

Dissertation Abstract

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While most philosophers agree that the concept of intentional action plays an important role in our folk psychology, there is still widespread disagreement about the precise nature of this role. Because there has been a dearth of empirical data about folk ascriptions of intentional action, the conceptual analyses of intentionality developed by philosophers have been mostly speculative. Lately, however, philosophers and psychologists have made a concerted effort to fill in this empirical lacuna. In my dissertation, I discuss the various ways that this research sheds new light on problems in action theory, moral philosophy, and the philosophy of law. In doing so, I examine some of the meta-philosophical issues surrounding the proper relationship between conceptual analysis—traditionally conceived—and the gathering data about folk concepts. By my lights, while these data are unlikely to *solve* any philosophical problems, a close examination of the relevant evidence about folk concepts may be a necessary first step towards finding solutions to problems in a variety of areas of philosophy.

In Part I, I set the stage with a discussion of some of the problems traditionally associated with the concept of intentional action. In this first section, my main goal is to survey the relevant literature from action theory in order to give the reader a perspicuous view of the debates that have shaped the philosophical landscape. Having laid out some of the salient problems, I turn my attention in Part II to some recent empirical research on the folk concept of intentional action and discuss the relevance of this research to the issues discussed in Part I. In Part III, I flesh out the implications of the aforementioned data on the folk concept of intentional action and on moral psychology—especially blame attribution—for the problem of jury partiality. Finally, in Part IV, I compare and contrast the folk concepts of intention and intentional action with their legal counterparts. My goal in this section is to determine the extent to which these concepts diverge—a problem that is particularly pressing given that jurors are often asked to judge whether defendants acted intentionally, purposely, knowingly, etc. Minimally, the discussion of juror partiality in Part III shows that the biasing effect of moral considerations further complicates our attempt to ascertain the proper role that ascriptions of intentional action should play in criminal proceedings.

