



Grounded cognition

Introduction to concepts

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Based on Margolis E. and Laurence S. (2014) Concepts. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

What are concepts?

- constituents of thoughts
- the most fundamental constructs in theories of the mind
- Hence, they are crucial to various psychological processes: categorization, inference, memory, learning, and decision-making
- But what is the nature of concepts?
- What are the constraints that govern a theory of concepts?
- Disputes often reflect deeply opposing approaches to the study of the mind, to language, and even to philosophy itself.

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Categorization

- Category – a group of objects, which for certain reasons we consider the same
- Concept – mental representation of a category
- Concepts can also refer to single-object categories
- Conceptualization helps us cope with the world
- Theories of categorization
 - Classical view (clear-cut boundaries and defining features)
 - Prototype view (family resemblances, basic level categories)
 - Exemplar theory (not single but sets of representations)
 - The theory view (membership decided due to individual's knowledge)

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Five core issues

- 1. the ontology of concepts,**
2. the structure of concepts,
- 3. empiricism and nativism about concepts,**
- 4. concepts and natural language,**
5. concepts and conceptual analysis.

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1. Ontology of concepts

- **concepts as mental representations**
 - Beliefs, desires and other propositional attitudes enter into mental processes as internal symbols.
 - concepts are identified with more basic representations
- **concepts as abilities**
 - concepts are neither mental images nor word-like entities (in a LoT)
 - ...but abilities that are peculiar to cognitive agents
- **concepts as Fregean senses**
 - abstract objects (as opposed to mental objects and mental states)
 - one's access to senses is described by means of the metaphor of "grasping"—we are said to grasp the sense of an expression

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3. Empiricism and nativism about concepts

- Empiricists:
 - all concepts derive from sensations (Prinz, Barsalou,...)
 - Challenge for abstract concepts
- Nativists:
 - all lexical concepts are innate (Fodor...)
 - Chomsky: inborn predispositions for language (UG)

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4. Concepts and natural language

- Can there be concepts without language?
 - NO (Brandom 1994, Davidson 1975, Dummett 1993)
 - But how about animals?
- Priority between language and concepts: alternative views
 - Concepts are prior, and language is just a means for conveying thought (Fodor 1975, Pinker 1994)
 - At least some types of thinking (and hence some concepts) occur in the internal system of representation constituting our natural language competence (Carruthers 1996, 2002, Spelke 2003).
- Linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity

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