



What People Believe When They Say That People Believe: Folk Sociology and the Nature of Group Intentions

Todd Jones

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In modern life, we often hear people say things like, 'Catholics don't believe in using birth control.' There are many reasons that we want to know what groups of people (such as Catholics) are thinking and doing. But it's hard to understand which social situations are being described by such statements. It's also difficult to understand what speakers believe when they make such statements (even when the speakers are social scientists.) In this work, cognitive scientist and philosopher Todd Jones looks at the different things that social scientists and ordinary speakers mean when they make statements ascribing beliefs or actions to groups, rather than individuals. Such statements are often denigrated as mere stereotypes or generalizations. Yet they are also used by people to strategize about what actions to take, and even for social scientific explanations. In this work, Jones takes a detailed look at the different things these kinds of statements about groups can mean, and the various social structures they correspond to. He also looks at how such statements can and can't be used to successfully explain the behavior of individuals or groups. While many people broadly dismiss such statements about groups, Jones gives a careful discussion of the problems and possibilities such statements have.

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