



Grounded cognition

Introduction to concepts

Igor Farkaš
Centre for Cognitive Science
Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics
Comenius University in Bratislava

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

What are concepts?

- constituents of thoughts
- 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**
 - based on representational theory of mind (Fodor,...)
 - 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
 - there are concepts that will never be grasped.

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3. Empiricism and nativism about concepts

- Empiricists:
 - all concepts derive from sensations (Prinz, Barsalou,...)
 - Challenge for abstract concepts
- Nativists:
 - Fodor (1975,1981): all lexical concepts are innate
 - 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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