
The Dynamics of Inquiry

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Abstract

Recent work from primatology (Michael Tomasello), anthropology (Terrence Deacon), and neuroscience (Jay Schulkin, and Deacon) has drawn from pragmatism in both its classical and contemporary forms. In many regards, this recent work is focused on the nature of cognition and inquiry. What is lacking in the primatological perspective of Tomasello is the rich insights from anthropology and neuroscience provided by Deacon. Yet what is lacking in Deacon is offered by Schulkin, particularly his work on the regulatory mechanism of allostasis. Furthermore, Schulkin opens the door to the insights of John Dewey whom Tomasello and Deacon both neglect.

Tomasello and Deacon are clearly and rigorously evolutionary thinkers, sensitive to the dangers of Cartesianism still creeping about in much contemporary cognitive science. Both Tomasello and Deacon recognize the necessary shift in perspective from a sensory-motor reflex arc to a dynamic circuit of engaging processes. In the case of Tomasello, the evolutionary perspective on the instrumental rationality he advocates in what he calls individual intentionality (which sets the evolutionary stage for shared intentionality in his "shared intentionality hypothesis") only begins with the great apes. In the case of Deacon, the evolutionary perspective goes far deeper: all the way to thermodynamics. Despite the vast difference in scope, both thinkers maintain an iota of Cartesianism in their discussions of representationism, as well as an inadequate (if not entirely absent) appreciation of the aesthetic in inquiry.

Schulkin's work provides an integral means of bridging Dewey's aesthetics and instrumentalism with the work of Tomasello and of Deacon. Both Tomasello and Deacon emphasize the role of homeostasis as a regulatory mechanism, particularly in the dynamics of an organism's interaction with its environment. Yet, as Schulkin has indicated, homeostasis is a fixed regulatory mechanism incapable of the creativity and novelty indicative of evolutionary transition – which Tomasello and Deacon nevertheless value. In other words, homeostasis seeks to re-established a previously set equilibrium (e.g., body temperature). Whereas allostasis can. Where homeostasis seeks a return to the old, allostasis seeks to establish a new equilibrium. Indeed, as Schulkin notes, allostasis is an integral process that helps biologically undergird the aesthetic experience of anticipation and consummation.

Tomasello has recognized the import of creativity and abduction in the evolution of thinking. However, he makes no reference to the aesthetic. Mark Tschaepé has argued that a key component to understanding abduction is the *creative moment of scientific apprehension* – a moment that is thoroughly aesthetic. Elsewhere, Tschaepé has expanded upon Schulkin's conception of allostasis, developing "philosophical allostasis" as opposed to "philosophical homeostasis" – that is, the deliberate innovation in science and philosophy that is inherently creative and seeks to expand our conscious horizons in an effort to resolve problematic situations at the human level in novel ways, whereas philosophical homeostasis seeks to use the

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same old ideas in the same old ways.

An appropriate example of the difference between philosophical allostasis and homeostasis is the lingering use of representation by Tomasello, Deacon, and Schulkin. While each scientist is sensitive to the dangers of Cartesianism, they nevertheless maintain a strong division between mind and world in their continued use of the word, "representation." I have argued elsewhere that inquiry into the nature of mental activity would be much improved if we abandon the word in favor of "affordance." In drawing on the work of Tomasello, Deacon, Schulkin, and Tschaepe, I aim to develop further this suggestion. In doing so, I also further elaborate upon a metaphorical model for thinking about the nature of consciousness, namely that instead of thinking of consciousness as digestion (cf. John Searle) or of consciousness as dancing (cf. Alva Noé), we are better off thinking about human consciousness as cooking. This model has a clearly Deweyan heritage yet it also has strong affinities with the approaches of Tomasello and Deacon. In connecting these similar but different perspectives, I aim to sketch the dynamics of inquiry in contemporary scientific garb.

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