Knowledge of Other People and Oneself

• “naïve psychology”: Children’s common-sense level of understanding of people.

• Three psychological constructs are at the center of naïve psychology, the ideas that people commonly use to understand human behavior:
  – Desires
  – Beliefs
  – Actions.

What do infants know about people?

• Intentions: the goal or desire to act in a certain way.
• Self: recognizing themselves.
  (self video)

... beyond infancy?

• Theory of mind (2-5 years): the basic understanding of how the mind works and influences behavior.

• A theory of mind includes knowledge of:
  – Perceptions (see, hear, smell, touch, feel)
  – Psychological states (emotions, desires, beliefs)
  – Actions.

Wellman’s model of preschoolers Theory of Mind

understanding the connections between others’ desires and their actions.
### Theory of Mind: False Belief Problems

**False-belief problems** test children’s understanding that other people will act in accord with their own beliefs even if the child knows that those beliefs are incorrect.

(Smarties video)

Some findings in false-belief problems:
- 3-year-olds fail, cross-culturally.
- 3-year-olds more likely to succeed if they collaborate with experimenter to deceive another child
- 4-year-olds succeed

### Information Processing on Theory of Mind

- What processes and representations are necessary to solve the task?
- Theory of mind improves due to the growth of general information-processing skills essential to understanding other people's minds, such as keeping track of conflicting information.

### Socio-cultural Theories on Theory of Mind

- Theory of mind comes from interactions with people.
- Children with older siblings do better in false-belief task.

### Core Knowledge Theories

- Child as product of evolution.
- Focus on **innate knowledge** in areas that have been important to people through human history.
- Specialized learning mechanisms - For example, language acquisition device.
- **Children’s informal theories**: Children actively organize their understanding into informal theories related to important domains like psychology, biology, and physics.
- Change occurs through:
  - Specialized learning mechanisms
  - Actively organizing experiences into theories
Core Knowledge on Theory of Mind

• There is a Theory of Mind Module (TOMM), a brain mechanism devoted to understanding others which matures over the first five years of life.

Children with Autism

• Autism: a syndrome that involves a variety of intellectual and emotional difficulties.
  – Rarely form close relationships.
  – Show greater interest in objects than people.
  – Engage in solitary repetitive behavior.
  – Lack normal language skills, specifically using verbs such as “know” or “think”
  – Most do not engage in pretend play

• Children with autism find tasks that test understanding of the knowledge of other people's minds particularly hard.
• Theories on the nature of autism?