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Editorial

These are exciting times to work on consciousness. Not only because it is now an established area of research, which it hasn't always been, but because this research field is essentially interdisciplinary, integrating the various traditions in philosophy with psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, biology, physics, and psychiatry. This is reflected not only by this successful journal, but also, of course, in numerous conferences and other publications. And today, researchers from these various disciplines work together on smaller or greater interdisciplinary projects. I myself, as a philosopher, find this very rewarding — to learn about all this important empirical stuff, to appreciate the ingenuity with which scientists devise their experiments to approach consciousness from various angles, and to try to interpret their findings correctly in order to integrate them into a philosophical theory. This is a big challenge, if only because it is difficult to keep track of all the new results that are constantly produced by researchers in these sciences of the mind.

Evan Thompson has set himself this task and succeeded to integrate, in his monumental book *Mind in Life*, a rich body of empirical work on consciousness with both the analytic and phenomenological traditions in philosophy, and especially the philosophy of biology. These are the main resources he draws on to approach the 'hard problem' of consciousness head-on, i.e. to make progress on closing the 'explanatory gap' between consciousness and the physical. He has not closed it, mind you, and does not even claim that he has done so. But after having read *Mind in Life* you are left with the feeling that progress is being made, that you have learned how these different strands can be integrated into a coherent whole, and you see things in a different light — even if you don't agree with every one of the book's

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claims and analyses. I take it that, overall, that's the attitude with which the contributors to this *Special Issue* have approached the numerous topics from their individual angles.

This editorial is not supposed to be itself a commentary, but let me elaborate some more on the main message of *Mind in Life* to set the stage for the deeper analyses of the contributors. *The Embodied Mind*, co-authored with Francisco Varela and Eleanor Rosch in 1991, promoted a paradigm shift in the cognitive sciences towards an enactive, embodied, and embedded cognitive science — against the prevailing cognitivism and computer model of the mind. According to the 'enactive approach', cognition is constituted by an animals' dynamic exercise of situated and embodied action in its environment. The central idea is that cognition (and perception in particular) is not something that happens to us, but rather something that we do. Creatures with mental capacities bring forth their own cognitive domains through successful sensorimotor coupling with the environment. Consequently, it is claimed that conscious experience does not merely supervene on brain processes; its basis includes embodied sensorimotor capacities as well as the environment, i.e. brain, body and world. Ever since, many others have joined this movement and contributed to a better understanding of how mind/brain, body and world fit together and produce conscious cognition. Consequently, there are various (more or less extreme) ways to develop the basic idea of enactivism, with different implications for the interpretation of many aspects of the mental (see the contributions by Dennett, Hutto, and Wheeler in this volume), and with different relations to the various traditional views it is intended to overcome. Whether the view promoted by Thompson in *Mind in Life* indeed runs counter to most mainstream ideas, and whether it is as revolutionary and radical as most defenders of the enactive approach want to make us believe, remains to be seen (see Dennett's and Van Gulick's contributions). What these debates show is that there is still a lot of work to be done to clarify even the basic terms used in the cognitive sciences today, as, for example, the use of the notorious notion of 'representation' (Foglia and Grush, Hutto, Newen, and Wheeler pick up this issue). There is no question that *Mind in Life* makes an invaluable contribution to our understanding of consciousness, and I am sure that this special issue does so, especially since it provides a platform for many friends and foes of enactivism to clarify and develop their positions further.

The topics covered include the role played by the body in the making of consciousness (see Siewert's essay), phenomena like pre-reflexive consciousness of body and self, mental imagery (see also

Foglia and Grush, this volume), time consciousness, and empathy. Thompson's analyses of these phenomena are based upon his claim that there is a deep continuity of mind and life, such that the organizational properties of mind are an enriched version of those characteristic of life — a central claim picked up by Newen, Protevi, and Wheeler, especially. The notion of 'life' thus plays a central role in his explanation of consciousness, since according to the deep continuity thesis, being a living system is enough to be a cognitive system (see also Dennett's contribution). Autonomous biological systems, the smallest being a single cell, are self-organizing systems that cause and maintain their own identity by producing the boundary that sets them apart from the environment. Since this characterization of living systems in terms of an autopoietic organization, Thompson maintains, can also be understood as constituting the most basic biological form of intentionality and cognition, it is the first step towards a naturalization of consciousness and intentionality. Therefore, he devotes a huge amount of energy to use developmental systems theory, the theory of autopoiesis, and other resources to build a bridge from the philosophy of the organism to the philosophy of mind (see also Oyama, this volume).

Yet, despite his attempt to make progress on the project of naturalizing the mind, Thompson also defends, following Kant's and Husserl's lead, a transcendental stance on consciousness, according to which consciousness is always already presupposed as a condition of possibility for the disclosure of objects (*Mind in Life*, p. 86). Thus, naturalization is not to be understood here in a reductive sense, but seems to boil down to the goal of developing a relation between phenomenology and the empirical sciences of the mind that is characterized by 'mutual enlightenment'. That is, phenomenology — understood as a transcendental science of consciousness — and the cognitive neurosciences should inform each other productively, each pursuing completely different goals (see the papers by Newen and Zahavi, this volume).

The preparation of this issue started in the fall of 2008 when I approached Evan with the idea to assemble several authors for a discussion of his book in *Psyche*, the online journal of the *Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness*. First, I want to thank Evan for spontaneously agreeing to do it and for all the effort he put into this, not only by providing the précis and replies. He supported the project at all times in numerous ways, also when it was clear that *Psyche* would be closed. Naturally, the next person to thank is Anthony Freeman and his colleagues at Imprint Academic, who offered to publish

the symposium as a special issue of *JCS*, which you are holding in your hand right now. Without their support, this edition would not have been possible. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the commentators who devoted so much time and effort in the preparation of their critical as well as sympathetic commentaries on Evan's work. This lively debate covers many important issues and I hope that it finds many interested readers who benefit from it.