which includes the possibility of testing hypotheses. The assumption of other people’s mental states helps to explain and predict their behaviour, and the theory of mind is a good tool in this respect; not only do these predictions foretell their behaviours, but they are possible based on their the anticipation of the specific

intentionality they might have. It does not require the demonstration of the existence of other minds, but only the pragmatic verification of the theory.

The predictability of other people's behaviour is ensured by the theory of mind, which is one of the foundations of socialization, because socialization requires the anticipation of some of the mental characteristics shown by the people we come in contact with. The game theory can be an example for how the theory of mind works in cooperation actions, as the theory of mind provides the foundation for any theory of cooperation. In other words, prior to mathematical modelling of the cooperation possibilities, the mechanisms involved in the development of the theory of mind have to be discovered, namely the variables involved in the development of each model.

4. The theory of mind involves a theory of the society

We cannot reasonably predict a person's behaviour without the knowledge / a cognitive relationship with the person's social network. For example, we cannot adequately predict the behaviour of a person who in love in the absence of a minimum anticipation of the behaviour of the person with whom she / he is in love. Predictions in the social environment are based on the knowledge of the social interdependencies specific to each individual. Belonging to a group, a family, a class, etc., provides information which is used as variables for predictions. The entire network of social connections is involved in a theory of mind. Moreover, the face is firstly interpreted (and most often) from the perspective of its belonging to a certain category of faces, being connected ever since the first encounter with the corresponding category of behaviours. If time, context or interest does not make us move beyond appearances, the person will bear the original label within the natural cognitive cataloguing process specific to the survival strategy. All these aspects tend to indicate that the main orientations specific to the theory of mind have a social origin, and that, at the same time, they depend on a broader perspective which we call the theory of society.

The ability to have a theory of mind is considered a social skill, "This ability appears to be a prerequisite for normal social interaction" (Happé, 2003). We are trying to take things further and we suggest that this ability requires, in its turn, a theory of society.

What arguments do we have for a theory of society starting from the theory of mind? The theory of society refers to the ability to anticipate the existence of several minds and the way they cooperate. The theory of society requires operating with a significantly increased number of variables, generated in the process of mentalization. People have a theory of society, just like they have a theory of mind. It involves the capacity to know the social environment and to adapt the behaviour to it. The correlation between the size of the neocortex and the size of the social group, as indicated by Dunbar (Dunbar, 1998), may be the first argument in this respect.

The theory of mind is an essential element for the social existence, ensuring the foundations of mutual understanding. It opens the possibility of inter-subjectivity, which is a cognitive way of being together. We must note that the theory of mind substantiates the existence of subjectivity / intersubjectivity, that is of whole areas of the social life. For example, the law, as a form of regulation of social life, is possible only in the context of accepting the validity of the theory of mind.

The theory of mind is a gateway into the complexity of social relations. Third-degree representations ensure the highest level of integration due to the anticipation and prediction ability that they bring with them. For example, a known person's sorrow entails a whole halo of assumptions on its reasons; we are forced to cover different explanatory variables to predict the possible changes in the behaviour of that person and in our relations with that person.

4.1. *Social mind-formatting for a theory of mind*

The mind is (socially) ready to presume the existence of other minds. Integration into society is a continuous meeting with other minds, in its various forms. The existence of language is the foundation of faith in the existence of other minds, since language is always shared with community members.

The existence of numerous words designating mental states in each language is an important indication of the existence of a social orientation of knowledge in connection with the theory of mind. Even if its usefulness and effectiveness is validated by tradition, asking ourselves about the possibility of an alternative for organizing the knowledge can be a way of building an objective form of approach to this problem.

4.2. *The human face*

The trigger of mentalization is the face, and the key role is inevitably held by the human face. Any human face or any face with similar traits catches attention and calls for a theory of mind. Every pair of eyes looking at us triggers the emergence of a theory of mind, which is able to anticipate within reasonable (reassuring) limits the probability of a danger or (in a later stage) the existence of an opportunity.

In a hierarchy of stimuli which directs attention, the human face ranks first. The orientation of attention in the presence of a face is inevitably modelled by a theory of mind that stands behind it. We have ready-made theories of mind that are standardized for different circumstances, whose presence we tend to indicate through the concept of *mentality*. The *mentality* is primarily a way to think of the existence of other minds, in other words, the theory of mind with which we tend to come to meet them. By considering the effort implied by the classification of different general behaviours depending on the common characteristics of the minds that have generated them, the *mentality* indicates both a way of organizing social knowledge and the orientation of the mind to such an organization, as the mind is ready to meet mentalities. While *mentalization* designates the orientation of the mind to assigning mental processes to entities depending on behaviour or appearance, *mentality* indicates the main trend of cognitive organisation of the entities whose characteristic is the mental, as the predictive ability is perhaps the most important criterion that underlies the "organisation of mental entities".

Nonverbal language (thinking in terms of its reading and organized "around a face") is somehow part of the theory of mind, as it explains our orientation towards understanding gestures depending on the corresponding mental states. The theory of mind implies accepting the possibility that different points of view, other than our personal ones, exist (trying to understand things "in other ways").

