

Workshop “Self and Other in Social Neuroscience and Philosophy of Mind”

Popular summary

The CNCC conference and workshop “Self and Other in Philosophy and Neuroscience” brought together leading researchers from psychology, neuroscience and philosophy with the aim of exploring the implications of the discovery of the mirror system in humans and monkeys for a conception of the self. In 1992 neuroscientists working in the University of Parma discovered the existence of neuronal systems in monkeys that are activated both when the monkey acts and when the monkey sees an action performed by another. Since then similar systems of neurons have been found in humans. These neuronal systems have become known as “mirror systems”. Some fascinating and controversial claims have been made about the implications of the discovery of mirror systems. It has been claimed for instance that the mirror system forms the basis for (1) intersubjective experience; (2) imitation; (3) empathy; (4) mindreading (i.e. the “understanding” of other’s and one’s own behaviour); and (5) perhaps even language. This meeting had the objective of critically probing some of these hypotheses. Some of the questions the meeting explored included:

- (i) The similarities and differences between the ways a person is conscious of his own mental states and the ways in which we are conscious of the mental states of others.
- (ii) The nature of action-representations and the role that action-representation might play in our understanding and thinking about other minds.
- (iii) The role of facial expressions in emotion-recognition.
- (iv) The relation between self, brain and body.
- (v) The necessity of theorising in an understanding of intentional action.