
Who Situates Cognition?

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Résumé

Situated cognition highlights the importance of embodied and embedded context for understanding practices and cognitive processes. I argue that what it means for cognition to be situated is downstream from the question of what we want embodiment and embeddedness to amount to, and hence *who* situates cognition. To use a refrain from Haslanger (2000), the question is not only what the body is, but what we want it to be, and who ‘we’ refers to. I argue that theoretical issues about what embodiment and embeddedness are are constrained by practical concerns. Moreover, answers to these questions play out differently for different stakeholders: philosophers, cognitive scientists, and cultural and political actors. First, there are different *motivations* to situate cognition: it avoids limitations of non-situated approaches (e.g., Barsalou, 2009) or is required for social justice (e.g., Young, 1980). Second, it is disputed whether the concepts of embodiment and embeddedness are *concrete* or *abstract*; do they bring our understanding of ourselves closer to, or further away from, the specific details of real world experience? I reject the view that these notions are pseudo-concrete or jargonistic (Carney, 2020), and argue instead that this debate should be resolved in favour of the abstract view. As real abstractions, embodiment and embeddedness can fruitfully guide the various projects of philosophers, cognitive scientists and cultural/political actors (c.f., Vishmidt, 2020). Third, there are different conceptions of what it would mean for the situated approach to *fail*. It fails were it to (i) repeat mistakes of non-situated cognition, (ii) have only limited application, or (iii) generate no novel direction. Recognizing differences between stakeholders on these points-motivations, views of abstraction, and failures to situate-is necessary to avoid stakeholders talking past one another. It also clarifies what is at stake in the project to situate.

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Mots-Clés: situated cognition, embodiment, abstraction