

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In the present studies I firstly aim to thoroughly analyze and describe counterfactual imagination – this one peculiar ability among our other mental capacities whereby we consider alternative states of affairs, and which is perceived by some authors as a particular evolutionary precedent and as a potential explanation of the unique human cognitive attributes. The specific scientific background for my research will be the thesis – now vividly discussed in philosophy of mind and in developmental psychology – that our domain-general capacity to create things and ideas in an almost unlimited manner could be initiated and enhanced by children's disposition to pretense. Combining the mentioned analyses I intend to decisively determine if the function of our species-specific manifestations of creativity's cognitive underpinnings could serve counterfactual imagination, which is said to be appearing in human development exactly in pretend plays, therefore, at age of 18 months already. Could the ability to imagine 'WHAT IF' be the indispensable factor of creative mind's architecture? Do children – even the ones at age of less than 2 years who can already behave as if banana were telephones – actually suppose alternative things while pretending? Finally, could make-believe games – as an especial area of counterfactuals – be the authentic *spiritus movens* of our mature expressions of creativity? Those are the guiding questions of my project, which I want to solve in a systematic and interdisciplinary way, coupling together the analyses from philosophy of mind, epistemology and developmental psychology with the studies on creativity phenomenon – so as befits an adept in cognitive science research.

Pivotal to this research will be the presumption that creative thinking is potentially an universal characteristic of human mind, though I initially accept the so-called egalitarian approach to creativity studies. The counterfactual imagination alone I interpret – according to Ruth Byrne (2005; *The rational imagination: how people create alternatives to reality*) – as a general capacity of imagining various alternative states of affairs – so not only as an ability to construct possible scenarios for the past (as did much of researchers before). Moreover, while analyzing the cognitive connections between pretense and creativity I will also take into account – differently than it has been previously done – the so-called exploratory stage of creative process, in which we 'polish up' and refine our initial ideas and artifacts; therefore not only the phase of generating ideas (or divergent thinking). I intend to show that the essence of pretend plays should be rather seen in exploring the possibilities of some alternative (counterfactual) scenarios and gradually developing them, what – on the other hand – is also fundamental for our mature manifestations of creative thinking, in which we aim at generating not only the innovatory solutions, but also – simultaneously – the valuable and reasonable ones.

The present project will purposely enrich the current state of scientific knowledge and philosophical considerations with following elements: [i] a thorough analysis of possible couplings between counterfactual imagination, pretense and creativity, [ii] a systematic description of the eventuality that pretend play is fundamental for developing full-grained creative skills in humans, [iii] an attempt to frame the cognitive origins of human species-specific manifestations of creativity. My research indirectly aims also at contributing to a better understading of the nature of human creativity and imagination. Moreover, future publication of the results of these studies would popularize in Poland the contemporary studies on pretend play and open there the scientific and popular science debate on the topic of my interest.