



Teleological Realism: Mind, Agency, and Explanation (Bradford Books) (MIT Press)

Scott Sehon

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Using the language of common-sense psychology (CSP), we explain human behavior by citing its reason or purpose, and this is central to our understanding of human beings as agents. On the other hand, since human beings are physical objects, human behavior should also be explicable in the language of physical science, in which causal accounts cast human beings as collections of physical particles. CSP talk of mind and agency, however, does not seem to mesh well with the language of physical science. In Teleological Realism, Scott Sehon argues that CSP explanations are not causal but teleological -- that they cite the purpose or goal of the behavior in question rather than an antecedent state that caused the behavior. CSP explanations of behavior, Sehon claims, are answering a question different from that answered by physical science explanations, and, accordingly, CSP explanations and physical science explanations are independent of one another. Common-sense facts about mind and agency can thus be independent of the physical facts about human beings, and, contrary to the views of most philosophers of mind in recent decades, common-sense psychology will not be subsumed by physical science. Sehon defends his non-reductionist account of mind and agency in clear and nontechnical language. He carefully distinguishes his view from forms of "strong naturalism" that would seem to preclude it. And he evaluates key objections to teleological realism, including those posed by Donald Davidson's influential article "Actions, Reasons and Causes" and some put forth by more recent proponents of causal theories of action. CSP, Sehon argues, has a different realm than does physical science; the normative notions that are central to CSP are not reducible to physical facts and laws.

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