Folk Psychological Narratives

The Sociocultural Basis of Understanding Reasons

Daniel D. Hutto

Preface

The Cognitive Revolution . . . was intended to bring "mind" back into the human sciences after a long cold winter of objectivism. . . . Some critics, perhaps unkindly, argue that the new cognitive science, the child of the revolution, has gained its technical advantages at the price of de-humanising the very concept of mind it had sought to re-establish in psychology, and that it has thereby estranged much of psychology from the other human sciences and the humanities.

—Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*

Folk psychology is a philosopher's label for the practice of making sense of intentional actions, minimally, by appeal to an agent's motivating beliefs and desires.[1] It is the sort of thing one does, for example, when digesting Jane's explanation of her late arrival at a meeting because she *mistakenly thought* it was being held in a different room. Taking our friend at her word (i.e., if we assume that she had genuinely *wanted* to attend the meeting on time), we will blame the content of her beliefs for the confusion on this occasion. This is something we do, and have the standing capacity to do, unthinkingly. We rely on it constantly.

Established wisdom has it that this workaday ability is something we inherited from our ancient ancestors. Proponents of the hotly debated dominant offerings for understanding folk psychology—known as *theory theory* and *simulation theory*—typically hold that our ancient cognitive endowment takes one of three forms. It is (1) a very special kind of sub-personal mechanism that literally contains the relevant mentalistic theory, (2) a basic starter theory that is modified by theory-formation mechanisms that fashion a mature theory of mind during ontogeny, or (3) a series of subpersonal mindreading mechanisms that enable direct manipulation of the relevant mental states themselves. To accept any of these views (or some hybrid combination of them) is to accept that our folk psychological abilities are essentially (or at least in important respects) a kind of biological inheritance.

That some such account must be true is encouraged by the apparent fact that, after a fairly stable pattern of staged development—though one that can be subject to specific delays—all normal human children of all cultures come to understand actions in terms of reasons using the same basic mentalistic framework and its conceptual ingredients. In other words, many believe that the human capacity to use mature folk psychology is a universal trait of our species. An important exception is those individuals who have autism. They exhibit a distinctive set of impairments—impairments that, inter alia, severely restrict their capacity to develop a folk psychological understanding, to the extent that they are able to do so at all. These considerations fuel the idea that such abilities must be written into the very fabric of our being: a gift from our evolutionary ancestors.

Against this idea, this book provides an elaborate defence of the claim that our capacity to understand intentional actions in terms of reasons has a decidedly sociocultural basis. It advances and explicates the hypothesis that children only come by the requisite framework for such understanding and master its practical application by being exposed to and engaging in a distinctive kind of narrative practice. I call this the Narrative Practice Hypothesis (NPH). Its core claim is that direct encounters with stories about persons who act for reasons—those supplied in interactive contexts by responsive caregivers—is the normal route through which children become familiar with both (1) the basic structure of folk psychology and (2) the norm-governed possibilities for wielding it in practice, thus learning both how and when to use it.

The overarching aim of this book is to introduce this possibility into the mix, thus breaking some new ground. My purpose is to make as strong case as is possible for the underexamined idea that our interpretative abilities may well be socioculturally grounded. This requires not only spelling out the positive contours of the NPH, which is the task of chapter 2, but also challenging certain widely held assumptions that might otherwise make it look like a less-than-serious contender for explaining the basis and origin of our mature folk psychological abilities. Consequently, apart from extolling the virtues of the NPH, a fair bit of space is given over to putting its dominant rivals under appropriate pressure. I make no apologies for this since overturning assumptions that prevent us from thinking clearly about important issues is a legitimate, indeed unavoidable, philosophical activity.

Equally, however, I want to engender a positive understanding of our capacities and practices. It helps to be clear about the status of the NPH in this regard. As I said, it marks out a section of, as yet, underexplored

conceptual space. It is inspired by the fact that certain types of narratives have precisely the right form and content to introduce children to folk psychology and explain their understanding of it over time. As a philosopher I do not see it as my job to fashion and supply straightforward empirical hypotheses. I regard the NPH not so much as conjecture but as a product of a kind of observational philosophy. Like its counterpart observational comedy, which can be funny or unfunny, this kind of philosophy too can be illuminating or unilluminating. My hope is, obviously, that the NPH is the former.

That said, the NPH has interesting empirical implications that deserve investigation. But marshaling such data and putting it to the full test (that is, by attempting to falsify the proposal) is not the purpose of this book. My aim is rather to prepare the ground for its acceptance mainly by revealing the limitations and bankruptcy of its rivals and discrediting certain popular suppositions that might stand in the way of taking it seriously.

For example, in chapter 1, I set the stage for the appearance of the NPH by challenging the all-too-common assumption that the primary function of folk psychology is to enable us to carry off third-person predictions of the behaviors of others by adopting a speculative stance. Undeniably, the actions of others sometimes cry out for explanation, but in all such cases, when making sense of these, what we are seeking is a narrative that fills in or fleshes out the relevant details of that person's story. This is the very heart and soul of folk psychological understanding. Hence, I call the narratives that do this kind of work *folk psychological narratives*. The practice of supplying or constructing them *just is* that of explicating and explaining action in terms of reasons. Folk psychology is, by my lights, in essence, a distinctive kind of narrative practice.

The crucial point is that folk psychological narratives come in both third-person and second-person varieties. Moreover, the success or otherwise of such explanations depends, in the main, on who is doing the telling—that is, who produces the account. Although we often attempt to generate such accounts on behalf of others "at a remove," by calling on simulative or theoretical heuristics, the fact is that even when this speculative activity is well supported it is quite unlikely to succeed in hitting on the right explanation. The likelihood of success in such endeavors is more or less inversely proportional to need.

In contrast, although not foolproof, by far the best and most reliable means of obtaining a true understanding of why another acted is to get the relevant story directly from the horse's mouth. The activity is familiar enough. Such accounts are typically delivered—indeed, fashioned—in the

course of ordinary dialogue and conversation. It is because of this that they are usually sensitive to a questioner's precise explanatory needs and requirements. The nature of such engagements is complex and deserves greater attention than it has received to date, but that too is not my focus in this work. A primary ambition of the first chapter is to draw attention to the banal truism that second-person deliveries of these folk psychological narratives are not only commonplace but they also do much of the heavy lifting in enabling us to make sense of the actions of others in daily life—that is, when there is a genuine need to do so.

After supplying reasons for thinking that our sophisticated folk psychological understanding is essentially narrative, I introduce the NPH in chapter 2. The basic claim is a developmental one: that we acquire our capacity to understand intentional actions using a framework incorporating the central propositional attitudes of belief and desire through participating in a unique kind of narrative practice as children—that of engaging with stories about protagonists who act for reasons. It is through scaffolded encounters with stories of the appropriate kind that children learn how the core propositional attitudes behave with respect to one another and other standard mental partners.

Serving as exemplars and complex objects of joint attention, these folk psychological narratives familiarize children with the normal settings and standard consequences of taking specific actions. But deriving an understanding of folk psychology from these is nothing like learning a rigid set of rules about what rational agents tend to do in various circumstances. Learning how to deploy the framework of everyday psychology requires the development of a very special and flexible kind of skill, one that can only be acquired by seeing reasons in action against a rich backdrop of possibilities. Folk psychological narratives provide precisely the right sort of training set for this. For in such stories the core mentalistic framework—consisting of the rules for the interaction of the various attitudes—remains constant. However, other important features vary. Thus children learn the important differences that the content of the attitudes make to understanding action, as well as the contributions made by a person's character, history, and larger projects. In this way, encounters with stories of the appropriate kind foster an understanding of the subtleties and nuances needed for making sense of intentional actions in terms of a person's reasons. By repeated exposure to such narratives, children become familiar with both the forms and norms of folk psychology.

