

DEFINING COGNITIVE PRAGMATISM: THE PROBLEM OF CONCEPT PRAGMATISM

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Whether Cognitive Science, understood as the effort to build a science of cognitive faculties born with the 1950s Cognitive Revolution (Gardner 1985), is currently undergoing a reorientation towards a pragmatist kind of theory of cognition, as well as whether it should take such a new direction, is a problem catching momentum (Cf. Steiner, P. 2013). And so is the expression of pragmatist turn of cognitive science in order to designate such a reorientation (Cf. Engel, A., 2013).

Obviously, the problem of the pragmatist turn of cognitive science so conceived is centrally dependent on a certain understanding of the notion of a pragmatist theory of cognition, more eloquently referred to as cognitive pragmatism. Accordingly, it also exhumes, although under a more restricted form, a thorny difficulty familiar to the tradition of classical philosophical pragmatism, namely that of the very definition of pragmatism.

As an answer to this difficulty, I have defended in previous work what might be dubbed the hypothesis of the essentiality of action (cf. Roy J.M. 2010). This hypothesis contains in fact several claims : 1/ that it is possible to define cognitive pragmatism and that skepticism in this regard is ill-grounded ; 2/ that a theory of cognition is pragmatist to the very extent that it sees action as essential to cognition ; 3 / that there are various degrees and ways in which to see action as essential to cognition, giving rise to a typology of cognitive pragmatisms ; 4/ that the essentiality of action to cognition defines cognitive pragmatism in the sense that it is a feature that captures its *differentia specifica* ; 5/ that this feature is a necessary and sufficient condition for a theory of cognition to qualify as a cognitive pragmatism, in the spirit of the classical conception of definition ; 6/ that the classical definition it provides is to be taken both descriptively and normatively.

The goal of the presentation will firstly be to offer of this hypothesis a more systematic and developed formulation than the ones it has received so far, articulating in fuller details its several components. And, on the basis of this more thorough reformulation, to then examine to what extent it is challenged by the specific area of concept theorizing. Indeed, it is arguable that the notion of concept pragmatism that has specifically emerged in the study of concepts, in particular in the context of the opposition between the anti-pragmatist position of Jerry Fodor and the pragmatist position of Robert Brandom, points rather towards a definition of pragmatism in terms of knowing how. Accordingly, I will first attempt to determine to what extent it really does. And if so, under what form or forms exactly, as well as how much this understanding of concept pragmatism can be accommodated with a general definition of cognitive pragmatism in terms of essentiality of action. I will show in particular that the key issue is not in fact one of incompatibility, but one of determining whether the idea of knowing how should be counted as an additional ingredient to the *differentia specifica* as captured by the hypothesis of the essentiality of action, through a scrutiny of the evolution of Fodor's criticism of concept pragmatism which contains theoretically revealing hesitations in this regard.

References :

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