

The Babylonian Lottery (2)

Douglas Lockhart

If we are not to abandon values such as peace and equality, or our commitments to science and truth, then we must pry these values away from claims about our psychological makeup that are vulnerable to be proven false.

Stephen Pinker

The Blank Slate/The Modern Denial of Human Nature (preface xi)

The man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unhappy but hardly fit for life.

Albert Einstein

A Portrait, p. 37.

The Matrix of Psyche

The relationship between verbal and non-verbal states of mind as conceived by most psychologists and philosophers is that they are incompatible mental states so opposed that meaning can arise in one, but not in the other. But as I hope to show, verbal and non-verbal states do not lie at the opposite ends of a graduated mental spectrum, they are sandwiched together and function not as polar opposites, but as complementary states that weave in and out of one another during all instances of mental and verbal mentation. There is no actual line of demarcation between verbal and non-verbal states, and that even during Paul van Buren's "central plateau thinking" where stale orderliness and flat unimaginative thinking afford little that is creative. We have fallen, I would contend, into a linguistic trap where conscious differentiation as a mode of thinking has pushed the backgrounding influence of psyche (the all pervasive, non-local, undifferentiated underbelly of the conscious mind) to the far end of a theoretical mental spectrum that does not exist in such isolated terms. Which tells us that all meta-mentations (forms of thought involving self, other or world as secondary, objectified acts of attention) are embedded in cognitive-mentations (instances where we relate to ourselves as living organisms through primary acts of attention), and that the states produced are not isolated one from the other as theory suggests, but are intricately interwoven states where only conscious "realisations" survive to tell the tale. Benny Shanon does not make this mistake, and that in spite of advancing a hierarchy of mental states (Cons 1, 2, 3, etc) that appear to reinforce the standard interpretation of mental events.

Paul van Buren's analysis, in turn, suggests that moments of authentic creativity signal experiences where language clarity shades out towards a non-verbal horizon of mind, but not to the extent of going beyond that horizon. I would contend, however, that moments of authentic creativity have little to do with a mental balancing act on some outer edge of language as Buren posits, more with an interstices mental state where language becomes progressively invisible to itself, but is still operative within the matrix of psyche. Language need not stay overtly "linguistic" within that binding matrix, that is, beholden to a conscious manipulation of signs and symbols. In terms of language being all the way down, isn't it more likely to function as a backgrounding influence "felt" rather than "known"? Which returns us to delicacy of "feeling" as an evaluative tool over against "emotion" as a potentially disruptive force, and to the actual experience of thinking, speaking or writing as a constant dipping into psyche for what has evaded us at the conscious level? Stuff, and lots of it, can certainly be generated out of language, and often is by the more didactic among us, but authentic creativity springs from a different kind of experience as every creative person knows. Don Cupitt makes no allowance for

creativity in this sense; for him a source of knowledge “uncontaminated” by language in the usual sense of language is inconceivable. But “uncontaminated” is a telling word choice; it speaks not of creative possibility but of linguistic limitation, so making all creative breakthroughs no more than a linguistic juggling act at the conscious level. It is the limitations of language that govern mental coherence for Cupitt, mental coherence being by necessity a rigorously held conscious state that must be allowed to govern all acts of cognition. Benny Shanon’s approach is quite different. He believes psyche to be a system of dynamic alternatives, a sharing of content in unexpected combinations, not a static hierarchy with “meaning” isolated in some upper, conscious compartment. Theoretically speaking there is an undifferentiated substrate, a conscious, differentiated level of knowing, and a capacity for conscious reflection and reflection on reflection; but for Shanon these are not separate mental strata; they are an integrated whole where unusual forms of comprehension - sudden inspiration, for instance - can erupt if the experiencer can find the requisite focal intensity.

