

Previous steps toward an affordance-based approach to concepts

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Abstract

Since some years ago, there have been several approaches that took affordances as a basis for explaining cognitive processes beyond perception and action, such as language, imagination, social practices, etc. Another key aspect of our mental life that is susceptible to be explained from an affordance-based perspective is the nature of concepts. The perceptual basis of concepts is a traditional theme in the history of philosophy, one that has been approached from either a nativist or an empiricist perspective. Here, we want to offer the minimal methodological and conceptual requirements for approaching the problem of the perceptual basis of concepts from an affordance-based perspective that overcome the traditional nativist vs. empiricist debate. We argue that affordances are a key idea to make sense of our experience, but also to make sense of our concepts, as they provide the materials from which we can build them up. For this, we sketch our own methodological and theoretical requirements or conditions for offering a successful affordance-based approach to concepts, and we offer a positive, constructive story to develop the idea in the future. In particular, we propose the idea of embodied concepts as a non-discursive link between basic and discursive cognition. These embodied concepts are a kind of bodily know-how in which we patternize the world. This bodily know-how is formed thanks to the experience we gain through dealing with affordances. Thus, embodied concepts can be considered as affordance-based states that are the missing link between merely reactive contentless states and discursive, contentful states.

1. Introduction

The story of the origins of concepts has been a challenging problem in the philosophy of mind since at least the origins of British empiricism. Locke talked extensively about this issue in his *Essay* and established the Modern version of the problem. Since then, many authors have dealt with this problem. Since we do not aim to enumerate all approaches, we must summarize the current state of the art as follows: there are two main approaches to the problem with key differences but also with some shared commitments. First of all we have the empiricist approach to the origins of concepts, by which our minds use the information gathered by perceptual states that is processed and enriched in order to build up concepts about ordinary things in