Social Cognition Unbound Insights Into Anthropomorphism & Dehumanisation (Waytz, Epley & Cacioppo 2010)

- Why anthropomorphism matters
    - Includes both physical features (e.g. perceiving religious agent in human form) and mental capacities that people believe are human (e.g. capacity to have awareness, intention, emotions)
    - Anthropomorphism is guided by the same process involved when reasoning about behaviour of other humans
    - Perceiving an agent to be human renders it worthy of moral care & consideration e.g. granting legal rights to plants & rivers based on anthropomorphic inferences
- Variability
    - Anthropomorphism is a basic process of inductive inference
        - Primary cognitive determinant of anthropomorphism is the extent to which knowledge of the humans is elicited or activated
        - E.g. the more similar an agent is to a human, the more likely it is to be anthropomorphised
    - Motivational states can also increase the extent of anthropomorphism
        - Basic motivation for social connection in response to lack of social connections with other humans
        - Basic motivation to be a competent social agent by increasing certainty, predictability & control
- Dehumanisation
    - Inverting the theory of anthropomorphism
    - A person who feels socially connected may lack the motivation to actively seek humanlike agents for social connection
    - Being in a position of power increases the tendency to objective or treat as means to one's own end
- Moral consequences
    - Dehumanising others licenses wrongdoing toward them & facilitates aggression, endorsement of violence

To What Extent is the Experience of Empathy Mediated by Shared Neural Circuits (Decety, 2010)

- Introduction
    - Empathy: the ability to appreciate the emotions & feelings of others
    - Sympathy: feelings of concern about the welfare of others
    - Perception action model of empathy: perception of the target's state automatically activates observer's representations of that state
- What are mirror neurons
    - A unique class of cells with sensorimotor properties
    - Functions such as action understanding, imitation & empathy have been attributed to mirror neurons
- Mirror neuron system in humans
    - Suppression in the mu rhythm over sensorimotor cortex during observation
    - Activation in the inferior frontal gyrus during observation & imitation of facial expression of emotions
- Lesion studies
    - Patients who suffer facial paralysis do not show deficits in experience of emotion
    - Impairment of the medial/ cingulate prefrontal cortex is associated with deficits in social interaction & self conscious emotions
    - Frontal impairment hinders perspective taking ability
    - Neuroimaging data is correlational so studies of neurological patients are important to establish causal role
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