



Understanding the Representational Mind

Josef Perner

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A model of writing in cognitive development, *Understanding the Representational Mind* synthesizes the burgeoning literature on the child's theory of mind to provide an integrated account of children's understanding of representational and mental processes, which is crucial in their acquisition of our commonsense psychology.

Perrier describes experimental work on children's acquisition of a theory of mind and representation, offers a theoretical account of this acquisition, and gives examples of how the increased sophistication in children's theory of mind improves their understanding of social interaction and how, in the case of autistic children, an impairment results in social ineptitude. He analyzes the concepts of representation and metarepresentation as they appear in current discussion in the philosophy of cognitive science and explains how the unfolding of mental representation enables infants to comprehend change over time, engage in pretence, and use representational systems like pictures and language. Perrier goes on to show that around age four children become able to understand the representational nature of pictures and language and to distinguish appearance from reality.

Introducing basic distinctions in philosophy of mind for characterizing the mental, Perrier discusses differences in how commonsense and cognitive psychology view the mind. Tracing the onset of a commonsense psychology in the social and emotional awareness of early infancy, he reveals how the child begins to take a cognitive, representational view of the mind with repercussions for children's episodic memory, self control, and their ability to engage in deception. Perrier concludes by describing the observed developmental changes as a case of theory change And contrasts his thesis with competing proposals.

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