

Critique of Interaction Theory based Concepts of Empathy

Introduction

Whereas in Theory of Mind based approaches empathy bridges the presupposed principal gap between two individuals, Interaction Theory approaches claim different forms of direct connectedness between individuals, which can be used to explore the experience of others in dialogical communication. While in Theory of Mind empathy is meant to produce identical or at least similar experiences of others in a first person by reconstruction or simulation, in Interaction Theory approaches empathy is not restricted to such similar experiences, but includes corresponding feelings of a first person as well, as long as they are directed at the other in a certain way.

In this essay I describe different positions on the principal separation or connectedness of individuals, and Theory of Mind as well as Interaction Theory based approaches on empathy. Following Interaction Theory, I raise the question, what remains of the original meaning of empathy as *feeling in*, meant as an additional source of understanding of the experience of others, that cannot be reached by other ways of interrogation and contact. I discuss that the term empathy in this approach may not be distinguished enough from other kinds of interpersonal contact, as for the term to remain informative. I raise the objection that simulation, used in the right manner, is well entitled to the term empathy.