This is not a passive process. Children must be guided through it by caregivers. Moreover, to reap the benefits just described, they must call on a range of basic interpersonal skills and exercise their imaginations in

relevant ways. And even this is not enough. They must also have a prior and independent (even if somewhat tentative) grasp of the core propositional attitudes. There is good evidence that younger children have just this kind of practical understanding and this raft of abilities. But having all this does not presuppose or constitute having "theory of mind" or any equivalent mindreading capacity.

Establishing all of this is the burden of chapters 3 to 7. Achieving it requires a rather long detour in which prenarrative, and indeed, prelinguistic modes of social understanding and response are examined and explicated. I begin this in chapter 3, by supplying reasons for thinking that nonverbal responding, quite generally, only involves the having of intentional—but not propositional—attitudes. Distinguishing these two types of attitudes is absolutely vital, but this is not often done in the existing literature. I therefore provide a detailed account of intentional attitudes in terms of a thoroughly noncognitivist, nonrepresentationalist understanding intentionality—one that regards embodied, enactive modes of responding as basic and sees symbolic thinking as the preserve of those beings that have appropriately mastered certain sophisticated linguistic constructions and practices. This matters because only those that have achieved the latter are in a position to have and to understand bona fide propositional attitudes.

With respect to those in the former class, which includes nonverbal animals and preverbal infants, I argue that they are intentionally directed at aspects of their environment in ways that neither involve nor implicate truth-conditional content. As such, basic intentionality is neither to be modeled in semantic terms nor understood as a property of content-bearing mental states or representations.

This position is motivated by a rejection of the standard naturalized theories of content on offer—a rejection prompted by an exposé of misguided thinking about the nature of informational content and how it is (allegedly) acquired. Thus in what may appear to be a deflationary maneuver I argue that the nature of basic intentional directedness is best understood in biosemiotic terms. (Crudely, biosemiotics is what you get when you subtract the semantics from biosemantics.) In essence, accordingly, although organisms must be informationally sensitive to specific worldly offerings, this sensitivity does not involve the acquisition or manipulation of encoded informational content as, for example, modularist accounts of perception would have it.

Chapter 4 takes this idea a step further, showing that a minimalist understanding of nonverbal thinking—that is, one that does not posit the existence of propositional attitudes but only intentional attitudes—can

account for even the most sophisticated of nonlinguistic activities. This chapter therefore sets out to meet a recent challenge laid down by Bermúdez. Ultimately, the minimalist proposal is put to the test by giving due consideration to what would have been required in order to fuel the kind of consequent-sensitive instrumental thinking exhibited by our hominid forebearers—that is, protological reasoning capacities of the sort that they would have needed in order to fashion the kinds of complex tools that populated the middle Palaeolithic. I argue that imaginatively extended but nevertheless perceptually based modes of responding would have sufficed for this and that despite their sophistication, these feats of our ancient ancestors do not imply that they were capable of propositional thinking.

With all this in hand, I return in chapter 6 to the question of how best to understand our primary nonverbal interactions. It is proposed that such engagements, as typified by emotional interactions, involve a special kind of sensitivity and responsiveness to one another's intentional attitudes, as expressed in bodily ways. This involves neither the manipulation of propositional attitudes nor any understanding of them. It is not rightly characterized as a form of "mind" or even "body" reading. Embodied responsiveness of this kind, which is in some cases extended by imitative and imaginative abilities, better explains what fuels our unprincipled interpersonal engagements than does the postulation of mindreading abilities involving propositional attitudes. This verdict applies, I argue, even to rudimentary forms of nonverbal joint attention.

Chapter 5 builds on this conclusion and rejects the proposal that, at root, cognition depends on having an in-built, symbolic "language of thought." Against this, I defend the idea that the only true language of propositional thought is natural language. Concomitantly, possessing genuine content-involving propositional attitudes requires mastery of complex linguistic forms and practices.

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Chapter 7 is devoted to saying how, in the human case, our natural responsiveness to other minds develops in stages as we master language. This process, which depends on children exercising their abilities in specific kinds of socially scaffolded activities, provides them with their first, tentative practical grasp of desires and beliefs as propositional attitudes. In this way children come into possession of all the pieces needed for playing the understanding-action-in-terms-of-reasons game before they can actually play it. What they are missing in their early years, prior to the relevant narrative encounters, is not the components needed to play this game: they lack knowledge of the basic rules for doing so.

This brings the reader full circle. For in order to continue the story, something like the NPH is needed. Therefore what might at first appear to be an abrupt and unexpected departure into discussions about the root nature of intentionality and basic social responsiveness for several chapters turns out to have great tactical importance.

This labor is worthwhile for another reason since it deals with the likely background worry that the NPH may be circular. We can call this the "narrative competency objection." At its core is the thought that if children are only able to acquire folk psychological skills by being exposed to "stories involving characters who act for reasons," then this must surely presuppose the very capacity that participating in such narrative practices is meant to explain—that is, "theory of mind" abilities. After all, it is not as if the narrative competence in question is of a *general* variety. Thus it would seem that in order to engage fruitfully with such stories at all, children must already have precisely the sort of understanding that such encounters are conjectured to engender. I deny this: a basic competency with the relevant narratives rests on having a range of abilities, including sophisticated imaginative and cocognitive abilities and a practical grasp of the attitudes, but, even taken together, these do not add up to having a "theory of mind." Young children come to the table with some basic practical knowledge and a range of intersubjective capacities and skills that fall just short of genuine folk psychological understanding.

After introducing the NPH and demonstrating its logical and empirical adequacy, I put its prominent rivals to the test and find them wanting. In chapters 8 and 9, I critically examine the existing alternatives, which can be divided into two main types. On the one hand, there are theories that posit the existence of native mindreading capacities or devices. (These come in both theory theory (TT) or simulation theory (ST) varieties.) On the other hand, there is the hypothesis that each child constructs his or her mentalistic theory by engaging in scientific activity during ontogeny. On close scrutiny it turns out that none of these proposals has the credible resources for explaining the basis of our folk psychological abilities since none of them can account for our acquisition of the concept of belief. This being the case they all fail a fundamental test of adequacy. Worse still, in lacking such an account, they are unable to explain the source or basis of the mature folk psychological *structure*. Certainly, they have nothing to offer on this front that is remotely as satisfying as the explanation espoused by the NPH. If my arguments in these chapters prove sound, they provide compelling abductive grounds for favoring the latter over its current competitors.

To remove other potential barriers to the acceptance of the NPH, in chapter 10, I consider and discredit three standard but ill-considered motivating considerations that are often cited as reasons for believing that folk psychology must be some kind of ancient endowment rather than a late-developing socioculturally acquired skill. These are that (1) the normal learning environments of children are too impoverished to explain how they could possibly acquire their folk psychological skills and understanding, (2) folk psychology appears to be universal in our species (and hence must be built in), and (3) the best explanation of the failure of certain autistic individuals on "false-belief" tasks is that they suffer from "mindblindness" brought on by malfunctions in biologically inherited metarepresentational mechanisms.

