
The pragmatist turn in cognitive science

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Abstract

Panel proposal ” The pragmatist turn in cognitive science ”

- Pierre Steiner, Costech, Université de Technologie de Compiègne, Differences that make a difference. Dewey, cognitive science, and the spirit of the experimental method.
- Quanmin Li, Department of Philosophy, East China Normal University, An Action-Oriented Approach to Understanding Social Cognition.
- Jing He, Knowledge and Action Lab, East China Normal University, The pragmatic roots of enactive and extended cognition.
- Jean-Michel Roy, Ecole Normale Supérieure Lyon, Defining Cognitive Pragmatism: The Problem Of Concept Pragmatism.

Are we facing the possibility or even the premises of a pragmatist turn in contemporary cognitive science? If so, is it a turn that cognitive science should take indeed? And how should ”cognitive pragmatism” be defined in the first place? These questions are pressing if we take into account the growing number of works that emphasize the theoretical proximities between contemporary post-cognitivist and post-connectionist approaches of cognitive processes (embodied, enactive, extended, embedded cognitive science) on the one hand and classical pragmatist theories, such as Peirce’s, James’, Dewey’s and Mead’s[1] on the other one. Or the fact that Jerry Fodor, one of the main proponents of classical (symbolic-computational) cognitive science, has been considering for more than ten years now what he loosely calls ”pragmatism” as the main challenger to this classical paradigm[2]. Or also the recent pleas for the edification of *neuropragmatism*[3] as a new type of naturalist and situated approach to consciousness, as well as for the development of pragmatist conceptions of intentionality[4] aiming at overcoming classical representationalism and linked to recent developments in the neurosciences of action. All these recent developments clearly make it an urgent task to address the above mentioned issues, considered as the three key constitutive questions of what might be dubbed the problem of the pragmatist turn in cognitive science.

Indeed, the relevance and the correctness of a possible alliance between pragmatism and ”reformist” or even ”revolutionary” cognitive science raises a number of difficulties, as it

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should in particular be made more precise as well as be assessed from a broader historical, philosophical, and epistemological perspective. What are the elements that would enable us to define the resources for a pragmatist turn in contemporary cognitive science, and to define the scope of the research program that would be fostered by that turn? Historically, philosophically, and strategically, may we for instance limit the relevance of pragmatism for contemporary cognitive science to its proximities with current *4E* (embodied, embedded, enactive, extended) approaches to cognition? Would that not be somehow over-simplifying the general framework of classical pragmatist approaches to mental phenomena and thus under-using some of their most original resources for considering cognition and its study? But how could we define these resources in order to make them effective in contemporary cognitive research and debates? The difference between *pragmatic* and *pragmatist* approaches to cognitive processes might also be made clearer[5] : is the explanatory/definitional reference to action for studying cognition necessary or even sufficient for constituting a pragmatist (and not only pragmatic) turn in cognitive science?

The main motivation behind this panel originates in the importance, both for the contemporary philosophy of cognitive science and for the contemporary relevance of the current of philosophical pragmatism, of these questions and of the difficulties they raise. The contributors will seek to provide elements of answers to some of them through the examination of a variety pragmatist authors and theories both past and present.

See for instance Johnson (2006, 2010), Jung (2010), Rockwell (2005), Schulkin (2004), Gallagher (2008), Skagestad (2004), Steiner (2008) and the volume edited by Steiner (2013), including contributions by J.-M. Roy, R.Shusterman, T.Solimosy and J. Shook, T.Rockwell, S.Madelrieux, L.Quéré, J.-P. Cometti, Y.Zhenhua.

See Fodor (2008).

See Solymosi,(2011), and Solymosi and Shook (2014).

See Roy (2010), Gallagher and Miyahara (2012).

See Egginton and Sandbothe (2004), Engel (2010), and Engel, Maye, Kurthen and K'önig (2013).

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