

Notes on Thompson, Mind in Life

37: autonomous system: self-determining: behaves as self-organizing unit in interacting with environment. Behaves relative to its own values. Paradigm is conversation. Coupling of dynamics of environment and system. Sometimes system seeks homeostasis, but sometimes growth and flourishing (especially so for humans in social-cultural interactions).

Heteronomous system is programmed in advance so that deviations from programming are errors. Paradigm is command, instruction.

43: dynamic systems: continuous change: rates, periods, durations, synchronies. Coevolution of imbricated processes of acting, perceiving, imagining, feeling, thinking. Always already ongoing processes that are being modulated by coupling with environment.

43: autonomous systems: endogenous, self-organizing, self-controlling, determining what matters to them ("determine their cognitive domain").

44: generic notion of autonomy: constitutive processes are 1) recursively inter-dependent network; 2) forming a unity of response and maintenance; 3) determine possible interactions with environment (Spinoza: "what a body can do"). The simplest physical paradigm instance is cell = autopoiesis ("self-making") with its membrane-metabolism recursivity. However, the ant colony is an autonomous social network.

45: top-down focus on logical recursive relations of operational closure and structural coupling.

46: bottom-up focus on thermodynamics of instantiation in physical world (membrane / metabolism).

47: nervous system links sensation and movement (cf. Keijzer's article on evolution of "skin-brain")

49: other forms of self-hood: immune system (monitoring network activities, not detection of "alien" particles). Cellular, somatic, sensorimotor, neurocognitive: "organism as meshwork of selfless selves."

51: information is "meaning," that is, context-dependent and agent-relative – coupling of system and environment.

52: contrast with context-independent notion of information in representations or internal structures encoding neutral states of the world that are then processed internally.

53: connection with LFB's predictive processing: "assemblies of neurons make sense of stimulation ... function of how brain's endogenous and nonlinear activity compensates for sensory perturbation."

56: critique of "coding" metaphor for DNA / RNA / protein synthesis: "abbreviating a lengthy but remarkably stable dynamic pattern of biochemical events." "Coding" substitutes a clean and direct informational command image for an interactive network of chromosomes, RNA, ribosome, folding all of which are related to cell position and so on which trigger and control gene expression and cell differentiation, which are highlighted when you take a developmentalist approach. So DNA doesn't "have" information qua command; DNA is part of a network that produces "information" qua organism-level or emergent meaning.

Rather than DNA commanding the cell (a heteronomy perspective) we have "dynamic co-emergence." For me, this is secret of French "post-structuralism" – difference precedes identity, or actual (better, intensive) identity is emergent from field of virtual (patterns of processes) differences.

223: have to go beyond dichotomy of hard problem: interior cness as 1st person qualia vs life as objective function seen from 3rd person.

225: mind in life continuity: interiority of life as selfhood and sense-making is precursor to interiority of consciousness. There's no "exteriority" of function as meaning and normativity (what organism should do for its survival / flourishing) arrives in dynamic coupling of organism and its enacted world. Thompson's slogan: mind is an event arising in brain, body, world interaction. It's not located in the brain.

226: Aristotle's psyche as capacity of organism for meaningful activity (vegetative, sensory, rational) vs Cartesian substance dualism of thinking and extended substance. Descartes begins with 1st person perspective however, which was missing from Aristotle's psyche, which is accessed by 3rd person scientific description.

229: Maine de Biran: feeling of existence of the "I" from feeling of effort in movement.

231: Körper / Leib helps defeat zombie argument, which depends on divorcing experience from behavior. Körper = physical living body / Leib = subjectively lived body. But these are interdependent: you can't physically move with subjectively experienced proprioception in feedback with movement (Husserl).

234: we can also critique "problem of other minds" via empathy's role in selfhood: "sensorimotor and affective coupling of our lived bodies as well as our mutual imaginative exchange of cognitive and emotional perspective" (see chapter 13).

235: body-body problem: Körper / Leib are phenomenological perspectives – ways our body is disclosed. But K / L is not sufficient.

236: how to describe emergence of living subjectivity from living being. Let's distinguish morphology from lived dynamics (flow of intentions and experience). No gap from physical body to morphological living body; but there does seem to be a gap between living body and lived body.

237: lived body (experience) is a "dynamic condition" or a "performance" of the living body. Experience is enacted in living: we need to integrate phenomenology of experience (lived body) and biology of organism (living body).

243: 3 modes of mind that all interact: organismic self-regulation in relation to physico-chemical processes, sensorimotor coupling with the world, interpersonal experience. Brain is essential for these, but is not the seat or location of mind. Quoting Hurley, mind is a "dynamic singularity" in patterns of interactive social – somatic processes.

245-47: Merleau-Ponty lived body subject; Gibson's affordances; body as an implicit "I can" – this has been criticized by feminist and disability theorists.

249: Gallagher body schema vs body image; Zahavi and pre-reflective bodily self-awareness (not intentional object, bcs that risks infinite regress).

260: sensorimotor theory needs autonomous agency perspective.