After showing that these claims are either straightforwardly false or harmless (once properly modified), I turn to one final challenge. In the final two chapters, I say something about what our true phylogenetic inheritance—our ancient endowment—might really amount to. In reviewing the evidence from primatology and cognitive archaeology, I cast serious doubt on the familiar claim that our immediate ancestors must have had mature "theory of mind" abilities—a view that is given credence by the popular but mistaken thought that their remarkable technical and social achievements would have been impossible otherwise.

Recent evidence strongly suggests that our closest living cousins, the chimpanzees, lack metarepresentational mindreading abilities. Despite this, they are capable of entering into quite sophisticated intersubjective engagements with one another. As a consequence, some researchers have postulated that these great apes must have "theory of behavior," a "weak" theory of mind, or unprincipled "mindreading" abilities. I doubt that any of these conjectures are true. If I am right, chimpanzees are not making contentful predictions or explanations of any kind.

Whether or not one accepts this, the limits of chimpanzee intersubjective abilities are now well established, and they fall a long way short of full-fledged "theory of mind" abilities. Hence, those abilities and any putative mechanisms that might sponsor them must have been selected for at a later point in human prehistory—at some time during the Pleistocene, when the hominids reigned.

Yet, despite its popularity, this hypothesis turns out to be not very plausible when reviewed closely in light of the evidence of cognitive archaeology. A much more promising and parsimonious explanation of the relevant capacities of our hominid forerunners is that they had powerful mimetic abilities; these best account for their unique forms of inter-

personal engagement, including those norm-engendering activities that paved the way for the development of language.

This is good news for my account, for if true, not only does this Mimetic Ability Hypothesis (MAH) show that there is simply no *need* to postulate ancient mindreading abilities, it also utterly defuses the "narrative competency" objection mentioned earlier. It provides an alternative and credible explanation of how and why modern humans come equipped with the basic abilities needed for engaging with and appreciating folk psychological narratives.

In all, there is good reason to think that our true biological endowment does not include native mindreading mechanisms of any "folk psychological" variety. We have little choice but to look to sociocultural practices in order to understand how we acquire our sophisticated skills in making sense of the intentional actions of persons—actions that are performed for reasons of their own. As chapter 12 emphasizes, the development of this sort of understanding would have been late-emerging in our prehistory and intersubjectively grounded in certain complex and very public narrative practices.

1 The Limits of Spectatorial Folk Psychology

It is a datum that psychologically normal, adult humans often act for reasons. Equally, they often make sense of intentional actions by seeking the reasons motivating such performances.[1] I took off to London for a break because I was at my wit's end. She canceled her trip because she no longer loved him. The giving and receiving of reasons is a prominent and distinctive aspect of much familiar social commerce. The context in which we do this, the form this takes, and how we come by this ability are the central topics of this book.

In speaking of "reasons" I mean what philosophers have traditionally understood to be the products of discrete episodes of means-end practical reasoning—that is, intentions to act. These constitute what might be called a person's "motivating" reasons.[2] When speaking of reasons in this sense philosophers typically focus on beliefs and desires (sometimes exclusively) and their special properties, the former being cognitive attitudes that aim at truly representing how things stand with the world and the latter being motivational attitudes that specify goals for action. When appropriately united these are held responsible for the formation of intentions.

When conjoined in the right way, in virtue of their contents, beliefs and desires are minimally what is required in order to motivate us to act for a reason. In the right combination these attitudes are the essential components of reasons—and they can be appropriately tied together because they are not just psychological attitudes; they are *propositional* attitudes. As such, they exhibit a special kind of intentionality—a directness or aboutness toward possible situations. In having such attitudes we are psychologically related in special ways to propositional contents: "X believes that P" and "X desires that Q," where P and Q are propositions with intelligible semantic content, such as "The boys get home at 4:00 p.m.," "Ashridge is a fine place for a picnic," "There are only forty pounds left in my current account," and so forth. One can adopt beliefs and desires about any of

these situations (and other propositional attitudes, too, such as fear, hope, and so on). It is debatable whether desires must always take a propositional complement; some hold that we can have desires for intentional objects—such as desiring a Ming vase or our neighbor's singing ability—and not just situations. But with respect to beliefs—which aim at truths—this is not an option. One can only believe propositions, not objects.

We need not decide if it is possible that the intentional objects of desires can be nonpropositional. It is enough to note that when desires are partnered with beliefs (thus constituting reasons), the content of such desires must be of a kind that permits them to enter into appropriate logical relations with the content of believed propositions. This requires that they have appropriate logical form and content. Without this the attitudes would not be able to bind together to form reasons, for this requires that their constitutive contents overlap at significant points—that is, they must be linked in virtue of having certain contentful components in common.

But is it always true that if an action is executed for a reason then it must be possible to explicate it, minimally, by appeal to a particular belief/desire pairing? This thought is deeply rooted and seldom challenged in Anglophone philosophy of action.[3] Some, however, argue that insisting on the rule that there can be no reason for acting without motivating beliefs and desires fails to accommodate our ordinary understanding of what it is to act for a reason, which includes a much wider class of psychological motivations (see Goldie 2007; Ratcliffe 2007a, 2007b). For example, we often explain action by appeal to other kinds of relevant propositional attitudes (hopes, fears, and so on) and other more basic kinds of psychological attitudes, such as perceptions and emotions. And we do this in more or less refined ways. More than this, to fully come to terms with the reason why someone acted, we frequently need to know about the person's character, situation, and history—in short, we need to know the unique details of his or her "story." This is true and important, and I will have more to say about all of this in the next chapter, but it should not obscure the fact that at least some of our actions are performed for reasons in the restricted sense (understood as belief/desire pairings) and that our capacity to make sense of intentional actions in such terms is commonplace.

Thus even if we think that folk psychology includes more than the practice of making sense of actions in terms of beliefs and desires, it should at least include this ability as well.[4] To keep things straight, when I talk of folk psychology I am concerned with the practice of predicting, explaining, and explicating intentional actions by appeal to reasons in a way that must include understanding a person's motivating reasons as restrictively

defined above. *Folk psychology* stricto sensu—the target phenomenon of interest here—incorporates the practice of making sense of a person's actions using belief/desire propositional attitude psychology.[5]

Defining folk psychology in this way distinguishes it from a much looser rendering equating it to the way or ways—whatever these turn out to be—that social beings manage to conduct their interpersonal relations.[6] As a working definition of folk psychology, the latter is far too encompassing; indeed nothing concrete could answer to it (see Morton 2007). To define commonsense psychology in this way would make it ubiquitous. Yet even with the tighter definition in mind, many of its so-called friends have over-stated and misunderstood its role in social cognition; typically they see it as more basic and as far more pervasive than it actually is. Unless we assume that folk psychology is deployed tacitly without our noticing—and we should not (for reasons I supply in subsequent chapters)—it is surely not fundamental to social engagements, not even exclusively human ones.

We have many other, more basic means of coordinating with one another in our social interactions. Our primary modes of interpersonal engagement are not driven by mentalistic predictions or explanations, rather they are characterized by the possession of embodied expectations. Such expectations are not intellectual products; arguably they are not the outcomes of the manipulation of representations by inferential operations at all—but, certainly, they do not involve the manipulation or representation of propositional attitudes. Like most creatures, our basic dealings with others are more visceral; we get by with scriptlike patterns of recognition-response, some of which can be quite sophisticated and complex. Typically, these are initiated and guided by indexical signs that take the form of the expressive behavior of others. However, in some creatures anticipatory responding operates in a more off-line way, thanks to the added resources of their recreative imaginations. As I will argue in later chapters, in all such cases well-calibrated social activity only involves a capacity to selectively respond to end-directed intentional attitudes that are revealed in the expressions of others; these expressive attitudes are unlike those of the propositional variety. For this reason, among others, these primary modes of interacting with others should not be classified as a species of mindreading. In "normal" contexts, such methods are a highly effective—indeed, arguably the best—means of navigating social dynamics.

