

Representations, Symbols, Icons, Concepts... And Why There are No *Mental* Representations

Abstract:

One of the key claims in my thesis is that the longstanding arguments over whether concepts are either (mental) representations or (non-representational) abilities gets its premises fundamentally wrong. Concepts must be both. When we reflect on them, they just are representations; but when we possess and employ them non-reflectively then, logically, they must be something else: and here, "non-representational ability" seems the best description.

In order to advance this position, however, I must first be as clear as I can what I mean by representations, either of the iconic or symbolic variety. A major stumbling block to resolving the conflict between the representationalists and the anti-representationalists is that, too often on both sides of the aisle, the term "representation" is used without any attempt at definition. I certainly won't claim my definition to be the correct one, but it is an attempt at clarity and, with respect to how I wish to apply the answer -- because, I think, one must always keep the application in mind -- a step in the right direction!