reassemble all the pieces that had been removed into a second ship, which would be the ship of Theseus? The results of experimental studies with children and adults confirm that most individuals infer that individuals that are gradually replaced by component parts retain their identity (Hall 1998). This is because we infer an essential element in addition to the material composition when we are asked to consider the unique nature of things. Hall’s (1998) developmental study revealed a stronger essentialist perspective for living things compared to an artefact, but we will essentialize objects that we consider significant by virtue of their unique identity if they have sentimental value (Hood & Bloom 2008). I have conjectured that this holds especially true for emotional objects such as memorabilia associated with individuals that we revere, from celebrities to religious saints, as well as so-called murderabilia, which are the items associated with murderers (Hood 2009). The authenticity of an object is similarly conferred by essentialist beliefs so much so that the value we place on objects such as artworks or collectibles is shaped by what we believe the object to be (Bloom 2010). For many, a perfect forgery indistinguishable from an original lacks some property that is difficult to articulate, consistent with the placeholder function that essentialism provides (Medin & Ortony 1989).

The inherent bias in positing an inherence heuristic
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Abstract: There are two problems with Cimpian & Salomon’s (C&S’s) claim that an innate inherence heuristic is part of our cognitive makeup. First, some of their examples of inherent features do not seem to accord with the authors’ own definition of inherence. Second, rather than posit an inherence heuristic to explain why humans rely more heavily on inherent features, it may be more parsimonious to do so on the basis of aspects of the world itself and our relationship to it.

Cimpian & Salomon (C&S) present some intriguing preliminary evidence for the existence of an inherence heuristic, a basic cognitive tendency that leads people to explain patterns with reference to inherent features rather than extrinsic (i.e., relational or historical) features. While we find it plausible that people rely more heavily on inherent rather than relational properties in reasoning about many domains, we have doubts about the possibility of drawing the distinction between inherent and extrinsic properties unambiguously enough to enable us to conclude with confidence that participants are clearly tracking such a distinction in all the examples cited. But even if we set aside these doubts, the tendency that C&S are describing may not represent a cognitive bias of its own, but may instead emerge from the way the tendency that C&S are describing may not represent a cognitive bias of its own, but may instead emerge from the way the world around them.

Finally, we cannot help entertaining the possibility that C&S fall prey to the inherence heuristic in positing an innate heuristic to explain certain human cognitive tendencies, rather than explaining them in terms of relations of human beings to the world. But then, wouldn’t that be a dramatic confirmation of the very heuristic that the authors claim to observe? Not necessarily: We are arguing that, instead of a basic component of our innate cognitive endowment, our tendency to explain patterns on the basis of inherent features is instead a function of our relationship to the world and of features of the world itself.

NOTE
1. There is a debate in metaphysics on the proper characterization of the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction (e.g., see Langton & Lewis 1998; Lewis 1983; Valletnye 1997). But that is not our concern here; rather,
Is it about “pink” or about “girls”? The inherence heuristic across social and nonsocial domains

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Abstract: The inherence heuristic provides an intriguing and novel explanation for early thought in a variety of domains. Exploring similarities and differences in inherent reasoning across social and nonsocial domains can help us understand the role that inherent thinking plays in the development of human reasoning and the process by which more elaborate essentialist reasoning develops.

Our drive to understand observed patterns in the world is pervasive and supports powerful learning throughout life. The inherence heuristic provides groundwork for this understanding both within everyday reasoning and across development, and has the potential to explain a wide range of psychological phenomena. We applaud the authors’ thoughtful proposal. Yet, further specification of key aspects of the proposal—particularly regarding the domain specificity or the generality of inherence thinking—will clarify further the theoretical underpinnings of the heuristic and generate related research.

Are inherence beliefs about entities in the world (e.g., “pink as feminine”) at all different from inherence beliefs about people or their psychological states (e.g., “girls like feminine things”)? Cimpian & Salomon (C&S) state that both might be the case and may depend on the particular context at hand. We agree that understanding which patterns are subjected to the heuristic process is complex, yet we suggest that there may be important differences in the ways that people attend to, encode, and explain observed patterns in different domains. Are different kinds of evidence similarly susceptible to inherence reasoning? For instance, is it easier or harder to learn a new conceptualization of “pink” or of “girls,” and are beliefs about people and non-person entities similarly resistant to change in the face of counter-evidence? One possibility is that information about people may be particularly easily viewed as inherent, and thus it may be relatively easier to update a belief about the femininity of “pink” as compared to the femininity of “girls.” Understanding how inherent reasoning is implemented across domains can be informative for understanding the development of children’s reasoning about diverse concepts (e.g., people, animates, artifacts) and could also be informative about the functioning of the inherent heuristic more generally.

Relat...