It is therefore false to say that without folk psychology we would be bereft of any reliable means of interacting with others. Nor do we call on it that often. Many of our routine encounters with others take place in situations in which the social roles and rules are well established, so much

so that unless we behave in a deviant manner we typically have no need to understand one another by means of the belief/desire schema. More often than not we neither predict nor seek to explain the actions of others in terms of their unique beliefs and desires at all.

That said, sometimes the actions of others cry out for explanation—sometimes they violate norms (or appear to do so) in ways that we can only make sense of by understanding them in a wider context, by acquiring the narrative that fills in or fleshes out the particular details of that person's story. Any account that has as its subject matter the reason why a person acted on a particular occasion (in line with the inclusive criterion detailed above) I will call a *folk psychological narrative*. The practice of supplying such narratives *just is* that of explicating and explaining action in terms of reasons. Folk psychology is thus, in essence, a distinctive kind of narrative practice.

As such, it is a unique specialty of linguistically competent human beings (*Homo sapiens sapiens*), which is not to say that all humans are capable of using it, or that they in fact do so. There are notable exceptions, the most prominent being the class of persons with extreme autism. And, if I am right in thinking that the basis for this skill is sociocultural, we cannot be sure that folk psychology (stricto sensu) is deployed in every contemporary human society. What is clear, going by the available evidence, is that neither our closest living cousins—the chimpanzees—use it, nor did our Pleistocene ancestors, as I will argue.

For several decades the dominant view has been that folk psychology is either a kind of low-level theory about the propositional attitudes or a simulative ability involving their direct manipulation (today many hold it to be a mix of both). That is, many imagine it to be, first, a specialized theory, understood as a systematically organized body of knowledge detailing the links between typical perceptual inputs, intentional states, and behaviors; second, procedures of simulative imagining that directly manipulate the relevant intentional states themselves, without using any principles about such states (for example, this might be achieved by using "shared circuits" or by running practical reasoning and other subpersonal mechanisms off-line); or third, some hybrid combination of these processes. Theorists are divided on the question of whether these heuristics are deployed tacitly or explicitly.

In the place of these conjectures I defend the idea that folk psychology is a unique kind of narrative practice and that viewing it as such is the best way to account for its ultimate origins and everyday applications. The Narrative Practice Hypothesis (NPH) claims that the normal route through

which children become familiar with the core structure of folk psychology and the norm-governed possibilities for its practical application is through direct encounters with stories about people who act for reasons. The topic of childhood acquisition is the focus of the next chapter; in this one I provide reasons for thinking that neither theory nor simulation could be the true basis of our everyday folk psychological understanding. To clarify, I do not deny that these heuristics often come into play when we speculate about why another may have acted or how they might act. What I reject is the thought that theory and simulation are ultimately responsible for folk psychological understanding or that they drive the practice; they are simply supplementary methods that we are sometimes forced to call on when we attempt to construct, understand, or ascribe folk psychological narratives. Theory and simulation only come into play in those cases in which we lack direct and reliable access to the narratives of others.

It is crucially important to recognize that folk psychological narratives come in both third-person and second-person varieties. This matters since the success or otherwise of reason explanations depends mainly on who is doing the telling—that is, on who produces the account. Although we often attempt to generate such accounts on behalf of others, even when this speculative activity is well supported—say, by simulative or theoretical heuristics—it is quite unlikely that such attempts will succeed in hitting on the "right" explanation.

To add appropriate force to these observations, the rest of this chapter is devoted to making the case for rejecting the widely held assumption that the *primary* business of folk psychology is to provide third-person predictions and explanations.[7]

The Primacy of Second-Person Applications

It is almost universally assumed that the main business of commonsense psychology is to provide generally reliable predictions and explanations of the actions of others. The main focus for the past two decades has been to decide whether these feats are achieved by the deployment of some kind of theory of mind or by a process of simulative imagining. Yet, in the rush to enter into the debate about how folk psychology is carried off, philosophers and psychologists have tended to make a number of questionable assumptions about the context in which we regularly deploy it. Chief among these is that we are normally at a theoretical remove from others. The attitude we adopt toward others is thus on a par with that deployed when understanding "foreign bodies" quite generally: we ascribe causally

efficacious inner "mental states" to them for the purpose of prediction, explanation, and control. As a consequence, this fosters the idea that our initial stance with respect to others is essentially estranged. Bogdan (1997, 104) conveniently labels this the "spectatorial view of interpretation," because it portrays "the subject as a remote object of observation and prediction."

This idea has no legitimacy when it comes to understanding how we interactively engage with others in basic encounters as we traverse the landscape of action. I say more about this in later chapters. But we also have reason to doubt that adopting a detached stance is the primary way we understand intentional actions performed for reasons. We must reconsider the received views about the kind of context in which folk psychology normally operates, taking seriously the idea that our starting point is second-personal. In abandoning the idea that contexts in which we make sense of others are, at root, spectatorial, we can recast and reorient our thinking about the nature of our everyday social expectations and about how folk psychological explanations are ordinarily achieved. It turns out that explaining and predicting actions from a third-person stance is not only late developing, it is relatively infrequent and far less reliable than our normal intersubjective means of coming to understand others through dialogue and conversation.

Expectations and Explanations in Second-Person Contexts

I advance what might at first seem a radical claim—that even in understanding the reasons for which others act, including adults, we often do not make any attribution of beliefs and desires at all. However, my reason for thinking this is the case is utterly banal: we simply do not need to make such ascriptions in most everyday, second-person contexts. An ordinary example from adult life will hopefully illustrate this.

Imagine that you see a man approaching the closed door of a shop while struggling with bags of groceries. We would hardly be surprised to see him put these down in order to open it or for him to wait until someone came to his aid. Should we suppose that our lack of surprise indicates that we were predicting, albeit tacitly, that this man might do either of these things?[8] We might suppose that a tacit mentalistic prediction is unnecessary precisely because we already know what to expect from others and they know what to expect from us in such familiar social circumstances. To anticpate this set of actions I need know or assume nothing about the particular mindset of this individual. Rather, the thought is that

if we make ourselves more readable to one another by conforming to shared norms of readability, it follows that much of the work of understanding one another in day-to-day interactions is not really done by us at all, explicitly or implicitly. The work is done and carried by the world, embedded in the norms and routines that structure such interactions. (McGeer 2001, 119)

In McGeer's words, it is through a common social training that we gain an "insider's view" on what to expect from others in everyday situations; it is not by relying on a set of innate principles or absorbing any explicit ones.[9] Being brought into "the fold"—learning what to expect of others and vice versa—amounts to gaining a second nature or a common sense.[10] With this observation in hand, we can begin to see the quite sophisticated practices of giving and understanding reasons in a new light.

