

Toward Empirical Investigation of the Self: Reframing the Dynamics of Emotion and Consciousness as a System of Systems Processes

As Dennett pointed out, the self cannot be found in neural pathways. While neuroscience may be able to provide explanations of consciousness, a description of consciousness comes from the level of subjective experience where empirical study is notoriously difficult. A view of subjective experience as a system of processes makes empirical research possible and provides a framework for the application of findings from the level of neuroscience/neurobiology. This paper sketches a view of consciousness and emotion from a systems perspective using findings and theories from neuroscience (Freeman, Ramachandran, Damasio). First, hierarchy theory is applied to delineate the focus of study: the self. Next, a series of questions from Banathy's three "lenses" for developing a systems view of human systems is applied to subjective experience and its components, using consciousness and emotion as examples. What emerges is the beginning of a model for grounded, empirical study that is situated between and integrates the explanatory level of neurobiology and the level of significance of the social environment. From this perspective, emotion is seen as intentional action (as described by Freeman, W.) and as an indicator of one's level of awareness or attention in any given moment of space/time. Finally, the paper describes how the self and consciousness are a system of processes that emerge from a system of processes, and how the development of Troncale's system of system processes can provide a framework for integrating diverse findings from neuroscience, cognitive science, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and more.

self; neurodynamics; systems; emotion; self-consciousness; emergence; hierarchy; self-organization; attention; emergence; first-person; reduction; constraint; system of systems processes; consciousness