Whether willing to admit it or not, we are constantly moving in and out of mental focus as we go about our daily business, constantly dipping in and out of psyche as a whole as we talk and think our way through a minute or an hour. It is a matter of here one minute and gone the next, a sliding away from conscious awareness towards a darker, more indeterminate form of awareness where ideas and images slide effortlessly, and opaquely, in and out of combination. In this sense to “think” is to probe into the darkness of the self and arrive back with intimations that may, or may not, be useful. There are no guarantees; just endless possibilities beckoning from a point beyond, or rather “behind”, conscious knowing, that tantalise with their presence as we scan our subjective self for clues. Non-verbal, on the whole, in that we cannot articulate to ourselves what we want to know before we come to know it, but not inconsequential, and certainly not gibberish. More an incoherent mixture of word-bits and image-bits floating in an atmospheric soup of sentience where shards of meaning come and go like phantoms, where memory drips the occasional globule of past thoughts into the mix. Hit and miss. An approach to the needs of self laden with cares, ambitions, hopes and fears that add density to the process, perhaps even intensity if we are searching out some needed perspective that has evaded us. Which makes “focal intensity” the key that opens the door of psyche to itself, a creative state not easily come by given the usual tenor of our thoughts, and the many standard intellectual formations in language that inform those thoughts. Language is undoubtedly our greatest acquisition, our supreme accomplishment as a species, but it is also our greatest weakness (that which contaminates through limitation) as Don Cupitt is well aware. But it is a weakness Cupitt is willing to put up with because he has come to believe that language is ultimately all we have to get ourselves out of strife, and that in spite of the fact that it is the limitations of language that mostly gets us into strife.

In his 1998 book *The Revelation of Being*, Don Cupitt’s postmodernist scheme of things is spelled out in detail, language itself presented as a spiritual experience in that it “gives us the symbolic forms in which we can express ourselves and become ourselves.”¹ Cultural “self-objectification” is what underlies personhood, we are told; everything about us is readable, although often in disguised form.² Without language self-integration would not be possible. Without language thought would not be possible. Without language even creative inspiration would not be possible. Thoughts are words. Everything that “comes to mind” is linguistic; thinking is no more than a waiting on “the formative and word-building power” of language as an all-pervasive, life-giving force.³ Language is like ‘spirit’ in religious parlance; hence the notion of poetic inspiration where language as ‘medium’ reveals our relationship to Being.⁴ Waxing lyrical, and theological, Cupitt conjures into existence a three-in-one relationship between Being and Man, Being and Language, and Man and Language, and by means of this tripartite (trinitarian?) analogy speaks of a “realistic, radical humanist, and semiotic” dance of signs that replaces our nostalgia for old religious certainties.⁵ But note what has happened here: the deeply

formative, and informative, non-verbal element of human experience has been swapped for a purely mechanistic vision of how meaning emerges from words combining and decombining. There is no trace of Shanon's "all-pervasive, non-local, undifferentiated underbelly of the conscious mind" in any of these statements; they are all dead ends in that they disallow the possibility of a deeper, more extended form of mentation. And, equally, there is no trace of Buren's outer-edge of language where "stale-orderliness and flat unimaginative thinking" can turn into creative brilliance. Which suggests to me that Cupitt's deep disenchantment with religious forms has resulted in an equally absolutist humanist program of thought that elevates language to the same level of omnipotence as the God he no longer believes in. I, too, no longer believe in theism's God, but my intellectual and experiential explorations point to Shanon's approach being the more fruitful experimental trajectory.

This is not to deny that without language we would not know who or what we are; it is to argue on behalf of psyche as a whole being more than the conscious mind and what that mind constructs out of its own limited linguistic resources. As a secondary process, language certainly controls interpretative output, but that makes no allowance for psyche as a whole functioning as a deep strata, never-to-be-shed, support mechanism. As a concept, "psyche as a whole" is contentious in terms of how "meaning" emerges from mind, but it is not contentious in terms of unconscious perception and choice of behaviour. As Tor Norretranders inadvertently observes in *The User Illusion, Cutting Consciousness Down to Size*, a massive amount of subliminal activity must be taking place in our heads". Why so? Because "the capacity of consciousness is vastly smaller than our senses."⁶ There is, in other words, a source of comprehension other than that of the conscious mind at work during our daily activities (registration of temperature, oxygen pressure, traffic, etc), and this tells us that "the ingenuity of consciousness consists not of the information it contains but of the information it does not contain."⁷ There is, as Norretranders points out, a "degree of 'wisdom' in the sorting that takes place."⁸ Unconscious forms of mentation in relation to "sentience" inform many of our decisions; without psyche as a whole decisions arrived at by the conscious mind would rest on a flimsy, shallow grasp of reality. The conscious mind, via language, may seem to be in control at all times, but it isn't; we are moving constantly between consciousness *of* self, and consciousness *as* self. Consciousness *as* self is where we relate to ourselves as living organisms through primary acts of attention, consciousness *of* self our objective involvement with self, other or world through secondary acts of attention. We are, in other words, much cleverer than we know, much dumber than we suspect.

