Radical Concept Nativism

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Abstract

Radical concept nativism is the thesis that virtually all lexical concepts are innate. Notoriously endorsed by Jerry Fodor (1975, 1981), radical concept nativism has had few supporters. At the same time, it has proven difficult to say exactly what’s wrong with Fodor’s argument. We show that previous responses are inadequate on a number of grounds. Chief among these is that they typically do not achieve sufficient distance from Fodor’s dialectic, and, as a result, they do not illuminate the central question of how new primitive concepts are acquired. To achieve a fully satisfactory response to Fodor’s argument, one has to juxtapose questions about conceptual content with questions about cognitive development. To this end, we formulate a general schema for thinking about how concepts are acquired and then present a detailed illustration.