Folk psychology just is the practice of making sense of intentional action by means of a special kind of narrative, those that are about or feature a person's reasons. These narratives play two vital roles in commonsense psychology, one developmental and the other practical. First and foremost, they help to shape our expectations about the reasons for which actions are likely to be taken and the appropriateness of doing so. More importantly and more fundamentally, they are the very medium through which we acquire our basic understanding of what it is to act for a reason. Saying how this is achieved is the topic of the next chapter. For now, I want to highlight a different role played by the practice of supplying and interpreting folk psychological narratives—the application of commonsense psychology. Such narratives are used to mediate in cases in which an action deviates from our expectations. They do this by helping us to tame the extraordinary. By using narratives to explicate why an action was taken we are able to forge "links between the exceptional and the ordinary" (Bruner 1990, 47). That is, folk psychological narratives function as normalizing explanations, allowing us to cope with unusual or eccentric actions, by putting them into contexts that make them intelligible, where possible. Getting the relevant details of another's story enables us to see if their action falls within the fold of the normal. Alternatively, such stories can also—at least sometimes—serve to extend the bounds of what is regarded as normal. If, however, they fail to do either of these things, then we simply will have failed to make sense of why the action was performed.[11]

For example, I could, in a very unilluminating way, explain why I swallowed an acorn by appeal to the fact that I believed it to be an acorn, while avowing my desire to consume acorns. Assuming that this explanation correctly identifies my reason for action, such a project is not irrational. There is no conflict between my stated beliefs and desires, yet it remains utterly

puzzling. This shows that at least in some cases the mere citing of the appropriate belief/desire, even when it fits appropriately with the other relevant beliefs and desires and even assuming it is causally responsible for the action in question, does not suffice to explain an action in the strong sense of making it intelligible. A larger narrative that further contextualizes the reason, either in terms of different cultural norms or the peculiarities of a particular person's history or values, is required for that (that is, if anything can achieve this end). A richer narrative serves to explain the action, by enabling us to understand its rationale when this is not immediately obvious.

In this way, narratives make the explanation or domestication of eccentric, exotic, or otherwise extraordinary actions possible. They do this either by helping us to see that the reasons behind such actions are in fact already familiar or by making them so. This is achieved either by supplying missing details that reveal an action to be already within the fold of the ordinary (despite appearances) or by fleshing out a larger context such that we extend our understanding of what is acceptable, which entails rethinking the bounds of what we take to be "normal." Thus it goes without saying that this sort of negotiation requires a prior fluency with the normal. In Bruner's words, in such cases "the function of the story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern" (Bruner 1990, 49–50; entire sentence emphasized in original).

Narratives can explain by smoothing our understanding of others in cases where their actions (or their accounts of why these actions were taken) do not initially make sense. Crucially, such explanations are only needed in the sorts of cases in which we are surprised or perplexed by another's actions. For "When things 'are as they should be,' the narratives of folk psychology are unnecessary" (Bruner 1990, 40). With this in mind, we might reconsider the implications of Fodor's (1987, 3) claim that commonsense psychology "works so well it disappears." For Fodor this highlights the fact that much folk psychological theorizing goes unnoticed, but for me it points to the fact that for the great bulk of social interactions it is not used at all.

Of course, making sense of an apparent action is not always possible. Sometimes the behavior of others is so erratic that we have no option but to regard those individuals in the same light as we do objects. Stich (1983, 163), who once observed that folk psychology is best regarded as a kind of domestic anthropology, provided us with a plethora of such cases involving exotic subjects, such as children, animals, and confused or demented

folk, in which it necessarily fails. Faced with these subjects we may have to resort to the postulation of theoretical inner states to explain their behavior, but these will not be of the folk psychological variety. It must be stressed however that this only occurs when our normal way of understanding others breaks down—that is, when no mediating narratives can be brought to bear or are of any use (see Gallagher 2001, 95).

Understanding folk psychology as a kind of narrative practice flies in the face of the prevalent view that reason explanations are merely a subspecies of theoretical explanations, the logic of which is structurally identical to the kind of explanations found in and throughout the natural sciences. Fodor (1987, 7) describes this tradition, telling us that when folk psychological explanations are made explicit, "They are frequently seen to exhibit the "deductive structure" that is so characteristic of explanation in real science. There are two parts to this: the theory's underlying generalizations are defined over unobservables, and they lead to its predictions by iterating and interacting rather than by being directly instantiated." This is to adopt a broadly Hempelian approach, according to which the explanation for a particular action requires that we subsume it under a general law that reveals the relation between the events in question. It is a feature of this way of thinking that, despite facing in different directions, predictions and explanations are regarded as having the same structure. Ideally, a reliable theory based on information about past cases, known regularities, and recurring patterns enables us to work backward from known effects to the causes of specific happenings, in just the way that we work forward from known, or presupposed, causes in order to predict future effects.[12]

As long as we believe that our basic relations to others are of a detached nature, this idea can seem almost irresistible. In the abstract, how else ought we to characterize and, indeed, rank the assumptions needed for predicting and explaining such "mental events" as the occurrence of specific thoughts and desires? How else would someone who had no knowledge of others get by? Yet a little reflection shows that everyday practical application of folk psychology should not be modeled on the way explanations are advanced in the purely theoretical, abstract sciences. For it is not just that folk psychology would have to have its own special set of laws or generalizations, it must invoke the slippery notion of rationality. This sets folk psychology apart from all other theoretical sciences. Commonsense psychological explanations come with built-in reference to rational agents, such that its laws take the form: "In a situation of type C, any rational agent will do x" (Kölger and Stueber 2000b, 13–15).

Proponents of this sort of claim are notoriously vague when it comes to spelling out exactly what *rationality* means in this context. For example, Dennett (1987, 98) writes that "the concept of rationality is systematically pre-theoretical. . . . When one leans on our pre-theoretical concept of rationality one relies on our shared intuitions."[13] Yet, however this everyday notion of rationality is unpacked, the fact that it is a nonnegotiable feature of folk psychology means that we cannot have a closed system for propositional attitude ascriptions. Folk psychology neither is nor can be suitably reduced to a tractable lawlike science. Understanding actions in terms of reasons is irredeemably disanalogous to the way we understand the behavior of "mindless" entities (Davidson 1991, 162–163; see also Davidson 1996). One can accept this while allowing that in some sense reasons do in fact cause actions and that reason explanations are a type of causal explanation (see Davidson 1980). To put it mildly, folk psychology has special constitutive features that make it unique among theories because of the "normative character of mental concepts" (Davidson 1987, 46). But this is putting it too mildly for my taste. If we challenge a few additional assumptions about the primary function of folk psychology we can take this thought further; there is no reason to think of folk psychology as any kind of theory at all.[14]

Moreover, abstract theories only ever constitute *general* knowledge. This makes them fundamentally incapable of providing the sort of explanations needed in applied or forensic sciences (and in other areas such as history and psychoanalysis). This is made evident by the fact that explanations in applied domains are always more than mere chronicles of what has happened during a particular time frame. They involve discriminating and selecting which specific event—under a particular description—is the important one for the purposes of explanation. Hence, explanations of particular happenings take the form of

1. Selecting the appropriate events
2. Ordering them within a temporal series
3. Isolating their relevant properties with a view to making them intelligible within a particular idiom

It is with this in mind that we should regard such explanations as having an essentially narrative form. For, as Roth (1991, 178) observes, "Narratives give [events] a connection which is not merely chronological. The process of presenting a narrative about one's past [or the historical past] requires identifying which events are significant and why."

This requirement is common to all singular causal explanations. They are contextual in a way that distinguishes them from purely theoretical

explanations. Consequently, what constitutes a sound abstract explanation of the general causes of carburetor failure differs altogether from what is required from a singular causal explanation that identifies why a particular carburetor actually failed to work on a specific occasion. Although general theories are no doubt useful in framing such specific investigations, it is clear that even in the natural sciences the two types of explanation must not be conflated.