Intentionality

We are in fact living on an existential knife's edge and are almost completely unaware of it. If we close our eyes for only a few minutes reverie can quickly carry us towards sleep and dream. Back in 1975 the psychologist E. Hartmann described the mind's capacity for hallucinatory activity as "a ubiquitous and fundamental feature of our mental life."⁹ In fact the crucial question for Hartmann was not why do we dream or hallucinate, it was, rather, "what keeps us from [dreaming and] hallucinating most of the time?"¹⁰ His answer was that an inhibitory influence exerted by the brain in relation to moment by moment cognitive activity was at work.¹¹ Remove sense of objective involvement with self, other or world, and we almost immediately blended back into psyche as a foundational experience. The 19th century psychologist Frederick Myers was of the same opinion, and detected this falling back into psyche in sleep, dream, somnambulism, trance, hysteria, automatism, altered states of consciousness, epilepsy, insanity, and induced states such as narcotism, hypnotic catalepsy and hypnotic somnambulism.¹² We appear to be psychologically stable, but just below the surface of mind lie regions where

almost anything can happen. Post-hypnotic suggestion shows us to be preprogrammable, and emotional and savant levels of intelligence highlight our wide-ranging capacity for exotic inner experience. And that isn't the end of the matter; we also have a capacity for ecstasy, spiritual epiphanies and what might even be latent telepathic and precognitive abilities. Even a good book can transport us!

Dreams, visions and hallucinations are generally about things; as are our thoughts: a fact worth keeping in mind in relation to our moment by moment experience as self-aware beings. In dynamic systems theory, and in neuroscience, “the ‘meaning’ of a given response [by this self] is typically identified with whatever it is in the . . . environment that produces that response”,¹³ a conception of self that changes self-awareness as a supposed primary experience into a secondary experience dependent not on the intentions of a self-aware individual, but on “environment” as sole trigger. According to such thinking we are no more than a response mechanism which, by way of a feedback loop in consciousness, tricks itself into thinking it is a self-aware entity. But as Edward Kelly points out in *Irreducible Mind*, “How can such an account deal with abstract things . . . or non-existent things? Responses do not qualify *ipso facto* as representations, nor signs as symbols. Something essential is being left out.”¹⁴ Kelly then quotes the philosopher John Searle’s view that intentionality of language is secondary to the intrinsic intentionality of mind, and winds up quoting Nietzsche’s remark that one cannot just will, one must will something. Which in turn suggests “something” that wills, something that responds to environment, not simply something brought into existence by way of environment. We are certainly reliant on “world” for existential context and sense of the objective (both Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger thought so), but that is an altogether different proposition from that proposed by the externalist, functionalist philosophical doctrine of mind hatched by dynamic systems theorists and neuroscientists. The very suggestion of a “user” in the system sends them into a tizzy; which makes one wonder where they think their own theories of mind originate, and why they even bother to questions one another’s findings.

According to the linguistic specialist Jordan Zlatev, consciousness must involve sentience, the presence of phenomenal experience for the being that possesses it.¹⁵ Without here-and-now experience, language itself could not exist, so making some deeper form of consciousness (consciousness as a whole) a necessary precondition for language.¹⁶ In alignment with this observation, Zlatev suggests that if “all ‘higher-order’ consciousness [was] based on language . . . then the foundational role of consciousness would not run very deep.”¹⁷ In Zlatev’s scheme consciousness is always to some degree self-aware in a non-thematic way.¹⁸ Which suggests that all meta-mentations (forms of thought involving self, other or world as secondary, objectified acts of attention) are embedded in cognitive-mentations (instances where we relate to ourselves as living organisms through primary acts of attention), and that these states are not isolated one from the other just as Shanon contends. Zlatev goes on to develop a highly sophisticated argument in relation to how all of this works out in human experience, but what concerns us here is his apparent blending of meta-mentations with cognitive-mentations, a factor tantalisingly allowed for by Paul van Buren, but dismissed by Don Cupitt. For Cupitt, the unconscious is by definition a biological substrate lacking coherence in terms of meaning. Zlatev agrees to the extent that this deep substrate cannot be experienced by first-person methods, but in having allowed “sentience” to be an intrinsic part of consciousness, he raises the issue of objective consciousness being an unlikely outcome without an active unconscious element, and in doing so raises the question of what “active” may mean in this context.

