Mental Simulation and the Reification of Beliefs

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Simulation theory has been put forward as an account of our folk understanding of the mind. In this paper, I examine a neglected argument to the effect that there is an essential limitation of simulation itself, which cannot explain a crucial ingredient of our ordinary, folk-psychological conception of beliefs. Even if it is conceded that simulation gives the subject some sense of what happens in the world when someone believes something, the understanding of facts of believing that can be extracted from simulation is incomplete; simulation theory must be augmented with a theory of beliefs as genuine constituents of such facts. Folk psychology reifies beliefs in order to deal with an essential requirement for mastery of the folk-psychological concept of belief. Hopefully, a reflection on the limits of simulation will lead to a better understanding of the role of theory in ordinary belief-ascriptions.