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### Dissertation Abstract

#### *Beyond Folk Psychology? Toward an Enriched Account of Social Understanding*

I defend the role of folk psychology in human social understanding against criticisms raised by philosophers of mind drawing on the phenomenological tradition. Folk psychology is the ability to interpret people's mental states (beliefs, desires, intentions, etc.) and to use this information to explain and predict their behavior. For example, an explanation for why Bobby did not eat the pasta at dinner might be that he *believed* it contained garlic, which he does not *like*. While folk psychology has traditionally been seen as fundamental to human social understanding, a group of philosophers working in phenomenological tradition have recently argued that most of our everyday social interactions do not involve folk psychology. Their alternative accounts of social understanding have become increasingly prominent in the philosophical and empirical literature. In this dissertation I push back against this recent trend to look beyond folk psychology. I show how the phenomena identified by these phenomenologists can indeed be accommodated within the folk psychological picture. In so doing, I develop an enriched account of human social understanding that accepts their descriptions of the phenomena of human social understanding (for example, what we consciously experience when interacting with other people) while retaining a significant role for folk psychological reasoning at the subpersonal level, below the level of conscious experience.

I begin by describing the traditional folk psychological account of social understanding, and the challenge to it raised by these critics. Much of the traditional philosophical and empirical research on human social understanding assumes a pervasive role for folk psychology (also known as "theory of mind" and "mindreading") in our navigation of the social world. Consequently, a major focus of this research has been the psychological processes by which we attribute mental states to other people. One account, the theory theory, claims that we possess theoretical knowledge about human psychology. In contrast, simulation theory proposes that we do not need a folk psychological theory because we use our own psychological mechanisms to "simulate" other people's mental states. Most researchers now believe we use a combination of theorizing and simulation. The phenomenology-based critics of folk psychology, such as Shaun Gallagher, Dan Zahavi, and Matthew Ratcliffe, contend that the folk psychological account over-intellectualizes human social understanding. I identify two central claims of these phenomenological critics: (1) that some mental state understanding occurs by "direct perception," without the need for theorizing or simulation; (2) that attributing beliefs and desires is not required and not often used for unreflectively interacting with other people.

While I believe direct perception and unreflective social interaction are important phenomena not adequately addressed in traditional accounts, I show how they can be accommodated without relegating folk psychology to a minor role in human social understanding. Specifically, I defend the idea that folk psychological reasoning can occur at the subpersonal level, outside of conscious awareness. This enables me to argue that direct social perception and unreflective social interaction can, contrary to the phenomenological critics, be driven by folk psychological theorizing and/or simulation. I first articulate an explanatory and investigative framework for the cognitive sciences based on the distinction between personal and subpersonal levels, and then apply this framework when addressing the two claims about human social understanding made by the phenomenology critics.

To differentiate levels of phenomena and explanation in the cognitive sciences, I appeal to the distinction between personal and subpersonal levels. The personal level concerns whole organisms and their experiences, while subpersonal levels concern the parts of organisms, especially their brains. I interpret the personal-subpersonal distinction in terms of the mechanistic approach recently explicated by philosophers of science, where subpersonal-level mechanisms are offered as explanations of personal-level phenomena. I address how phenomenological claims about conscious experience fit within this mechanistic framework, and show that my account of levels is compatible with the perspective of the phenomenological critics. Given the various kinds of evidence appealed to in accounts of social understanding, I also characterize the methods of inquiry used to obtain multilevel accounts of cognitive phenomena. I first describe third-person research techniques found in the cognitive sciences, as well as first-person methods used to acquire more direct evidence about the structure and contents of consciousness. Here I describe methods derived from the phenomenological tradition, and how they can be integrated with third-person data.

With this explanatory and investigative framework in hand, I address the two claims about human social understanding made by the phenomenological critics. I first tackle the phenomenologists' claim that we can "directly perceive" some mental states, such as emotions and action goals. Phenomenologists see these phenomena as challenging folk psychological accounts, which require a psychological step beyond perception to

infer other's "unobservable" mental states from their "observable" behavior. I argue that the direct perception of mental states is indeed in conflict with personal-level versions of theory theory and simulation theory, but not with subpersonal-level versions of each. Focusing specifically on Dan Zahavi's arguments against theory theory and Shaun Gallagher's arguments against simulation theory, I argue that neither gives us reason to reject subpersonal-level versions of theory theory and simulation theory. The folk psychological picture is in this way able to accommodate a class of phenomena identified by the phenomenological critics.

I then move beyond goal and emotion attribution to full-blown folk psychology involving the attribution of beliefs and desires. The phenomenological critics claim that belief-desire attribution is restricted to conscious, reflective cognition, and is not used for unreflective social interaction. I agree with them that non-mentalistic modes of social understanding should be better emphasized in accounts of unreflective social interaction, and that the standard experimental research does not speak directly to the role of folk psychology in unreflective social interaction. I do not, however, agree that this means belief-desire attribution plays no role in unreflective social interaction. To make this point, I describe recent experimental research on our understanding of other people's false beliefs that provides direct evidence of folk psychology driving unreflective social interaction. I then defend my interpretation of these experiments against possible objections from the phenomenological critics.