In this light, we would be well advised to adopt Woodward's (1984, 232) approach to singular causal explanations (or some close cousin), accepting that these constitute "a distinct genre of explanation, which does not possess anything remotely like a covering-law structure." He maintains that what they seek to explain "is simply the occurrence of a particular event . . . rather than some more complicated *explanandum*" (p. 232).[15] Thus, at best, the covering-law model is appropriate for all-inclusive, purely theoretical forms of prediction and explanation. Explanations of that kind are quite unlike those in which we deliberately avoid mentioning certain features in tune with the context of inquiry, since these can be taken for granted or regarded as idle or irrelevant. This last point is worthy of note, for if everyday explanations function by supplying *only* relevant information, then exactly which details will be significant will vary from context to context.

The standard picture that reason explanations operate in abstract, theoretical contexts must be rejected. For it is not as if we offer such explanations to complete outsiders or newcomers to our world or practices—that is, to someone who lacks all information and shares no background understanding with us. In many cases, background details go without saying. I hold that it is just as plausible that they go without thinking. Although we can imagine abstractly reconstructing what would have had to be the case for such psychological explanations to work (by detailing all of the nomologically sufficient conditions), there is no justification for reading all of this back into the minds of those doing such explaining or those receiving such explanations.[16] If we insist on this where exactly would one stop? In ordinary contexts in which we can reliably take most things for granted, good explanations stop precisely when enough has been said to make the particular action intelligible. The context determines just how much of this structure and the peculiar character of the target individual's psychology or history we will need to reveal in order to make sense of the actions or to fine-tune our predictions. We are normally only interested in tips, not whole icebergs.

In general our practical, everyday explanations are not designed to fully account for why something happened. It is only the citing of relevant

details in a particular context that does the explaining. In this light, far from being mere supplementary or peripheral information to be situated in a larger theory, in everyday contexts the narratives we supply about our reasons for acting—those that home in on the relevant details—just are the explanans.

Most importantly, a restorative narrative need not issue from the person seeking the explanation. In attempting to discover why someone acted we do not always occupy an estranged, spectatorial point of view. In many ordinary cases the other is not beyond our reach. The fact is that we often engage directly with others in order to determine their reasons. This is quite unlike other forensic investigations that attempt to delve into the causes of other kinds of happenings. To establish with any confidence why an action was performed we simply cannot approach the issue using the same sort of method as we would when trying to determine, say, the cause of a plane crash. Our best chance, by far, is to rely on the revelations of the other: the authors of actions are uniquely well placed to explain their reasons for themselves. Of course, their admissions are defeasible; often people lie or are self-deceived about why they act. Nevertheless, we have fairly robust methods for testing, questioning, and challenging such testimony when it is important to do so, as in legal cases. For example, we compare the person's avowals about relevant public events with the accounts given by others; this uncovers lies or internal contradictions in the agent's story that will invalidate either the details of the account or the person's overall credibility. Countless everyday conversations involving the explanation of actions in terms of reasons mimic this process to a greater or lesser degree. Also, when directly engaging with others in "normal" contexts there are a wealth of telltale cues, expressions, and responses of a more embodied variety that provide fairly reliable guidance and feedback when deciding if we can place our trust in what another says.

The Unreliability of Third-Personal Folk Psychology

Understanding others in normal contexts of interaction is not a spectator sport. This is not to claim that we never adopt a spectatorial stance—but doing so is the exception, not the rule. As Gallagher (2001, 92) observes,

Even in cases where we know (or think we know) a person very well, we may express puzzlement about their behaviour. In discussing a friend's behaviour with someone who doesn't know her well, we may come to devise a theory about why she is acting in a certain way. It seems very possible to describe such cases in terms of a theory of mind.

Gallagher also notes that "in the situation of talking with someone else about a third person, it seems possible to describe our attitude toward the person under discussion as theoretical or as involving a simulation of the other person's mental states" (p. 93). Even so, these heuristics remain at the periphery—coming into play only in special cases, such as those in which we do not accept the other's account of his or her reasons. Driven by suspicion we may be left with nothing but speculation and supposition about their motives. That is, we may be forced to make third-party predictions and explanations of actions precisely in the sorts of cases in which we do not know what to expect from others or when we cannot engage with them directly. But, for this very reason, these sorts of approaches are bound to be, on the whole, much less reliable than our second-person modes of interaction.

Consider that most third-person predictions operate with framing information about the other's background beliefs and desires already in hand, as in the following paradigm case: "Suppose I wish to predict what John will think of the new jacket; will he think it garish? Suppose further that I know that John believes the jacket to be scarlet and he thinks all bright colours to be garish. I will, of course, expect him to think the jacket garish" (Heal 1995, 39).[17]

Heal (1998b, 86) is quite clear that this heuristic, at least on its own, cannot account for how we succeed in "interpreting and explaining behaviour." But if simulation procedures were used to enable us to understand reasons for action, folk psychology would either be a very dull business or a very uncertain one indeed.[18] For the cost of having reliable predictions is inversely proportional to the need to make them at all. To come back to Bruner's point about our expectations, if a situation is familiar there will be no question about what another will do and no need to make any predictions. In contrast, in third-person cases, we are faced with two extremes. At one pole, we already have framing information that is good enough for us to deduce logically what another will think or do—in which case it is unclear what need such predictions might serve. At the other pole, to the degree that we lack such information the need to make predictions will be clearer but they will be less reliable.

Consider how folk psychological predictions are allegedly achieved on Goldman's account of the simulation process of manipulating the mindreader's own stock of mental states, putting them through their paces, as it were.[19] This is achieved by modifying the normal routine of mechanisms that support practical reasoning in particular, and others that support psychological responding more generally. Goldman, for example, proposes

that simulation is fueled by subpersonal mechanisms. He presents this claim as a straightforward empirical hypothesis: the very same mechanism that permits the manipulation of beliefs and desires in the course of practical reasoning is also our stable but flexible basis for "high-level" mindreading. Normally, the outcome of practical reasoning is the formation of an intention to act on the part of the reasoner. But on this account when we make sense of another's action our practical reasoning mechanism—although functioning properly in one sense—is being put to a different end. It continues to process beliefs and desires as usual but because it is fed with pretend beliefs and desires as "input," the resulting "output" takes the form of predictions or explanations (rather than issuing intentions to act, as it would normally). It is, to coin a phrase, being run off-line.[20] On this basis, successful mindreading exploits the similarities in the reasoning processes of individuals. Or rather, it succeeds if appropriate allowances are made for differences in the other's psychological set and the right believed and desired contents are used (that is, those that in fact motivated the target).

In taking my practical reasoning mechanism off-line, I shelve certain of my beliefs and desires and allow others—which I do not genuinely harbor—to go "live." To get any interesting results, I need to make a number of fine-tuned adjustments. Clearly, the more I know about my target the better my chances of successful prediction. Precisely the same challenge attends the generation of retrodictive explanations from a third-person perspective. If X is to simulate Y, X cannot simply imagine what it would be like to be in Y's position; one must take into account the relevant differences between the simulator and the target.

An illustration makes the point better than a description, and the annals of Sherlock Holmes prove a useful sourcebook. Holmes avows that he frequently imaginatively reenacts the thought processes of criminals when making predictions about their next moves or explaining their past steps. In *The Musgrave Ritual*, Conan Doyle (1892–1893/1986, 343) provides a tidy account of how the basic simulation heuristic is supposed to work:

You know my methods in such cases, Watson: I put myself in the man's place, and having first gauged his intelligence, I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances. In this case the matter was simplified by Brunston's intelligence being quite first rate, so that it was unnecessary to make any allowance for the personal equation, as the astronomers have dubbed it. He knew something valuable was concealed. He had spotted the place. He found that the stone was too heavy for a man to move unaided. What would he do next?

