

Rachel Paine
4EA in "50 new ideas" Special Issue
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4EA

One area that has changed dramatically in the last ten years has been the philosophy of mind. 4EA refers to a collection of views that, while disagreeing over specific details, agree overall that the mind is not a *thing* separable from the body and the world, but a feature of the body and world. While physicalist accounts of mind also hold this view, they founder on a range of problems related to reductionism and further, problematic, dualisms. These, however, are not concerns for 4EA. If you don't pull the mind, the body, and the world apart, then you don't have to worry about how to put them back to together again. 4EA is a positive account of the mind, exploring its richness and complexity, in contrast to the 350-year-old question posed by the need to find a solution to the mind-body problem.

While philosophers working in this area may hold that only some of these are necessary for an account of the mind, 4EA, or the complete set, stands for:

Embodied : Our living body is, in itself, a sentient being. Our subjectivity is constituted by a particular embodied perspective on the world, grasped phenomenologically.

Embedded: We are constituted by our embeddedness in a world of others. The "world" is understood as the cultural world: we do not find ourselves in merely biologically-constituted environments. Although the human perspective is important, work in this area often draws on 'Dynamic Systems' analyses of organisms in natural environments as ways of modelling our embeddedness. Work on cultural identity is also relevant to this account.

Enactive: We co-create our world with others. We are, dynamically, both formed by and forming the world we live in.

Extended: The mind is not “in” the brain or the head, but moves across the boundaries of the body and the world.

Affective: As embodied beings we feel ourselves to be in-a-world-with-others in a way that grounds all other experiences. The ever-present felt qualities of experience mean that we are never neutral in respect to our being, or neutral in respect to the world of which we are a part.

4EA establishes the philosophy of mind as an interdisciplinary area of study, incorporating conceptual analyses, scientific findings, cultural studies, world philosophies, sociology, literature and other art forms, psychology, and artificial intelligence.

After decades of debating what it is we see “inside our heads”, the assumption that we do see inside our heads is itself being questioned: perhaps we don’t really “look inside” and find “redness” or “the taste of soup”. The French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, argues that when we “look inside” we find ourselves in a world. We are constituted by what he calls an “intentional arc” that situates us in a temporal, spatial, and cultural totality. Alongside such conceptual analyses, there is a close link with research into robotics. The work of roboticists, such as Rodney Brooks, coupled with the ideas of ecological psychologists, in particular, the theory of affordances developed by J.J. Gibson, have been useful for understanding “thinking things” as the engagements of whole systems with their environments. On these views, thinking is itself a way of doing things, not added on to, or emergent from, the body, but a *constituent* of a living body engaged in a world.

Apart from resources from other disciplines, there are many philosophical antecedents to this contemporary work: Aristotle’s account of *phronesis*, or practical wisdom, Descartes’s account of the mind-body unit in *The Passions of the Soul*, the Process Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, the analysis of our social practices found in Heidegger, the embodied philosophy of perception of Merleau-Ponty, and the situated ethics of Simone de Beauvoir, to name a few. What is shared by all these approaches is an understanding of

the mind as dynamically constituted through the engagements of the whole person in an interpersonal world.

Already this alternative to mind-body dualism is showing signs of having strong intuitive power and of providing a useful, grounding set of assumptions for understanding other current developments in philosophy, such as sensorimotor theories of perception, particularist ethics, (e.g. Margaret Urban Walker) and political and cultural aesthetics (e.g. Nikolas Kompreides). There are connections here to Posthumanism and Speculative Realism, too. There are a great many resources for 4EA in feminist work done on the primacy of culture, our embodiment and our interpersonal, affective relationships with other. Early works, like Iris Marion Young's classic "Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality", utilising the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir, for instance, can enrich our appreciation of these current developments in embodied and embedded accounts of the mind. There are probably few areas of philosophy on which 4EA will not have some impact as the ideas become more fully integrated into the mainstream.

An important early book is *The Embodied Mind* (1991), F. Varela, E. Thompson and E. Rosh. A contemporary exploration of these ideas can be found in *Reconstructing the Cognitive World* (2005), Michael Wheeler. Extensive exploration of embodiment is found in *The Primacy of Movement* (2011), Maxine Sheets-Johnstone.

Rachel Paine teaches philosophy with the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education and with The London School of Philosophy.

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