

# Simulation as an epistemic tool between theory and practice: A comparison of the relationship between theory and simulation in science and folk psychology

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## Abstract

Simulation as an epistemic tool between theory and practice:

A Comparison of the Relationship between Theory and Simulation in Science and in Folk Psychology

In this paper I explore the concept of simulation that is employed by proponents of the so-called simulation theory within the debate about the nature and scientific status of folk psychology. According to simulation theory, folk psychology is not a sort of theory that postulates theoretical entities (mental states and processes) and general laws, but a practice whereby we put ourselves into others' shoes and simulate their situation from our own perspective. On the basis of this sort of simulation, we supposedly know how we would act or think or feel, and then expect the same of others. A closer look at the concept of simulation reveals some problems with this view, but also helps to clarify the insight motivating simulation theory. Specifically, I defend the thesis that the analogy to simulations in science shows us how theoretical elements in folk psychology can be complemented by (i.e. not replaced by) the central idea of simulation theory – namely that our own cognitive habits and dispositions provide us with a resource that is distinct from propositional knowledge in folk psychology. I also discuss the idea that our use of simulations during cognitive development enables us to imitate the people around us and thereby to become more similar to them, which in turn makes simulation an increasingly effective epistemic strategy. Insofar as theoretical elements – such as the distinctions, relations, and entities referred to in folk psychological discourse – play a role in imitative learning, they are causally embedded in our cognitive development, so we have good reason to regard them as being among the real causes of our behavior.

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