

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Title: Reading Notes on Alison Gopnik (2010): *The Philosophical Babies* - Chapter 7: Learning to Love (p.179 - 201)

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Summary/ Abstract: These are reading notes on Gopnik's *The Philosophical Babies*: Chapter 7: Learning to Love (p.179 - 201)

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**Reading Notes on Alison Gopnik (2010): *The Philosophical Babies*
Chapter 7: Learning to Love (p.179 - 201)**

This chapter is shorter and contains less new research. Gopnik defines love in terms of John Bowlby's attachment. Starting point: "The craving for protection and nurturance is innate and universal" (p.180).

She puts forth four types (R: probably we can find the same in textbook, but she wrote cogently):

Secure babies – cf. US

Avoidant babies – cf. Germany

Anxious babies – cf. Japan

Disorganized babies

They are causal maps of care. Secure babies conclude that caregivers will quickly make them feel better. Avoidant babies think that expressing distress will only cause more misery. Anxious babies are unsure that comfort will be effective.

p.184 Susan Johnson's experiment on babies' preference of attachment.

"These babies, some only 12 months old, had already learned to make predictions above love".

quickly die. But when it comes to love, children have to draw conclusions based on a very small and very variable sample, the mothers and fathers, siblings, grandparents, and babysitters who care for them.

R: It is learning the characters of parents and caregivers.

p.186 Adults on love, reflecting child-rearing practices.

Like babies, some adults seem to confidently, if not always accurately, believe that they have been loved in the past and will be loved in the future. Others tend to avoid even thinking about love past and future. They say, for example, that they just can't remember much about how their parents treated them, and in times of romantic stress they turn to computers and spreadsheets. Still others fear that they will always need love more than they will receive it, that their love is far more likely to be rejected than returned. In the

p.187 Serena Chen's research.

R: Parents are significant others and children project that image in later life (preference, etc.)

Interesting reflection:

Wife: "He really does think I'm his mom" (p.187)

Mother: "Deep down inside I really am my mom" (p.188)

p.188 R: Overcoming past experience and growing.

There are some people who say they had very unhappy relationships with their parents but recounted those experiences in a thoughtful, organized way. They could tell a coherent story about how those early experiences had led to their present state. One of the advantages of a coherent causal picture of the world is that it allows you to entertain counterfactuals—to imagine ways that the world might be different. This was what had happened for these adults: they understood how their own parents had behaved and could imagine ways that they might act differently themselves. Those people, hearteningly, were more likely to have secure relationships with their own children. Other people said perfunctorily that they had been loved but couldn't remember anything more or give any details. Those parents were less likely to have secure children.

child's ideas about love. A newly discovered adoptive parent or a dedicated teacher or a friend's welcoming family can transform an insecure baby. On the other hand, the unavoidable loss of love that comes when parents grow sick or die or divorce can make a once-secure baby more reluctant to believe in love.

p.190 Summary of the computer paradigm.

Psychology has always been influenced by technological metaphors, and in cognitive science and neuroscience the mind appears to be more like a computer than an engine. Our brains are designed to arrive at an accurate picture of the world, and to use that accurate picture to act on the world effectively, at least overall and in the long run. The same computational and neurological

p.195 Life's weather (early experience affects later life).

p.196-9 Gopnik's view of life and children.

Parents often feel a kind of existential anxiety as they watch their children grow up—as we say, it goes by so fast. We watch that infinitely flexible, contingent, malleable future swiftly harden into the irretrievable, unchangeable past. Japanese poets have a phrase, *mono no aware*, for the bittersweetness inherent in ephemeral beauty—a falling blossom or a leaf in the wind. Children are a great source of *mono no aware*.

certainly do, lie ahead, but an intrinsic immunity. Change and transience are at the heart of the human condition. But as parents we can at least give our children a happy childhood, a gift that is as certain, as unchanging, as rock solid, as any human good.