

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-04979-5 - The Body in Mind: Understanding Cognitive Processes

Mark Rowlands

Frontmatter

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In this book, Mark Rowlands challenges the Cartesian view of the mind as a self-contained monadic entity, and offers in its place a radical externalist or environmentalist model of cognitive processes. Cognition is not something done exclusively in the head, but fundamentally something done in the world. Drawing on both evolutionary theory and a detailed examination of the processes involved in perception, memory, thought, and language use, Rowlands argues that cognition is, in part, a process whereby creatures manipulate and exploit relevant objects in their environment. It is not simply an internal process of information processing; equally significantly, it is an external process of information processing. This innovative book provides a foundation for an unorthodox but increasingly popular view of the nature of cognition.

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Understanding cognitive processes

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University College, Cork



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Preface

Philosophy since Kant has been, well, neo-Kantian. Indeed, neo-Kantianism in philosophy arguably predates Kant by a considerable time. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were all neo-Kantians. Kant was a neo-Kantian. Hegel was a neo-Kantian, as was Marx (at least the Marx of the first and second Internationals). Nietzsche, that most professedly anti-Kantian of thinkers, was a neo-Kantian. The linguistic turn in philosophy is essentially a linguistic form of neo-Kantianism. Mainstream twentieth-century philosophy of science has been about as neo-Kantian as you can get. Structuralism is neo-Kantian. And anybody, but anybody, who writes about literary theory is neo-Kantian to their intellectual core. As you might have already gleaned, I am using the expression ‘neo-Kantian’ in a somewhat broad sense. Indeed, the way I am using the expression makes it difficult to imagine anyone who is not neo-Kantian. Neo-Kantianism is the view that there are activities of the mind whose function is to structure the world. At least some aspects of the world that is presented to us, therefore, are mind-dependent in that they depend for their existence or nature on the structuring activities of the mind. The significance of recent strands of thought that have been labelled *externalist*, or *anti-individualist* is that they effectively invert this picture of the relation of mind to world. What is essential to externalism, or, as I shall call it here, *environmentalism*, in all its forms, is the idea that the contents of the mind are, in some sense at least, *worldly*: they are environmentally constituted. This does not, of course, provide a *refutation* of neo-Kantianism, but it does, in effect, turn neo-Kantianism on its head.

This book was written over a period of time that straddled life both in the USA and in Ireland. My philosophical debts incurred on both sides of the Atlantic have been many and large. Colin McGinn first started me thinking about externalism. Max Hocutt helped me realize that commonalities between anti-Cartesian positions were more

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important than the differences. Of a more immediate nature, my thanks to Maeve Crowley, Eoin O’Kelly, and Paul Rothwell who read earlier versions of this book, and to staff and students at University College Cork, Trinity College Dublin, Queen’s University at Belfast, and the University of Ulster at Coleraine where proto-versions of some of the individual chapters were presented. John Post and Pierre Jacob, as readers for Cambridge University Press, made several very useful suggestions which greatly improved the final version. Also at Cambridge, my thanks to Hilary Gaskin for her help and quiet efficiency, and to Gillian Maude for some outstanding copy-editing.

A much earlier version of chapter 5 appeared as ‘Against methodological solipsism: the ecological approach’, in *Philosophical Psychology*, 8, 1, 1995, 1–24. An earlier version of chapter 11 appeared as ‘Teleological semantics’, in *Mind*, 106, 422, 1997, 279–303.

Before his sad and untimely death, Edward Reed was kind enough to read, in its entirety, an earlier version of this book. His suggestions greatly improved the eventual result, particularly with regard to the chapter on memory. An abiding regret is that I never got to meet Ed, and so could not benefit from talking to him as I have benefited from reading him. This book is dedicated to his memory.