

Fall 2016 SWIP-Analytic Events

Speaker | Date | Topic

Cláudia Passos

Rio de Janeiro Federal University

Monday, November 7th, 12:00-1:00pm

CUNY, The Graduate Center, NYC. Room 5409.



“Do newborns have a sense of agency?”

I will argue that newborn babies have experiences of agency. I present evidence from developmental psychology involving four types of behaviors (neonatal imitation, actions oriented to goals, actions toward objects, and actions toward people) and argue that this evidence supports a prima facie case that babies have experiences of agency. I then address objections. An important objection is that experiences of agency involve a higher-order attribution of agency generated by a high-level cognitive mechanism, which requires self-consciousness and a self-concept, and that babies lack the capacity for self-consciousness and a self-concept. In the absence of these capacities, babies can be at best aware of certain actions they perform and not of their own agency in those actions. I will argue for an intermediate view on which the experience of agency requires nonconceptual self-representation but not a self-concept. If this view is correct, the lack of conceptual self-consciousness is no obstacle to the claim that babies have agency experience. I also argue that some actions by newborns involve only action-awareness while others involve agency-awareness, and that consequently some but not all actions in babies involve the experience of agency.

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