The 19th century psychologist William James (1842--1910) went further still, describing perceptual, cognitive, and volitional activity as emanating from “an elusive and mysterious self which [could] often be sensed at or behind the innermost subjective

pole of our ongoing conscious experience.”¹⁹ James defined psychology as a ‘person-centred field’, consciousness as a ‘plurality of states’; an approach that allowed him to question the then emerging “unexamined assumptions of radical materialism”²⁰ that inadvertently chopped consciousness up into bits and rendered language the only force capable of creating order out of perceptual chaos. This very point is made by the transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilber in *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977) where he speaks of linguistic processes that slice up reality and unconsciously introduce “dualisms that we then naively imagine have existed all along.”²¹ Governed as we are by dualistic language, we end up more or less convinced that reality (even our own subjective reality) is similarly constructed. And so “a pernicious violence is unconsciously perpetrated upon nature”²² and we find ourselves conforming to a linguistically constructed version of reality populated by a fictitious matrix of distinctions.²³ Naively unconscious (ignorant) of what our reliance on the logic of language is doing to our world, and to ourselves, we fall into the linguistic trap I mentioned earlier, the trap where conscious differentiation as a mode of thinking pushes the backgrounding influence of psyche as a whole (the all pervasive, non-local, undifferentiated underbelly of the conscious mind) to the far end of a theoretical mental spectrum that does not in fact exist. Henri Bergson remarks on this very state of affairs in *Time and Free Will* (1910), and Dan Zahavi reiterates his comments in his paper "Varieties of Reflection" (2011): “[T]he true life of consciousness cannot be caught in our perceptual network. It will always overflow our artificial demarcations and distinctions.”²⁴ Given their vintage, James and Bergson may seem like unlikely sources of intelligence in a postmodern world, but they were in fact at the cutting edge of questions not yet properly resolved in either psychology or philosophy, and on that basis should not be dismissed as irrelevant.

Truth and Method

This brings us to the question of whether the rich tapestry of conscious life can be explained through an examination of the brain’s physical processes, or whether in attempting to do so we inadvertently embrace a form of reductionism (radical physicalism) that disables our ability to properly evaluate the mind’s causal power.²⁵ Which suggests that physicalism’s “matrix of distinctions” in relation to mind and brain research may actually be fictitious, and that reliance on such a scheme may help perpetrate an intellectual mischief on society. Not wholly fictitious, of course - a fundamental, neurobiological relationship of brain to mind quite obviously exists - but that relationship is questionable in terms of the general philosophy of mind that now deeply affects modern thinking. The physical, mechanical, objective side of nature has come to dominate science, its ongoing precision in describing the processes underlying physical systems translated into an attitude housing assumptions about self, other and world that reduce human beings to the level of duped automatons.²⁶ But is this how we experience ourselves? Is this how we really are? To progressively lose sight of ourselves in this way is surely to underestimate our unique capacity for self-scrutiny, a form of reflective awareness over and above object recognition that marks us out as highly unusual creatures. Which leaves us with the problem of deciding with our rational minds if mind is best understood from the bottom up, or from the top down, that is, from the neurobiological perspective, or from the perspective of introspective experience and analysis?²⁷ Should “self” be conceived as something that has thoughts, or would it be more accurate, more honest, to describe self as something constructed out of the experience of having thoughts? And again, what does that mean in terms of the fact that it is this very self that is posing the question? In the final analysis, mind or self may not

be the problem we have to deal with, more the methodology we employ when attempting to unravel this ongoing puzzle.