Many describe this process of simulation as one of "placing oneself, figuratively speaking, into the shoes of the other"; it is to enact, emulate, or otherwise get an imaginative handle on how things look, looked, or will look from the other's perspective. Predicting or explaining their actions is then improved by fine-tuning such projections. This, in any case, is the driving insight. And in the very first paper to introduce the idea of simulation, Gordon stressed that the procedure

is not the same as deciding what I myself would do. One tries to make adjustments for *relevant differences*. In chess, for example, a player would make not only the imaginative shifts required for predicting "what I would do in his shoes," but the further shifts required for predicting what he will do in his shoes. To this purpose the player might, e.g., simulate a lower level of play, trade one set of idiosyncrasies for another, and above all pretend ignorance of his own (actual) intentions. Army generals, salespeople, and detectives claim to do this sort of thing. (Gordon 1986, 162; emphasis added)

The point is that when simulating I focus on the situation as it might be for the other, not on what I would do in such a situation if I were the other. But if I am in a position to determine, without further ado, in what respects the other's perspective is relevantly different from mine, this obviates the need for the explanation. Yet without such information the simulation procedure leaves us with nothing more than *possible* explanations. And this reminds us that unless this activity is constrained in some further way it is unlikely to yield accurate results. There are simply too many possibilities about how someone might act in any situation, all of which fall within the rational spectrum. One is faced with an embarrassment of riches. Because of this, at best, we are left with mere hypotheses about what the other will do. Once again, unless we already know (or can safely assume) enough about the other's background beliefs, desires, and psychological attitudes, there is a good chance that our simulated predictions will go astray. The problem is that, unlike ordinary conversations, on its own the simulation heuristic has very meagre resources for determining which psychological states to put aside and which to keep in play.

The point can be illustrated graphically if we examine Goldman's schematic, as presented in figure 1.1. Although an appropriate box is set aside to perform the function of generating pretend propositional attitudes, it is interesting that it alone stands free of input. Since everything is clearly labeled, it is easy to see what is left crucially unexplained: the means by which particular beliefs and desires are selected to act as pretend inputs.
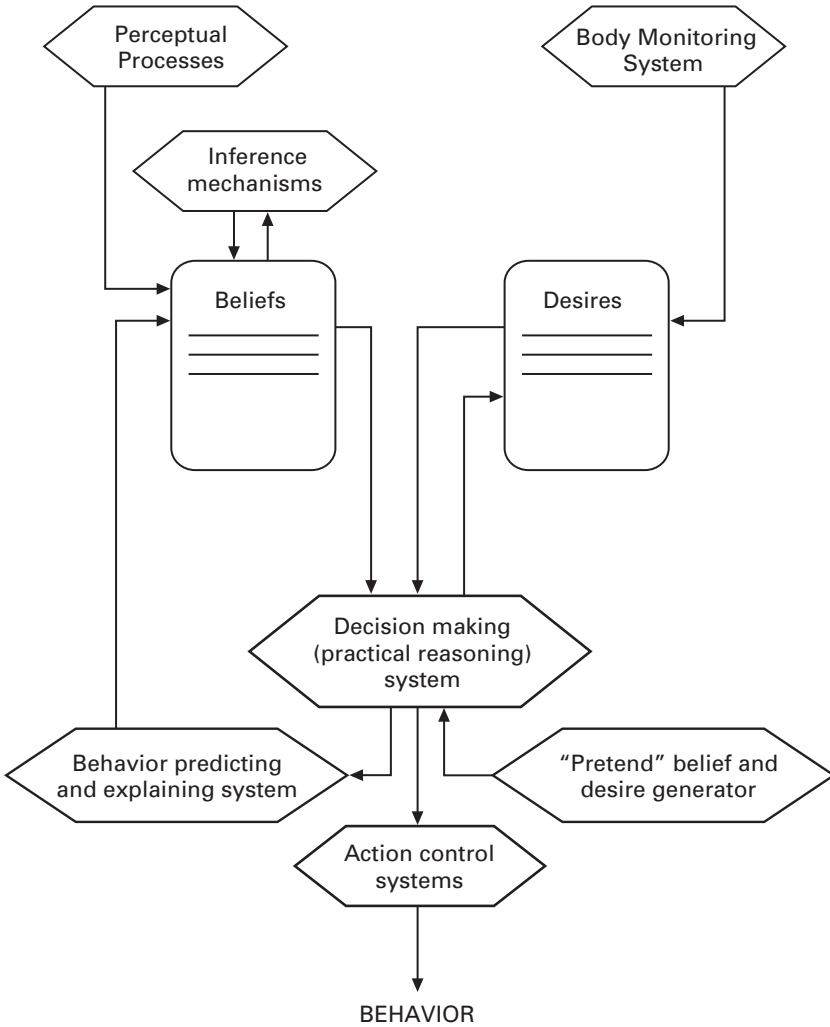
Figure 1.1
Practical Reasoning Mechanism (adapted from S. Stich and S. Nichols 1995, 92; S. Nichols et al. 1996, 40; and reprinted from D. D. Hutto, "The Limits of Spectatorial Folk Psychology," *Mind and Language* 19, no. 5 (2004): 548–573. Used with permission from the editors, *Mind and Language*).

These criticisms of simulation theory are well rehearsed and have led some to hold that when interpretation gets tough, simulators need to get a theory. Indeed, for over two decades, the dominant theory, in both philosophical and psychological circles, has been that at some level folk psychological predictions and explanations are achieved by making use of a set of principles about how we humans (and disputably certain other primates) navigate our everyday social affairs. Fodor once neatly illustrated the character of folk psychology's core principles with an example from *Midsummer Night's Dream*. He traced the elaborate path of Hermia's reasoning that drove her to suppose (wrongly, as it happens) that Demetrius had harmed Lysander. Ultimately, her conclusion was reached, inter alia, on the basis of her knowledge that "if x wants that P, and x believes that not-P unless Q, and x believes that x can bring it about that Q, then (*ceteris paribus*) x tries to bring it about that Q" (Fodor 1987, 2). Within the space of a page, Fodor cast this account of what is clearly recognizable as the skeleton of the practical syllogism in the form of an "implicit theory." This was understood as constituting the central pillar of a body of knowledge that regularly takes up the "burden of predicting behaviour—of bridging the gap between utterances and actions" (Fodor 1987, 3). Apart from enabling us to enjoy Shakespearean comedies, it is claimed that tacit knowledge of such abstract principles is what permits our more mundane mentalistic predictions. The core of folk psychology is, on this conception, a kind of schematic that details the ways the core propositional attitudes must interrelate if they are to generate action: a "theory of mind" (or ToM).[21]

Whether on its own or as part of a hybrid, it is generally thought that somehow a theory of mind could reliably provide causal explanations that designate another's reason for acting.[22] Allegedly, it is because theories employ subsuming causal laws that "the mechanism posited by the theory-theory is supposed to underpin the giving of robust psychological explanations of behaviour by the folk" (Arkway 2000, 135). But, as suggestive as this thought may be, theories are in no position to deliver where simulation procedures cannot. They fare no better when it comes to dealing with difficult cases.

This should not be surprising since internal resources of theories of mind—understood as a set of core principles about the behavior of the attitudes—are just as limited as those of simulation heuristics. In different ways, both regard folk psychology as grounded in our shared rationality.

