

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Title: Reading Notes on Alison Gopnik (2010): *The Philosophical Babies* - Chapter 2 Imaginary Companions

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Summary/ Abstract: Alison Gopnik (1955 -) studied philosophy but soon turned to psychology. Jerome Bruner was her doctoral supervised in Oxford (1980). She was on UC Berkeley faculty since 1988.
In 2010 Gopnik turned out a book on child development for the educated reader, *The Philosophical Baby*. I found it educative and enjoyable.
This is her Chapter 2 and quite eye-opening on children's imagining companions.

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Reading Notes on Alison Gopnik (2010): *The Philosophical Babies*

Chapter 2 Imaginary Companions

Chapter 2: Imaginary Companions

Gopnik's Chapter 2 is less substantive than her Chapter 1. She had a good lead in — Plato's rejection of poetry and fiction. (p. 47) Then she ventured in children's pretend play (CPP).

R: (Imagination and Experience)

- (1) It turned out that human sociality explains CPP. Children imitate about social situation and personality to learn about them. In CPP they practice, immerse, (投入, 代入) thus the human psychological world — world of human desires and action (p. 48) by creating imaginary personalities and role. Gopnik had her own experience of Dunzer (p. 49) and Charlie Ravioli (p. 51).
- (2) In a sense it challenged Dewey's notion of experience — human concrete experience and reconstruction as cornerstone of education / philosophy. Living in an imaginary world may be as important as experience.
- (3) Another way to put it, children experience reality and unreality (imaginary world) they create.

- p. 49 Gopnik quoted Marjorie Taylor extensively on the subject.
- p. 50 63% children had bizarre imaginary creatures.
- p.51 Gender difference.
- p. 52 "Children who watched a lot of television were less likely to have imaginary companions, but that was also true of children who read a lot of books."
- p. 53 Children "know" what is "real" and imaginary.
- p. 53 – 54 Paracosms (age 9 – 12).
- p. 55 Children's theory of mind — understanding a psychology world

From two to six, children discover fundamental facts about how their own minds and the minds of others work. They formulate a causal map of the mind. They start to understand the causal connections between desires and beliefs, emotions and actions, just as they start to understand the connections between blickets and blicket detectors, or between food and growth or illness. One of the central tenets of this theory of mind is that people may have different beliefs, perceptions, emotions, and desires and that those differences may lead to different actions. People behave differently because they have different kinds of minds.

(p. 55)

p. 55- 56 Gopnik's experiment of broccoli vs Goldfish crackers.

p. 57 Children understanding →

- (1) Other people have thoughts, desires → action.
- (2) Our understanding can be wrong.
- (3) People think and act differently, (decentering).
- (4) Emergence of empathy.

It also leads to imagination and creation.

p. 59 Lying experiment — age 5 children can effectively lie.

p. 60 Delay gratification and self-control strategy

These children learned some important things about how our minds work. For example, they learned that focusing on what you want makes your desires more irresistible, while thinking about something else makes your desires less intense. They were using their causal knowledge about how minds worked to make them work differently, just as they used their knowledge of other people to deceive them, or used their knowledge of the blicket detector to make the machine work.

(p. 60)

R: (1) Imagination strategy to manage self-control are as old as 5-year-old.

(2) Lots of unconscious thinking going on to lead to conscious thinking and action.

p. 61 – 63 Autism as neuro defect

R: Gopnik didn't give neuro-details.

p. 64 About ½ fiction writers remember imaginary companions but few high-scholars remember.

- p. 70 The Lord of the Rings.
- p. 72 Development of inhibition (against impulse)
- p. 73 Uninhibited exploration of children.