the nature of cognition

Where is cognition in a complex system? Many of us would agree that the human nervous system is a complex system in which cognition serves as an inherent property. Beyond that foundational claim, there are almost as many interpretations as there are cognitive scientists. Should we define cognition by a list of skills that are performed uniquely by humans? Do cognitive processes require a material substrate capable of representation and computation? Should we limit cognition to individual elements (humans, the nervous system, neurons) or does cognition exist at a system (social, economic) level? Recently, philosophers have pushed the system level interpretation by suggesting that cognition is a property of the entire system, comprising animal and environment. Here, we might assume that the pad of paper on which we solve problems and record reminders is similarly cognitive. So what is the nature of cognition and where is it located? Each of us have opinions about this topic that, even when unaddressed, shape our research and theory development. Let’s share ideas.

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