It might be thought that we can build on this base by adding some auxiliary hypotheses—a kind of *Homo sapiens* psychology with some local

variations—to support the self-contained folk psychological theory. The core mentalistic principles only detail the appropriate interrelations between the central propositional attitudes (beliefs and desires) and nothing more. To get any interesting predictive or explanatory results it is recognized that this theory would need to be augmented with other more specific laws or generalizations, for as Botterill (1996, 115) observes, "if that was all we knew of other people, we wouldn't know what to expect of them."[23]

Holmes provides an example of one such generalization when explaining his deductive methods to Watson in "A Scandal in Bohemia":

When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it. In the case of the Darlington Substitution Scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsorth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby—an unmarried one reaches for her jewel box. (Doyle 1891/1986, 108)

The Baker Street detective is here supplementing the core principles of folk psychology with a specific "empirical" generalization about human (indeed, specifically female) psychology. In other words, he factors in what he knows (or thinks he knows) about the general proclivities of this special class of human beings and makes adjustments based on the subject's marital status (which he takes to be relevant). The result, if we believe the story, is an accurate prediction of Irene Adler's very next action.

But really this is not enough. A less fanciful example helps to make this clear. As I was preparing for a long visit to St. Louis, I asked my wife to arrange for my car to be serviced and kept in my local garage while I was abroad. I supplied her with the appropriate telephone number and she kindly made the booking for me. On the morning of my flight, she agreed to drive me to Heathrow after I had first dropped off my car at the garage. So, we set off in our separate cars and she took the lead, her trunk laden with my luggage. As we came to the relevant intersection, she stopped at a set of red traffic lights but uncharacteristically failed to signal. This surprised me because my wife is a stickler for such things. But then something even odder happened. To my amazement when the lights changed she did not turn, but began driving toward the town center, straight past the garage at which she herself had made the booking! As time was against us, this alarmed me. I raced to make sense of her action, assuming that her mind must have been elsewhere. At first, I flashed my lights with my signal light blinking, expecting her to realize that I was no longer following in the hope that she would notice her mistake. Things went from bad to worse when I saw her cast a glance in her rearview mirror without stopping. At

this point, I was faced with a rather tricky interpretative problem. Given that my wife is very competent and reliable, lacking any malicious streak or any known reason to treat me badly, I was at an utter loss to make sense of her actions. Although a number of possible explanations sprang to mind, knowing my wife, none of these looked plausible. I was unable to make any sense of her actions. Assuming my wife had not become irrational, I could not begin to narrow the field of possibilities enough to yield a plausible explanation even though I had a detailed knowledge of the circumstances as well as her history and character. No supplement to a core theory of mind would have been any use.

And this is the moral. Achieving the requisite explanation would not have been made possible by means of a graft—that is, if my (alleged) core theory of mind was reinforced by a clutch of auxiliary hypotheses, even if these took the form of minitheories about the dispositions and traits of the person in question. Certainly, we often explicitly call on such information when speculating about others. It might even be thought that if we are prepared to take a *very* relaxed view of what constitutes a theory, then person-specific theories could be formed on the basis of regular encounters and prolonged experience with particular individuals. No doubt this would help in weeding out some explanations. For example, Stich and Nichols (1992) consider a case in which such detailed information about a person's character could be used in order to evaluate the suggestion that he was speaking in a foreign language for purposes of comic effect. They write that "some belief/desire pairs will be easy to exclude. Perhaps the agent is a dour fellow; he never wants to make anyone laugh. If we believe this to be the case then [this proposal] won't be very plausible" (p. 43).

Although such knowledge of a person's character certainly helps enable us to make refined guesses about why someone might have acted, in most cases these guesses will still fall short of providing the explanation for an action. Or rather, nothing ensures in any given instance that an action, even if it is not irrational, stems from a fixed set of dispositions that define one's character or personality traits: it is always possible that the person is, in fact, acting "out of character" or is spurred on by an unpredictable emotion. Moreover, many situations have novel features that we just cannot guess accurately.[24]

Luckily, on learning the history of my wife's actions it was possible to rationally explain her otherwise disturbing behavior. After the incident, she explained that although it was true that she had phoned the garage to make the appointment herself, and she had used the number I had given

her, she believed it was the number for our old garage, which is located in the next village.

The point is that neither core theory theory nor simulation theory, nor the two in concert, could have reliably generated this explanation. This matters because it is explanations of just this sort that we require—and regularly get—in our everyday affairs. Third-person methods therefore lack the resources to enable us to reliably and successfully deal with many ordinary cases that cry out for explanation. Put otherwise, given that successful reason explanations require us to designate *the* reason for acting—as opposed to simply offering a *possible* reason for acting—all such third-person approaches are of limited use (see Hutto 1999b). Ironically, if we accept the idea that folk psychology is central to our practice of accurately explaining actions in terms of reasons, and reliably so, then it cannot be conducted in the way most theorists suppose. In most everyday cases it is the narratives of others—those they relate to us directly—that explicate and explain why an action was performed.

To reiterate, the greatest chance of obtaining a successful explanation— of deciding for which reason an action was performed—depends on the authors of actions identifying and explicating their reasons for themselves. Other conditions must hold too—that is, the person must not be confabulating, must not be engaging in post hoc rationalization, must not be self-deceived, and so on. Nevertheless, by way of comparison, asking the other for their reasons is vastly more reliable than trying to determine why they in fact acted as they did from the distance of a third-party spectator—and the likelihood of accuracy decreases in direct proportion to our explanatory need. By way of contrast, it is only in second-person contexts that we confidently obtain true folk psychological explanations (to the extent that we do at all), as opposed to merely speculating about possible ones. When in doubt, it is best to find out why someone acted from the "horse's mouth." Even though in some cases we will have legitimate reasons to doubt the other's word, the explanations that we generate on their behalf rarely rise above the status of mere supposition (at least in those cases where there is any interesting question about why they acted as they did in the first place). This should give us pause for thought about what the primary function (or functions) of folk psychological explanations really is. I return to this in the final chapter.

The stories others tell about their reasons are typically delivered, and indeed, often fashioned, in the course of online interactive dialogue and conversation—dialogue of the sort that is, with luck, sensitive to the questioner's precise explanatory needs and requirements. The nature of such

engagements is complex and deserves more attention than it has received to date. That is not my focus here. The crucial point to recognize is that it is what is conveyed in these second-person deliveries—the narratives narrated—that do the heavy lifting in enabling us to understand and make sense of others with confidence. As before, I call narratives of the kind that explicate actions in terms of reasons (as understood above) *folk psychological narratives*.[25] Providing these is the primary work of folk psychology stricto sensu, which is—at root—a distinctive kind of narrative practice. It just is the practice of providing (or generating) narratives about reasons.

Folk psychological narratives can, of course, be constructed and used for third-person speculation—as in those cases in which we wonder why another may have acted in a certain way on a particular occasion. But such attempted explanations are unlikely to hit the mark in any case of real need.

Yet even if this claim about the nature and source of folk psychological explanations is accepted, it might still be thought the only way we can makes sense of these narratives—the only way to digest them—is by means of operating "theory of mind" machinery of some kind or other (of either the TT or ST varieties). Surely, such machinery must be at work in enabling our folk psychological understanding. I think it is only a familiar habit of thought that encourages this view. To break it I devote the next chapter to considering how children might acquire their basic folk psychological understanding and skills through narratives themselves.