

PSYCO 354 Quiz 5

Define the term 'affordance'. Why is this term important to cognitive science?

Name:

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The notion of affordance is a critical component of Gibson's (1979) ecological theory of perception. An affordance is a characteristic of the environment that offers an agent a potential action. For example, a pencil offers the affordance of 'graspable'; a set of stairs offers the affordance 'climbable', and so on.

Critically, affordances can only be defined in relation to an agent's embodiment or physical structure. This is because affordances depend not only upon the state of the world, but also upon an agent's ability to act. For instance, a pencil is not graspable to an agent who does not have a hand with an opposable thumb; stairs are not climbable to agents who cannot walk. In short, one can only define affordances by considering both the world and the structure of the agent at the same time. In other words, this means that affordances are a core component of embodied cognitive science.