The mind-body dichotomy is an old problem. In 1879 John Tyndall argued that the ultimate nature of the mind-body relationship was not only unknown, but unknowable,²⁸ and in 1890 William James admitted that mind and brain “hang indubitably together and determine each other’s being, but how or why, no mortal may ever know.”²⁹ T. H. Huxley was less reticent, announcing boldly in 1892 that “so far as observation and experiment go, they teach us that . . . psychical phenomena are dependent on the physical.”³⁰ Huxley’s bravado apart, the 19th century saw the birth of “methodological parallelism”, a neutral approach that allowed researchers to get on with the job of describing psychological processes and forget, or ignore, the issue of how mind and brain related one to the other. By such means was a method constructed that failed to confront the central question, a method that ignored the other contradictory, non-ordinary aspects of human experience identified by Frederick Myers.³¹ Wishing to be recognised as a “science”, 19th century psychology sidestepped the problem of questioning the world view derived from the physical sciences, and in Edward Kelly’s words “avoided the theoretical problems that psychological phenomena alone raised.”³² So was born modern psychology, a form of thinking described in 1961 by the psychologist S. Koch in these telling words.

. . . as an independent science, psychology has been far more concerned with being a science than with courageous and self-determining confrontations with its historically constituted subject matter. Its history has been largely a matter of emulating the methods, forms and symbols of the established sciences, especially physics. In so doing, there has been an inevitable tendency to retreat from broad and intensely significant ranges of its subject matter, and to form rationales for so doing which could only invite further retreat.³³

The problem that arose at this point was that those questioning this physics-based paradigm were portrayed as pseudo-scientific and dismissed as irrational. Why so? Because those holding such contrary views were predominantly members of *The Society for Psychical Research* (S.P.R.) and presumed to be advocating a return to magico-religious beliefs with an occult twist.³⁴ As these dissenters included august figures such as Arthur and Gerald Balfour, W. F. Barrett, W. E. Gladstone, Sir Oliver Lodge, Lord Rayleigh, John Ruskin, F. C. S. Shiller, Henry Sidgwick, Eleanor Sidgwick, Balfour Stewart, Lord Tennyson, J. J. Thomson and Frederick Myers, the accusation of irrationality was not well founded. But it stuck, and the reason it stuck was because the S.P.R.’s most active investigator, Frederick Myers, did what few psychologists were willing to do, deal critically with the religious and psychological anomalies of human experience. Myers has been criticised for his interest in the possibility of post-mortem survival, but given that such a question has dominated life on this planet for as far back as anyone can remember, and concerns the crucial question of how mind relates to body, the rejection of Myers as a serious researcher had more to do with the advent of methodological parallelism than it had to do with properly conducted science. The notion that mind was no more than the byproduct of elementary material processes was in full swing, anyone suggesting otherwise viewed as scientifically naive.

A similar methodological disregard arose in relation to the human will, an approach based on John Stuart Mill’s *Logic* and David Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature* where, as Hans-Georg Gadamer reports in *Truth and Method*, Mill sought “to

outline the possibility of applying inductive logic to the ‘moral sciences’.”³⁵ This was an attempt to “establish similarities, regularities, and conformities to law which would make it possible to predict individual phenomena and processes.”³⁶ It hardly mattered if one believed in freedom of the will or not, all that mattered was the quantity of data available; it was hard data that governed sensible prediction, not metaphysical assumptions. A universal rule was now presumed to exist within concrete phenomena, and historical research should attempt to establish and extend that underlying rule. Gadamer did not agree. He tells us bluntly that “historical research does not endeavour to grasp . . . concrete phenomena as an instance of a universal rule”, and that even in the case of their being detectable experiential universals.³⁷ The ideal of historical research for Gadamer is not confirmation of law, it is the attempt to “understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness.”³⁸ Historical research may appear inexact in terms of scientific procedure, but “exactness” is not what history reaches for; there is the more important factor of *humane* significance.³⁹ In this sense “humane significance” is not something one calculates; it is something one appreciates. Humane significance is humane for very reason that it relates to what is subjectively “human”, and it is this important element that has been all but excised from the modern and postmodern model of what constitutes the mind-body relationship. Inductive logic has its uses in relation to fundamental physical systems, including that of the human body, but it should not be used to the detriment of life as an experience.

