

Self, Mind and Social Institutions as Complex Emergent Phenomena *sans* Intention

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Abstract

Recent developments in complexity theory point to the possibility of self, mind, and social institutions as emergent phenomena arising from micro-level interactions among observable physical elements with known or knowable properties. In light of recent research, perhaps the physical properties of the human body also emerge from, and therefore depend on, its microbiome. Proposals to see a human body as an organization, along the lines of anthills, rather than a single biological individual is gaining traction. The idea of self as an emergent property for the purpose of awareness, control, self-governance and coordination with others is taking a more concrete shape. The complexity framework, along with the findings regarding malleability of intention, raise questions about value of the dominant preferences-and-choice paradigm in economics and social sciences. Instead of deriving macro-level properties of social systems from optimized choices by strategic and intentional agents, we consider leveraging the Zero-Intelligence (ZI) paradigm to explore an alternative route to understanding institutional properties. Intention is a useful and appropriate characteristic of individuals, for the sake of imputing accountability and personal responsibility, but not for emergent phenomena. Using examples extracted from multiple disciplines, we highlight value of the proposed synthesis.

Table of Contents

Self, Mind and Social Institutions as Complex Emergent Phenomena *sans* Intention

INTRODUCTION

MEANING AND INTENTION

INTENTION AND AGENCY

MALLEABILITY OF INTENTION

Experimental Vignettes

ZERO-INTELLIGENCE AND INSTITUTIONS

EXAMPLES:

Work-requirement in Medicaid

Complexity of the Healthcare System

Regulatory framework in India

Caste System in India

Sanitation and Olfactory System