Daniel D. Hutto and **Erik Myin**. *Radicalizing Enactivism: Basic Minds without Content*. MIT Press 2012. 232 pp. $39.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780262018548).

In *Radicalizing Enactivism* (RE), Hutto and Myin present compelling arguments for why basic minds do not have content. In particular, they introduce the Hard Problem of Content (HPC), which states that 'informational content is incompatible with explanatory naturalism' (xv). By reviewing a range of theories, the pair demonstrate the futility of attempts to distinguish content from covariance (content is information within a system, whereas a covariant system can be explained purely by way of causal interactions).

However, in spite of these arguments, Hutto and Myin *do not* present a theory of mind that is content-free. Instead, they label a total rejection of content as *really radical enactivism*, which they claim is a bridge too far. They conclude that while basic minds do not have content, highly intelligent minds, such as human minds, *do* trade in content, and that this content is made possible due to our linguistic abilities. This conclusion is the weakest element of RE as it threatens to undermine the early work done in the book. Unfortunately, Hutto and Myin fail to embrace the dilemma that they claim HPC presents: either solve how content arises from covariance (even though it does not seem possible to square this with naturalism) or give up content altogether. In this review I provide both a brief overview of the book and show why this is such a concern.

Once the initial ideas (and numerous acronyms) are laid out in chapter 1, the goal of the book becomes clear: it does not strive to convert cognitive traditionalists to enactivism, instead it attempts to radicalize enactivists further. Less radical enactivism both a) acknowledges the difficulties for content-based theories; and b) emphasizes the importance of world and action in defining cognition; but, c) still places content as a fundamental aspect of cognition (chapter 2). It is this last claim that Hutto and Myin wish to contest.

To do this the pair focus on two common moves that less radical enactivists make in order to avoid the HPC while at the same time attempting to keep a naturalist conception of content. The first is to change the contents of content. Instead of content conceived as properties or features of the world, content is posited as encoded context-dependent actions (Michael Wheeler, *Reconstructing the Cognitive World*, MIT Press, 2005). For example, a ball is not represented as being round, rather it is represented as roll-able, or pick-up-able. The idea of action-oriented representations is a clear example of this (Wheeler, 2005).

The second move made by less radical enactivists in order to avoid the HPC is to change the *vehicle* of content by taking an externalist approach, that is, stating that content is not contained within the mind or brain but that it extends out into the world (see Hilary Putnam, The meaning of 'meaning', *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 1975, 7:131-93). This move is associated with one of the core ideas of enactivist theory: the idea that cognition is *embodied*. Mark Rowlands (*Body Language: Representing in Action*, MIT Press, 2006) employs this approach with his suggestion that bodily positions and series of physical movements can be understood as intentional states (which he calls *deeds*).

However, as Hutto and Myin emphasize throughout the book, the challenge presented by the HPC is not solved by changing the *nature* of content in any way; instead, it is a question of

whether there is *any* type of content at all. In fact, it is a variant of the debate over whether *semantics* can have an effect on the *syntax* of a cognitive system (John Haugeland, *Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea*, MIT Press, 1985). This book presents the contemporary guise of this debate, a guise that can be traced to the work of William Ramsey (*Representation Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press 2007). Ramsey asks what causal role, or extra explanatory power, does one get from positing representations, especially when any account of cognition seems potentially explicable in a purely causal, or correlative way?

To Hutto and Myin there is no extra role that *aboutness* or *meaning* contributes to a causal account. In other words, content *has no physical role to play within a cognitive system*. Modifying the contents of content (to actions) or changing its location (content externalism) fails to provide anything extra to the causal story. This means that standard, garden-variety forms of enactivism *and* traditional computational theories fall on the same sword: the inability to explain content within a naturalistic, causal, framework.

Once this point has been made clear, Hutto and Myin then turn their attention to running down any attempts to 'retreat' from the hard problem (Chapter 5). This is especially focused on countering any appeals to minimal notions of representations, for example those that deny conceptual content (Chapter 6). This work emphasizes how often correlation is confused for content.