This takes us back to the problem of how objective and subjective states of mind relate one to the other, for in making mind an epiphenomenon of the physical brain, science has relegated our sense of sentience to the periphery of human experience and left us all but bereft of an existential core. The significance of being an alive, breathing, thinking, relating human being has all but evaporated in the rational attempt to prove that we are essentially no more than a biofeedback loop. Every trace of 19th-century idealism has been dismissed as irrational, the subjective element in all objective mental events interpreted as an underlying opposition to those events from out of which magico-religious experiences and beliefs can sprout like weeds. In this scheme subjectivity is the opposite of objectivity because conceived in objective terms,⁴⁰ the fundamental coordination between these states being conceptually invisible. And again it is Gadamer who correctly sums up the nature of this problem. “. . . we can certainly examine and analyse [the unity of a living organism] from outside, but can understand only if we go back to its hidden roots”. Then, quoting Husserl’s philosophical objection to Hume’s notion of subjectivity as the opposite pole of objectivity, he adds:

The naiveté of talk about ‘objectivity’ which completely ignores experiencing, knowing subjectivity, subjectivity which performs real, concrete achievements, the naiveté of the scientist concerned with nature, with the world in general, who is blind to the fact that all the truths that he acquires as objective, and the objective world itself that is the substratum in his formulas is his own life construct that has grown within him, is, of course, no longer possible, when life comes on the scene.⁴¹

In this context “life” is used to express the whole of existence as an experience, an experience that includes people and their involvement with one another. Which, in similar terms to my extension of “humane significance” to include what is subjectively human, also identifies life with the subjective domain, a domain of mind described by Gadamer as a “primal I” (*Ur-Ich*) on which the conscious mind as “inquiring I” is dependent for its capacity to objectify self, other and world.⁴² So is this William James’ elusive and

mysterious self which could be sensed at or behind the innermost subjective pole of our ongoing conscious experience? Is this hidden self an atemporal zone of awareness where “intentionality” takes on a new, deeper significance? A “life” is simultaneously historical and subjectively personal, a realm within which an elaborate tapestry of events take place and experiences are had. But as noted above, it is more than that: it is also that from out of which objectivity emerges.⁴³ Human subjectivity is not merely that within which objectivity is housed; it is that without which objectivity cannot arise. Which returns us to a previous statement: subjectivity should not be conceived as an opposite pole to objectivity; that is to conceive of subjectivity in limited objective terms and inadvertently disable it. Hence the problem of trying to deal with verbal and non-verbal categories of mind. Non-verbal experience, as suggested earlier, does not lie at the opposite end of some graduated mental spectrum, it is an enmeshed condition of psyche where language as an integral component of mind constantly attempts, in relation to intentionality, to transcend its own limitations. Why so? Because language’s inbuilt limitations automatically cause an ongoing questioning of self, other or world to occur, and that questioning is deeply related to, and perhaps even responsible for, psychological and physical health.

Perspective

As we saw in relation to Frederick Myers’ list of unusual mental states, such states have in themselves nothing to do with magic, religion, or irrationality; they are quite simply states of mind that by their very nature continue to defy and deny the categorical certainty so often exhibited by inductive thinkers. And this is no new realisation, it’s been around for a long, long time, indeed, from the very moment science attempted to constrain all areas of research within the confines of its overarching reliance on this form of thinking. There is nothing wrong with inductive thinking, it has proven itself to be a highly successful tool of mind, but it has to be handled with infinite care when dealing with the mind’s more delicate experiential features. Deny those features meaning or significance and the way is open for a mechanistic, fatalistic determinism to annul any suggestion that things might be otherwise. Such an assumption became prevalent throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, and it culminated in the astronomer Laplace’s famous statement that all events (including the “mental”), “obey the great laws of nature.”⁴⁴ The conscious will was suddenly an illusion; there was no such thing as volition or chance; sufficient amounts of information would make all behaviours ultimately explicable. This was augmented by Helmholtz’s revolutionary “conservation of energy theory”, and by Darwin’s “theory of natural selection”. These incisive theories seemed to complete the deterministic picture of how reality functioned – continuity was the underlying signature. The universe was a unitary, not a dualistic phenomenon; everything in the universe functioned according to the same basic deterministic principles of cause and effect.⁴⁵ In alignment with such thinking “observation” became the principle methodological tool of the sciences, psychology and philosophy willing participants in its theoretical remodeling of reality.⁴⁶ The emerging conception of self, other and world was now so influenced by the deterministic vision that any hope of sustaining the “humane significance” of life in either psychology or philosophy began to fade like the images on an old photograph.

