

Call for Papers

# Missing the Woods for the Trees: Neglected Aspects of Francisco Varela's Work

To be published as a special issue of *Constructivist Foundations*

Editors: Sebastjan Vörös and Alexander Riegler

Expressions of interest due: 1 August 2016

**Submission deadline for full paper submissions: 1 April 2017**

Send all material to: [submit/at/constructivist.info](mailto:submit@constructivist.info)

In the past three decades, the work of Francisco Varela (1946–2001) has had an enormous impact on current developments in contemporary cognitive science, especially in the field of so-called 4E approaches to cognition. However, Varela's thought was extremely complex and multifaceted, and while some aspects – notably, his contributions to the autopoietic theory of living and the enactivist and embodied conceptions of mind and cognition – have gained widespread acclaim, others have either received significantly less attention or have not been dealt with in sufficient depth. The neglected aspects span various fields and topics, ranging from artificial life and immunology to phenomenology and wisdom traditions, and are intricately connected with the more well-known elements of his work. Such selective treatment of Varela's legacy is highly regrettable, as it not only threatens to miss potentially important insights, but also impoverishes and/or distorts the overall image of Varela's philosophy. In order to counter this trend, this special issue aims to address the more unfamiliar aspects of his work, exploring how they might be put into practice effectively and what concrete implications they may have for various scientific disciplines.

The contributors might find it useful to reflect on the following questions:

- Q1. Are the less well-known aspects of Varela's work still important or have they been ignored for a reason?
- Q2. Which aspects of Varela's work have been unduly neglected in contemporary research, and how has this omission affected the corresponding field and/or discipline?
- Q3. How could the neglected aspects of Varela's work be productively incorporated into contemporary research? What concrete results might they produce?
- Q4. How important is the role of neglected aspects in Varela's overall philosophy? Could these aspects help us obtain a better understanding of the more popular elements of his work (e.g., autopoiesis, enaction, etc.)?

Possible topics include, but are *not* limited to (see also Suggested Reading below):

**T1. Formal systems**

including work in artificial life, artificial intelligence, cellular automata and the calculus for self-reference.

**T2. Biology**

including immunology, perception and color vision, viewing living organisms as dynamic systems, evolution as natural drift, and questions of teleology.

**T3. Phenomenology**

including the shift from naturalization of phenomenology to phenomenologization of nature, investigating the (in)compatibility of phenomenology and natural sciences, as well as practical phenomenology, i.e., the development and implementation of first-person techniques.

**T4. Wisdom traditions**

including enactive approaches to contemplative/meditative techniques, the relationship between enactivism, phenomenology, and wisdom traditions, as well as Buddhist philosophy.

## Article submissions

The special issue will be organized around a number of target articles followed by open peer commentaries (OPCs). Expressions of interest to submit a target article, **including a short abstract**, should reach us by 1 August 2016. If your proposal is accepted, submission of the full paper (in English) is due 1 April 2017, followed by a double-blind review. In the case of conditional acceptance, sufficient time will be allocated for the revisions requested. **Target articles should not exceed 9000 words.** The special issue will be published in November 2017 in *Constructivist Foundations*, a print and online open-access journal indexed in Web of Science, Scopus and other citation indices. Submission of papers is free of charge. Each author will receive a complimentary print copy of the special issue.

Please use the Word template with the author guidelines to be found at <http://submit.constructivist.info/template.doc>

Declarations of interests, paper submissions, and all inquiries should be sent by e-mail to the editors at: [submit@constructivist.info](mailto:submit@constructivist.info)

For further information about this special issue, see: <http://constructivist.info/special/varela>

## Timetable

- 1 August 2016 expressions of interest (*with short abstract*)
- 1 April 2017 deadline for paper submissions
- 15 July 2017 deadline for revised papers
- 1 October 2017 deadline for OPCs
- 15 November 2017 publication date

## Suggested Reading

- Bacigalupo J. & Palacios A. G. (eds.) (2003) A Tribute to Francisco Varela (1946–2001) *Biological Research* 36(1).
- Bopry J. & Brier S. (eds.) (2001) Francisco J. Varela (1946–2001). *Cybernetics and Human Knowing* 9(2).
- Depraz N., Varela F. J. & Vermersch P. (eds.) (2003) On becoming aware: A pragmatics of experiencing. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Froese T. (2011) From second-order cybernetics to enactive cognitive science: Varela's turn from epistemology to phenomenology. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 28: 631–645. <http://cepa.info/abs/449>
- Maturana H. R. & Varela F. J. (1980) *Autopoiesis and cognition: The realization of the living*. Reidel, Boston.
- Maturana H. R. & Varela F. J. (1987) *The tree of knowledge: The biological roots of human understanding*. Shambhala, Boston.
- Petitmengin C. (ed.) (2009) *Ten years of viewing from within: the legacy of Francisco Varela*. Imprint Academic, Exeter UK.
- Rudrauf D., Lutz A., Cosmelli D., Lachaux J. P. & Le Van Quyen M. (2003) From autopoiesis to neurophenomenology: Francisco Varela's exploration of the biophysics of being. *Biological Research* 36: 27–65. <http://cepa.info/1140>
- Thompson E. (2004) Life and mind: From autopoiesis to neurophenomenology. A tribute to Francisco Varela. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 3: 381–398. <http://cepa.info/1137>
- Varela F. J. (1979) *Principles of biological autonomy*. Elsevier/North-Holland, New York.
- Varela F. J. (1984) The creative circle. Sketches on the natural history of circularity. In: Watzlawick P. (ed.) *The invented reality: Contributions to constructivism*. W. W. Norton, New York: 309–325. <http://cepa.info/2089>
- Varela F. J. (1986) Laying down a path in walking: A biologist's look at a new biology. *Cybernetic* 2: 6–15. <http://cepa.info/2069>
- Varela F. J. (1996) Neurophenomenology: A methodological remedy to the hard problem. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3(4): 330–349. <http://cepa.info/1893>
- Varela F. J. (1999) *Ethical know-how. Action, wisdom, and cognition*. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA. <http://cepa.info/2119>
- Varela F. J., Maturana H. R. & Uribe R. (1974) Autopoiesis: The organization of living systems, its characterization and a model. *Biosystems* 5(4): 187–196. <http://cepa.info/546>
- Varela F. J. & Shear J. (eds.) (1999) *The view from within: First-person approaches to the study of consciousness*. Imprint Academic, Exeter UK.

## Further resources

<http://cepa.info/author/varela-f>

Francisco Varela's bibliography of 230 publications, many of them as full texts

<http://cepa.info/approach/neurophenomenology>

A bibliography of publications relevant to neurophenomenology

<http://cepa.info/approach/enactivism>

A bibliography of publications relevant to enactivism

## About the journal

Constructivist Foundations is a scholarly peer-reviewed e-journal concerned with the critical interdisciplinary study of constructivist and related approaches to science and philosophy. It is indexed in the ISI Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) and has currently more than 9,000 subscribers.

See <http://constructivist.info> for more information