

Alex Mills and Dominic Halsmer

Asking the question “How?” is an effective initial starting point for the understanding of an interaction, an origination, or the nature of a concept, being, or object. Yet, the true starting point that lies within the question of “How?” is the determination of the basis on which the interactions, originations, and natures will be discussed and evaluated. In the attempt to understand the holistic picture of the way in which biology, psychology, and culture interact to produce religion and the respective expressions, one must first utilize a foundation on which this interaction can be explored. This foundation must be able to incorporate all aspects of science, hard and soft, while also taking into account the culture that allows for religion to manifest itself or be supported. Philosophy is able, to a large extent, to generate a discussion about and around the aforementioned intersection; however, it is severely lacking a methodological approach to the momentous undertaking of understanding the “How?” of this intersection due to its lack of foundation from which topics can be explored methodically and with an increased specificity. The foundation that is suggested is a foundation based on the concept of affordances.

An affordance is defined, simply, as a consequence, or result, of a relationship. In a more complex light, an affordance can be seen as an understanding of (a) relationship(s) via the methodological analysis of the created interactions through both the lens of the physical and metaphysical. The nature of the concept of affordances makes it uniquely equipped to be able to facilitate a discussion between all branches of knowledge. The origination of affordances is ecological, where it was used to understand an organism’s relationship with its environment in the exploration of niches. Biological systems display some of the most complex part-to-part and nested affordances, which is two different methods of generating synergistic dependencies between individual affordances or between layers of affordances. Lastly, one of the most significant aspects of the concept of affordances is the teleological neutrality that it brings. This neutrality is derived from the implication of an ability and not dictating a specific purpose of the relationships, and so, allowing for culturally influenced perceptions to influence the metaphysical interpretations of the complex and extensive affordance structure that is prevalent throughout all of nature and humanity itself.

Thus, in order to accurately and completely depict the strength of an affordance-based approach, its validity will be established in the field of ecological psychology. Its usage will then be extended to include the understanding of biological niches through the discussion of reverse engineering. Lastly, a discussion will delve into the varying ways that affordances can be interpreted and used to create differing religious views, or a lack thereof. The use of the concept of affordances has a multi-faceted potential to generate a variety of intellectual conversations in the discussion of concepts unable to be explored on similar grounds, the fruit of which is boundless