5. The theory of mind is the specific form of the world reality thesis

5.1. Thesis of reality

The theory of mind is a *theory* (in the weak sense of the term, understood as suspicion of separation from practice) because it orders the obtained data according to own values; the situation is visible in the way other people are judged – we label their place in the world according to our own coordinates or interests. Our perspective of them and the perspective we assign to them are often oriented by the theoretical model of our position in the world, which is also apparent in the world reality thesis that is specific to us.

The world reality thesis is a tool that mediates trust in a world, as a variable that is essential for the daily life of the individual. Thus, the world reality thesis gives shape to normality, allowing connections that are specific to everyday life. Even if it also includes a number of backup orientations specific to different alarm states, the world reality thesis can be considered a structure belonging to the every life, in other words, an instrument for building the normality; or, normality is the environment of everyday life, par excellence. The world reality thesis has a stabilizing function, which generates a reference context in a multitude of possibilities. It includes a thesis of reality of other minds, which specifically models the theory of mind. Any theory of mind is “a thesis of reality”, as it is part of the world reality thesis.

The thesis of reality of other minds shows variations depending on the field of consciousness in which it takes place. For example, the way in which we perceive the other in the context of intimate life is different from the perspective we have in the context of cooperation during work activities. The world reality thesis can apply to the theory of mind: we do not “issue a theory” every time we meet a person we know, but every time we use the previous theory, perhaps updated in the light of our future interests / experiences / observations.

The theory of mind involves seeing the others on a daily basis in the context of specific mental states (with the simultaneous tendency of reduce them to these states): “*The phrase, theory of mind, emphasizes that everyday psychology involves seeing oneself and others in terms of mental states – the desire, emotion, beliefs, intentions, and other inner experiences that result in and are manifested in human action*”. (Wellman, Cross, Watson, 2001). Mental states are relevant from the perspective of the critical information they provide to our ability of anticipating behaviours. In other words, mental states have to be considered in this case from the perspective of certain variables used for prediction, often resorting to probabilistic approaches. This means that mental states must be understood in the light of the likely behaviours they tend to announce, as they contribute to the construction of reality (as thesis of reality), in other words, to the construction of confidence in people.

5.2. Culture and heredity in the theory of mind. Some speculations

The theory of mind is a survival strategy that can be understood from the perspective of cognitive behaviours. From the perspective of the principle “ontogenesis repeats phylogenesis” we might

consider that theory of mind appeared during the “childhood of humanity”. Could such an approach provide a better understanding of the evolutionist context in which the theory of mind developed?

We must also take into account that culture could make a significant contribution to the differentiation of specific attitudes and abilities of the theory of mind. The analysis of the relationship between the culture and the theory of mind depends on a crucial clarification on the relationship they have with the genetic dimension. To verify such assumptions, a few thought experiments can be drafted: if the theory of mind is a cultural construction, it means that it records significant variations depending on the cultural context, and, for each culture, we can speak of a cultural indicator like the “permeability to a theory mind”. Another variable may be individual competence, from which perspective we can consider that there is a theory of mind, with all the individuals positioned on the same construction frames, or that there are theories of mind involved, in which case we can speak of “qualitative variations” in the construction of a theory of mind.

6. Some conclusions

Our goal is not to analyze the level of adequacy of the theory of mind, translated in the ability to understand, through it, the people living around us, since this adequacy often faces difficulties similar to self-knowledge. From our point of view, the theory of mind should not be considered in the light of its revelations about different people, but from the perspective of its usefulness for own self, as part of the survival strategy. The theory of mind is an important component of the world reality thesis because, it delimitates the latter’s contours in a way that is comprehensible to us, generating a world context for us. The essence of the world reality thesis is its stabilized function, which offers useful (or at least usable) landmarks to the consciousness.

As part of the world reality thesis, the theory of mind is “a tool” that is useful for survival, and, to a certain extent, this is proven by the fact that it still exists at present. The attempt to think of it from the perspective of the accuracy of the knowledge it provides would fail to show the importance of the theory of mind for the human existence. As a cognitive tool, the theory of mind is perfectible, as there are variations in the level of success in different cultures. We can even consider that it contains some orientations specific to the scientific knowledge, which would help to generate certain orientations for the latter (although, since it involves humans, it shares the cognitive difficulties specific to the sciences of this field). If it transformed into a form of scientific knowledge, moving quickly to a much higher degree of suitability, its environmental impact could be a devastating one; it is enough to imagine the effect that the ability of fully knowing the other would have for the schemes specific to the game theory. The theory of mind depends on the two above-mentioned coordinates that are essential for the existence of consciousness: the areas of consciousness and the world reality thesis.

The theory of mind should be considered in terms of the individual’s social integration, in which the individual takes part through the thesis of reality of the society. Even though we find ourselves in a purely speculative area, we believe that a theory of mind is impossible in the absence of a theory of the social context in which it is found. In other words, the theory of society is a prerequisite of the theory of mind, as it provides a context for the development of the latter.

The existence of a theory of mind is an essential argument for the development of the awareness of the existence of another mind or of another self. This ability includes different values depending on several variables, of which the first is age. The theory of mind is not just the orientation towards “reading other minds” but a specific way of relating to the world, a fundamental orientation of consciousness. From this perspective, the theory of mind could be an indicator of consciousness.

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