Foregrounding the Background: Cognitive Science as The Study of Self-Sustaining Embodiments of Context

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Most contemporary cognitive scientists harbor a commitment to either direct- or indirect-realism. Common to both is a correspondence approach to reality and truth that asserts the following: (1) the important thing about reality is its independence of observers, and (2) science is a method that allows one to overcome subjectivity and, as a result, reveal reality’s observer-independent, ‘real,’ intrinsic properties. The present paper proposes that such a correspondence approach to truth and reality is ultimately insufficient. This is because defining reality in terms of observer-independence ultimately privileges human epistemology, and science, and detracts our attention from the more fundamental question of whether or not any phenomenon can exist in a context-independent fashion, as opposed to an observer independent fashion. Focusing on the notion of context independence opens the possibility of conceptualizing organisms as self-sustaining embodiments of context. Doing so, in turn, leads one to a coherence approach to reality and truth—the approach that was popular among idealist and continental philosophers. The present paper fleshes out the differences between coherence and correspondence driven approaches to reality and truth, propose an explanation of why cognitive science came to favor correspondence approaches, describes problems that have arisen in cognitive science because of its commitment to correspondence theorizing, and proposes an alternative framework (i.e., Wild Systems theory—WST) that is inspired by a coherence approach to reality and truth, yet is entirely consistent with science.