With regard to (1), **de Gelder** is just wrong in claiming that my view is “not sensitive” to the distinction between having beliefs “about things” and “about people.” Presumably some beliefs “about people” are about them only insofar as they are mere “things” – e.g., the belief that a particular person is visible, weighs more than a hundred pounds, is too large to squeeze through a porthole, and so on. These do not warrant distinguishing from similar beliefs about tables and chairs and other things. The special class of beliefs “about people” are those that are about their beliefs and other mental or intentional attributes. The mark of these is, in my terms, that they are higher-order beliefs, and this distinction is central to my view. As for the other alternative suggested – the idea that only “real” believers can reciprocate the intentional stance – this is discussed and rejected by me in the book, and more explicitly in my response to Premack (1988, p. 522), who made the same proposal in his commentary.

With regard to (2), I agree with de Gelder that I missed a trick in not distinguishing, as (in particular) her research does, between what she calls sympathetic understanding and theoretical understanding. But I see no reason why I cannot incorporate her findings into my theory. Some jazz musicians get by thanks to a hard-won mastery of harmony theory, which permits them to figure out quickly which notes “go” with a particular chord change, while others – often innocent of music theory – just “do it by ear.” The differences in both competence and underlying mechanisms are real and important, but so are the sim-
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ilarities in competence. Autistic children seem to “have a tin ear” for intentional attributions – a fact my theory permits one to explore, though I grant that it not only did not encourage this, but may well have contributed to some researchers’ overlooking this prospect. I like the idea that the therapies de Gelder discusses are rather like formal training in music theory for those who are not born with good ears.

I think de Gelder’s (3) misapprehends the point of my notion-belief distinction, which is really “just for philosophers” and concerns theoretical niceties of reference – such as what to do about beliefs about Santa Claus, or the beliefs of those who don’t know that the Morning Star is the Evening Star. As far as I can see, its wheels turn quite independently of any empirical issues arising from cognitive neuropsychology. That might be a reason for criticizing my distinction – or at least ignoring it, if puzzles in formal semantics are outside one’s concerns.

De Gelder’s commentary points to a particular weakness of the intentional stance which is a necessary concomitant to its strength: Since it abstracts from mechanisms (from the “design stance” point of view), it lumps together those cases where different mechanisms (with different details of competence and incompetence) are responsible for a shared competence. Sometimes this is theoretically desirable; sometimes not. One must keep this fact in mind.

References


