

The pragmatic roots of enactive and extended cognition

Jing He

Knowledge and Action Lab, East China Normal University

Recently developed enactive and extended approaches of cognitive science have different roots. The enactive approach is typically influenced by phenomenology and social biology; while the extended approach is inspired a lot by analytic philosophy of mind and computationalism. However, it is rarely noticed that these two approaches touch on recurrent themes of central importance in pragmatism. More than this, today's enactive and extended cognition characterizes the nature of minds and how they relate to the world in ways that not only echo but fully agree with many of the clear statements of Peirce, Dewey, Mead and other pragmatists.

However, the purpose of my presentation is not to provide a full historical account of the pragmatic anticipation of these recent developments of cognitive science. Rather, I would like to show, on the one hand, that in many respects pragmatism can contribute to and embrace the current debates between these two approaches and enable the elaboration of a more integrated perspective. And on the other hand, since pragmatism has always been a philosophical school aiming at conceptual clarity and empirical responsibility (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: xi), pragmatists can help to read some classical problems in new context and inspiring ways. That is why an alliance between pragmatism and the enactive as well extended approach to cognition should be urgently pushed.

I will proceed in the following way: I will first begin with some brief indication that despite a lack of acknowledgement of the pragmatic roots of enactive and extended cognitive science, it is very clear that some central concepts and important preliminary insights were already discussed by pragmatists like Dewey and Mead a century ago. According to Dewey and Mead, cognition is indeed not just a brain process but should be rather seen as a dynamical regulation between organism and the environment. Secondly, I will then take a closer look at Peirce's foreshadowing of the externalist turn and at Dewey's interpretation of the role of the brain in cognition, as these two points are of particular importance. Thirdly, elaborating on Mead's four stages theory of acting (impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation) and on Peirce's claim that thought is not just expressed in work, it is exceeded in work, I will point to the striking connections between the pragmatists' treatment of cognition and that of the extended approach. Finally, on the basis of the revelation of these shared pragmatic roots, I will argue that we can draw from the fertile resources offered by the pragmatists a more coherent perspective showing that the enactive and the extended approaches are not necessarily in conflict.