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# Minding Minds

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## Abstract

The theme of this essay is rather simple, though its demonstration is not. It is that humans think reflexively or metamentally because -- and often in the forms in which -- they interpret each other. In this essay 'metamental' means 'about mental' and 'reflexive mind' means 'a mind thinking about its own thoughts.' To think reflexively or metamentally is to think about thoughts deliberately and explicitly, as in thinking that my current thoughts about metamentation are right. Thinking about thoughts requires understanding thoughts as thoughts, as mental structures that represent; it also requires an ability to relate thoughts to other thoughts and to recognize such inter-thought relations. Since metamentation is essential to and uniquely distinctive of human minds, the idea that it originates in interpreting other minds can be encapsulated in the slogan that minds are minded because minds mind minds. This word play translates as: minds evolve into reflexive minds because they mind other minds -- where 'minding other minds' means interacting and bonding with other minds, being concerned or curious about them, representing their relations to the world, manipulating and using these relations for some purpose, and the like. All of this amounts (in my terminology) to interpreting other minds in social contexts of cooperation, communication, education, politics, and so on. It follows that intermental relations among individuals, handled by a distinct competence for interpretation, are essential to the evolution of abilities to represent intramental relations among thoughts, typical of a reflexive mind. I take 'interpretation' to be a convenient, short, and grammatically flexible label for what is known in philosophy as commonsense or folk psychology and in psychology as theory of mind, mindreading, or naive psychology. Interpretation is a cognitive rapport between an interpreter (she, in this book) and a subject (he), whereby she represents his mind-world relations, from the simplest, such as seeing....

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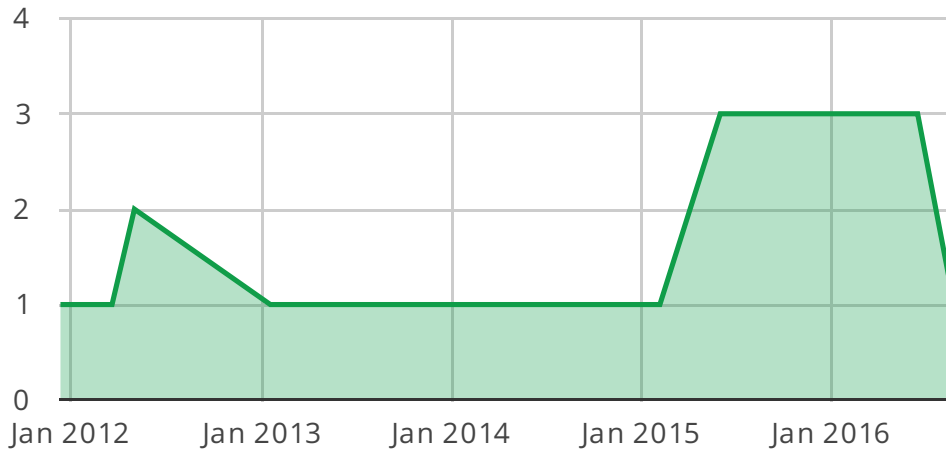
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