

Twitter Thread by Zena Hitz

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@zenahitz



Before some so-called Events intervened, @MCHammer and I had agreed to talk about 1. the nature of consciousness and 2. the value of thinking. (I will later put up a thread about planaria, the beautiful animals that started off the conversation!)

.@zenahitz we shall pick up where we left off before being rudely distracted by purveyors of untruths and non truths ..
Peace within is a worthwhile journey. <https://t.co/UQPp1c8ytr>

— MC HAMMER (@MCHammer) January 8, 2021

@radekvana argues here that new discoveries about the two-way relationship between microorganisms and brain function should change the way we think about organisms and consciousness.

<https://t.co/ZFU8eXDwxH>

(Caveat: I am not a biologist or a philosopher of mind, so I welcome more expert interventions in the thread.) But here is how I see it. It is amazing to think that whole organisms (bacteria) may be a crucial part of human cognition and perception.

The difficulty I see with the piece is that its challenges to the notion of organism (early in the piece, where he argues that we are holobionts) don't seem to work. The mystery of consciousness-- and life-- is not just reactivity and flexibility.

There is a *unity* to my consciousness, just as there is a unity to my life. On the latter: when I lose consciousness, or die, do my gut bacteria change? Not necessarily, I'd guess. Nor am I persuaded that a single organism's life or death is a "spectrum".

One may be alive without being fully conscious, and while lacking certain functions, but that does not change the fact that death is a single event. Likewise, my full consciousness belongs to that same body, that same person, whose consciousness was once limited. *I* wake up.

To me the great gift of Aristotle's philosophy is the difference between on the one hand, parts, material conditions, and tools of living things (matter); and the whole being that governs the use of those things on the other (form).

A certain friend (who may reveal herself) sliced her Achilles tendon as a child. A nearby muscle moved in and took over the Achilles function! It is events like these that are the wonder of biology.

These cases show us that material parts are not autonomous. They are subordinate to large-scale functioning. So, for human consciousness: While I find it exciting and delightful to learn that its material conditions involve much more than the brain...

(and it makes me wonder about the way a body perceives) ...the real question for me is: Where does the unity come from?? How is it that *I* feel my stomach grumble, pain in my finger, and anger when I don't get what I want?

The article describes consciousness as flexibility in responding to problems. But what is a problem? A problem for a part could be a benefit for a whole; the problem for a whole could be a benefit for a part.

The notion of problem assumes the existence of a being with a good, that flourishes or suffers. So consciousness is bound to the unity of an organism, of a living thing with an autonomous good. Without an account of that unity, we haven't gotten what we were looking for.

Hope that's enough to start the conversation! Delighted to talk about the deep stuff with people of all walks of life. That's what it's all about, in my book!