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The Vernacular Concept of Innateness

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Abstract

The proposal that the concept of innateness expresses a ‘folk biological’ theory of the ‘inner natures’ of organisms was tested by examining the response of biologically naive participants to a series of realistic scenarios concerning the development of birdsong. Our results explain the intuitive appeal of existing philosophical analyses of the innateness concept. They simultaneously explain why these analyses are subject to compelling counterexamples. We argue that this explanation undermines the appeal of these analyses, whether understood as analyses of the vernacular concept or as explications of that concept for the purposes of science.

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