Method or Ideology

The corner stone of any properly functioning professional discipline is “method”, not “ideology”.⁴⁷ In terms of method, “observation” is the highly successful means by which science gains access to reliable information about self, other and world; only phenomena that are observed directly or indirectly are adduced as capable of providing the contents of any discipline claiming to be scientific in approach.⁴⁸ Having removed

the notion of mind and brain as separate entities, psychology, in relation to this maxim, ceased to be “psychological” and became “logical”, that is, subservient to what was “observable” in terms of brain functioning. But the question of how mental phenomena arose in relation to the physical brain remained puzzling; there was a black hole in our comprehension of how electro-chemical processes produced complex systems of thought, never mind the kaleidoscope of images that often accompanied them. First-person accounts of mind suggested personal agency; third-person scientific accounts suggested impersonal agency.⁴⁹ Edward Kelly, from whom I’ve paraphrased the above dilemma, pulls the draw-string on this problem when he says that psychologists could “redefine, or reconceptualise, psychology in such a way that it excluded whatever [did] not fit the frame work of the physical sciences”.⁵⁰ And that is exactly what happened. Psychological phenomena were relegated to the pile marked “of no, or little consequence”, consciousness measured only in physical dimensions as E. G. Boring so eloquently stated in 1933.

Psychology, if it is to be a science, must be like physics . . . The ultimate abandonment of dualism leaves us the physical world as the only reality. Consciousness will ultimately be measured in physical dimensions.⁵¹

The view held today by most scientists, psychologists and philosophers, is that consciousness is a byproduct of an evolving nervous system, “eliminative materialists” even claiming folk psychology status for any description that denies mental processes are not reducible to brain processes.⁵² The general approach is based on careful scientific observation of subjects whose nervous system has undergone injury resulting in the abolition of consciousness.⁵³ But correlation is not causation. That, according to Emily Kelly, assistant professor of research in the Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioural Science at the University of Virginia, is no more than an entrenched assumption.⁵⁴ If we broaden our horizon to include phenomena in which “a change in mental state clearly seems to be initiating cause”,⁵⁵ then we are forced to let “volition” back into the picture. Having identified multiple states of mind that suggested volitional engagement, Frederick Myers challenged an already burgeoning physicalist interpretation of mental events, and according to Emily Kelly his findings are again surfacing in mainstream scientific and medical thinking.⁵⁶ More to the point is Kelly’s observation that much of what Myers brought to the attention of the scientific community remains “ignored, denied or derided” because too problematical for that community to address. There is, she claims, “a continuum of phenomena suggesting effects of mental states on physiological processes”, and they are being dismissed as beyond the explanatory framework of science in terms of an ideology.⁵⁷ That is a damning accusation from a highly qualified individual.

But if this is really the case, what does it mean in real terms for science, and for scientific psychology in particular? How does one evaluate instances of psychophysiological influence? Much has been written around this problem of late, critics such as Sloan, Bagiella and Powel (1999) finding such studies inconsistent and methodologically weak; particularly in relation to spirituality and religion. But not all researchers are of this opinion; some are more optimistic.⁵⁸ There is undoubtedly an undifferentiated biological substrate of consciousness that cannot be studied by way of first-person methods, but that is not the “unconscious mind” as generally understood. The unconscious mind is a quite different phenomenon, and may not actually be “unconscious” in the way the word suggests. Conscious/unconscious may be a simplistic

formulation for something that is in fact a sophisticated co-joined system of comprehension for which we have not yet evolved a suitable descriptive vocabulary. Language is without doubt that through which we will evolve that vocabulary, but language may also play a subtle, double role in the situation, being that which constitutes the very nature of this supposed “unconscious” strata of mind. But not language as a medium bound by conscious rules; more a dynamic interface between levels of objective and subjective reality where words, and images generated by words, become symbols housing multitudinal conceptual possibilities. Benny Shanon has probably got it right when he describes psyche as “a system of dynamic alternatives, a sharing of content in unexpected combinations, not a static hierarchy with ‘meaning’ isolated in some upper, conscious compartment.” The earliest sign of differentiated intelligence in a child is when language begins to form and fulfill its function, but the earliest sign of creative intelligence in an adult may be the moment in which they experientially transcend the limitations of language and learn how to live with themselves *as* psyche.

