

# 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 subjects to a series of realistic scenarios concerning the development of birdsong. Our results explain the intuitive appeal of many of the existing philosophical analyses of the innateness concept. They simultaneously explain why all such analyses are subject to compelling counterexamples. We conclude that philosophers need to think more clearly about what they are trying to achieve when 'analysing' the concept of innateness.

**Keywords:** innate innateness nativism developmental canalization folk biology naive biology essentialism experimental philosophy

[Specific Sciences: Psychology/Psychiatry](#)

**Subjects:** [Specific Sciences: Cognitive Science](#)  
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