“Embodied Cognition and the Causal Roles of the Mental”

Lisa Miracchi (University of Pennsylvania)

Abstract

Embodied cognition theorists who argue that cognition is grounded in, or constituted by, bodily and environmental processes face the challenge of explaining why the body and environment are not merely causally, but constitutively, relevant (Block 2005, Aizawa 2007). This is especially pressing because much of the support for this embodied cognition claim comes from empirical evidence for the causal interrelatedness of bodily, environmental, and neural processes, which at least prima facie could equally support both hypotheses. I provide a novel response to this challenge. Those who pose it typically conceive of cognition as identical to informational states and processes—and thus as having identical causal roles—whereas the embodied cognition theorist should hold that mental states and processes are higher-level kinds whose causal roles cannot be identified with those of any of their constituents. I argue that the view is independently plausible, empirically falsifiable, and plausibly captures the Rylean commitments of many embodied cognition theorists.