References and Notes:

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- 3) Ibid
- 4) Ibid
- 5) Ibid, pp 51-53.
- 6) Norretranders, Tor, *The User Illusion*, Viking 1998. pp. 172-173.
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- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Kelly, Edward, *Irreducible Mind*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007. p. 40.
- 10) Ibid.
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- 12) Taylor, Eugene, 'Who Was Frederick William Myers', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 11-12, 2010. p. 158-159.
- 13) Kelly, Edward, *Irreducible Mind*, (as above)
- 14) Zlatev, Jordan, 'The Dependence of Language on Consciousness', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 6, 2008, p. 38.
- 15) Ibid.
- 16) Ibid.
- 17) Ibid, p. 40
- 18) Kelly, Edward, *Irreducible Mind*, (as above) p. 45. It is interesting to note that Carl Jung in 'The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche', pp. 332-334, Vol. 8 of his *Collected Works*, (Routledge, 1996?), muses on the possibility of a self greater than the conscious self with these words: "The truth is that our conscious mind does not express the whole of our human nature; it is and remains only a part[,] ego-consciousness is not the only sort of consciousness in our system, but might perhaps be subordinate to a wider consciousness, just as simpler complexes are subordinate to the ego-complex. I would not know how we could ever prove that a consciousness higher or wider than the ego-consciousness exists in us; but, if it does exist, the ego-consciousness must find it acutely disturbing." He adds soon after that unconscious processes are not only far from being unintelligent, they often surpass conscious insight and are not in the least inferior to conscious processes in their subtlety. Referring then to this wider consciousness as a "dark region", he speculates that it (the unconscious) may well be conscious of itself, so making the term "unconscious" a misnomer.
- 19) Alvarado, Carlos S, and Stanley Krippner, 'Nineteenth Century Pioneers in the Study of Dissociation', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 11-12, 2010. p. 20.

- 20) Wilber, Ken, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, p. 134.
- 21) Ibid.
- 22) Ibid, p. 135.
- 23) Zahavi, Dan, 'Varieties of Reflection', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2011. pp. 13-14.
- 24) Kelly, Edward, *Irreducible Mind*, (as above) .
- 25) Ibid, p. 49. Arthur Koestler makes short work of reductionism's claims in *Janus: A Summing Up* (Hutchinson of London,1978) where he gives examples of psychiatric reductionism in relation to the arts. It is, he admits, quite possible that some sexual (or even scatological) motivation may enter an artist's work, but it is "absurd to proclaim that art is nothing but goal-inhibited sexuality, because [that] begs the question of what makes Goethe's art a work of genius, quite unlike other premature ejaculators". The aesthetic criteria that pertain to artistic creation cannot be reduced to sex-hormones or to the level of biological processes "without losing their specifically mental attributes in the course of the operation." (*Janus* p. 24.) Which, as explored through Benny Shanon's psychological approach, is to deny the mind a psychological perspective "and replace it with a theoretical framework of biology in relation to chemistry and physics." Nothing-but-ism is the result of such thinking, and it constitutes a reductionist orthodoxy that leaves us with human beings as no more than 90 per cent water and 10 per cent minerals.
- 26) Ibid, p. 57.
- 27) Ibid, p. 58.
- 28) Ibid.
- 29) Ibid, p. 59.
- 30) Ibid.
- 31) Ibid, op. 59.
- 32) Ibid, p. 61.
- 33) Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, Continuum, London 2006. p.3.
- 34) Ibid.
- 35) Ibid, p. 4.
- 36) Ibid.
- 37) Ibid, p. 5.
- 38) Ibid, p. 241,
- 39) Ibid, pp. 240-241.
- 40) Ibid, p. 240.
- 41) Ibid.
- 42) Kelly, Edward, *Irreducible Mind*, (as above) p. 49.
- 43) Ibid, p. 50.
- 44) Ibid.
- 45) Ibid, p. 118.
- 46) Ibid, p. 50.
- 47) Ibid, p. 51.
- 48) Ibid.
- 49) Boring, E. G, *The Physical Dimensions of Consciousness*, London Century, 1973 .p. 6, 7.
- 50) Kelly, Emily, *Irreducible Mind*, (as above) p. 117.
- 51) Ibid.
- 52) Ibid.
- 53) Ibid, p. 118.
- 54) Ibid.
- 55) Ibid.
- 56) Ibid, p. 13.

