
Embodied Cognition: The Very Idea

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Abstract

For twenty years now embodied cognition has been sweeping the planet. The empirical findings in support of the thesis are stunning. For example, Barsalou and colleagues have given impressive data to incline one to think cognition is taking place in perceptual regions. Glenberg and colleagues have given impressive data to incline one to think cognition takes place in motor regions. Many other researchers offer supporting data of many kinds supporting similar conclusions. Nonetheless, there has been some resistance among cognitive scientists to the some of the stronger conclusions drawn from these impressive findings. I myself have asked the question whether the empirical findings can differentiate between mere causal support of cognition taking place in these regions versus cognition being constituted by processing in these regions. The empirical data alone cannot detect this difference. Yet, until now, little has been done to push back directly on the very idea of what is required for cognition truly to be embodied. In this paper, I shall first present some strong reasons for thinking that the whole research program has gotten out of hand by extending its arguments to plant cognition and plant neurobiology. What is more, I shall present considerations from neuroscience, and from naturalized semantics that would block attribution of cognition to plants. I shall then claim that these same considerations, if they work against plant cognition, cast strong doubt on the entire research program of embodied cognition.

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