With both the beginning and middle of this book taking such a critical position toward content, it seems a simple move to delineate radical enactivism from its less radical cousin. One would expect radical enactivism to be defined by: a) an acknowledgment of the difficulties that content-based theories have; b) an emphasis on the importance of world and action-based cognition, and where the radical form takes hold; and, a denial of c) that there is content involved in cognition. However, the authors do not deny (c). Instead, Hutto and Myin insist that to be a radical enactivist is simply to claim that content is not fundamental to cognition; instead, it is only *linguistic* minds that have content. Here the pair draw a distinction between *basic* minds, which is where most cognitive work is done (for example, moving through the world), and what I label as linguistic minds, which are basic minds plus linguistic practices scaffolded on top (see below). The authors' form of enactivism is radical due to this denial that content is present in all forms of cognition. However, Hutto and Myin make it clear that they are not advocating *really radical enactivism*, which is to claim that there is no content involved in cognition at all (xvii).

To understand why this last minute reprieve for content is made, we must go back to Hutto's earlier work in which he argues that linguistic minds necessarily have content (*Folk Psychological Narratives: The Socio-Cultural Basis of Understanding Reasons*, MIT Press, 2008). Hutto subscribes to the Davidsonian model of language, which involves propositional attitudes, such as believing that it is raining outside, or desiring a piece of cake. These attitudes are contentful because they are *about* things, and since they are about things, they can have a *truth value*. This idea is then used by Hutto to conclude that any language user must have propositional attitudes and therefore content (for a very similar combination of language and cognition see Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again*, MIT Press, 1997). In other words, as language is necessarily propositional, any language user must have propositional states in order to be able perform linguistic tasks.

Where Hutto and Myin diverge from a traditional propositionalist approach (cf. Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, Harvard University Press 1975) is that they insist that linguistic cognition is only possible through social practices. This is predicated on the idea of scaffolding, which is to say that the ability to perform certain actions is necessarily linked to an agent's interaction with, and development alongside, elaborate tools and structures in the agent's environment (Kim Sterelny, Minds: extended or scaffolded? *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 2010, 9(4): 465-81).

However, with all this questioning of content, how can we be sure that linguistic practices give content? Consider that Hutto and Myin do not explain how linguistic practices that give content differ from other social practices that do not. For example, learning to use utensils to eat (forks in some cultures and chopsticks in others) is a social practice, but not one that appears to generate content. Just as claims that content is based in action fail to solve the concerns of the HPC, the idea of scaffolding fails in a similar way (in spite of fitting in with an evolutionary understanding of development). It does not actually answer the question of how content distinguishes itself from covariance because it does not elucidate the crucial transitional step. Even if we follow the Davidsonian approach, the idea that language is propositional is not validated by the claim that language arises due to social practices, and vice versa.

According to their own argument, Hutto and Myin need to provide a plausible naturalistic account of the transitional step from covariance to content, but the notion of scaffolding does not do this work for them. At best, Hutto and Myin's appeal to language being contentful could be seen as falling back on the Default Linguistic Mind (as opposed to the Default Internal Mind, see 137). This position relies on the common assumption that content is involved in linguistic cognitive practices.

With this assumption exposed, we can see how Hutto and Myin's own critical assessment of content undermines their conclusion. Hutto and Myin's positing of content is puzzling because their overall position relies so heavily on showing that content does not easily emerge from within a naturalistic framework (if at all). Moreover, it undermines their critique of other appeals to content: if radical enactivism can simply ignore the HPC when it is convenient, then surely any other theory can too. The insistence that language must involve content is no different from the insistence that basic minds must involve content if neither side is backed by an account of how content arises (see Nikolai Alksnis, A Dilemma or a Challenge? Assessing the All-star Team in a Wider Context, *Philosophia*, 2015, 43(3): 669-85).

All this said, the authors must be commended for their efforts; in particular, their studious analysis of the various ways content has been changed in response to the HPC. Their work leaves very few alternatives unexamined and is dedicated to showing why these alternatives fail. The main criticism of this book is that the authors fail to meet their own high standards. If *Radicalizing Enactivism* were to meet these rigorous standards, I suspect this book would in fact conclude by rejecting content altogether. Their move to preserve content seems more like a traditional philosophy of language reflex, rather than a thoroughly thought-out position. Only by removing this reflex does this book become a truly radical work.

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