

Homuncular Innatism is Incoherent

A Reply to Jackendoff

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If representational systems are necessarily combinatorial systems--as Jackendoff (1991) assumes--then it is impossible for representational systems to exist. The representational atoms (primitives) for any such combinatorial system cannot be created by combinations of other atoms; therefore, they cannot (within the confines of *combinatorialism*) exist at all. Therefore, such a combinatorial system cannot have any base set of atoms, and, therefore, only an *empty* combinatorial space. A strict combinatorialism makes it impossible for representation to come into being, to emerge out of non-representational phenomena, and, therefore, impossible. Period.

Representation clearly did come into being sometime between the big bang and now; therefore, representation--whatever else it is or isn't--is not strictly combinatorial.

Jackendoff passes off the problem of the emergent creation of representational atoms to evolution. But evolution, if it is to solve this problem, must do so in some non-combinatorial manner (on pain of infinite regress or incoherence). If there is some non-combinatorial manner in which representation can emergently come into being--and Jackendoff's account requires that there be--then there is no a priori reason why that manner of emergent creation of representation would not be available in learning and development--for the development of new *non-innate* representational "atoms," for example. Jackendoff assumes that representational systems are combinatorial, but he must also assume that representation is not *necessarily* combinatorial (i.e., in evolution) in order for his system to get off the ground.

In particular, whatever the genetically innate supports may be for the development of language--

and clearly we must begin with *some* innate resources--it cannot be logically necessary that those resources constitute a homuncular innatism, an innatism of already existing (pre-formed) representational atoms ("germs"). If it is logically necessary to already have representation (innate atoms) in order to get representation (combinations of atoms), then it is impossible for representation to exist. More generally, if it is logically necessary to already have X in order to get X--whatever X may be--then X is impossible.

If representational systems are not necessarily combinatorial, then the rest of Jackendoff's argument does not follow. Most particularly, the necessary innatism does not, and can not, follow. More generally, Chomsky and Fodor were, and remain, wrong (Bickard, in press-a, b; Campbell and Bickhard, 1987).

References

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