WHAT IS THE MIND?

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On November 4, 2007, the *Sacramento Bee*'s Forum section reproduced a *Washington Post* article by Joel Achenbach titled, "What Makes up our Mind and Gives us Consciousness?" Every time I come across an article about this topic – and it happens about once a year, in sophisticated places like the *New York Review of Books* and in less sophisticated venues like *Time Magazine* - it brings my blood to a boil!

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The modern world has come to a near-unanimous conception of the human *mind* as basically the *same thing as the brain*. This is a monumental and stupid mistake.

The guilt for this error belongs largely to the so-called social sciences, especially to Psychology. These folks have managed to convince the modern world of their stupid belief. As a result, by now, the popular culture, the media and the public all subscribe to this modern-day mythology. Another example of this is a December 3, 2007 *Time Magazine* cover story titled "What Makes Us Moral?" Here, like practically everywhere else, mental phenomena such as "morality, empathy" are said to be "deep in our genes," reducible to chemical processes.

In this article, I do two things: (1)I refute this pandemic 20th-century myth and (2) I offer an alternative - and *correct* - answer to the question: What is the Mind?

I. Psychologists and Most Other People Confuse the Brain and the Mind

Why can psychologists (and consequently the public) not understand that the *mind* and the *brain* are not the same thing? Take for example the November 2007 Achenbach article in the *Sacrament Bee*:

- The author describes research done at George Mason University's Krasnow Institute "devoted to the study of the *mind*…" and then he adds that "the human *brain* is a hunk of meat that…contains about 30 billion cells, called neurons."

- The quote that "human *brains* can do things that no computer can match…" is followed by a quote from Steven Pinker's book *How the Mind Works*.

- Elsewhere in the article the author writes that, "the human *brain* has a premium feature: consciousness…or self-awareness..."
- ...and that, "there is an "I" somewhere inside our skull."

- ♣ He also quotes the famous UC Berkeley philosopher Colin McGinn, who said that , "the water of the physical *brain* is turned into the wine of consciousness."

- ♣ Next, we are told that psychologist Jim Olds proposes that the Federal Government invest $4 billion in a decade-long scientific project to study the *mind*, following the "1990s decade of the *brain*," which brought attention to neuroscience. Olds is quoted saying that, "*brain* science is an exhaustive collection of facts without a theory,"

> "People have been poking around the brain in search of the mind for many centuries..."

- ♣ We also learn that a group of scientists published a letter in the journal *Science*, in which they advocate a breakthrough in *mind* research, saying, "look at the progress already made through *brain* scans such as MRSs..."

- ♣ The article's author also tells us that, "...the *mind* isn't something that pops up on a computer screen. People have been poking around the *brain* in search of the *mind* for many centuries, and no one is even sure what neurological structures are the most critical in generating consciousness." He lists various brain structures that are allegedly important for this, e.g. "Brodmann area 46", the "anterior cingulate sulcus," the "thalamus," and *of course* "the ...dipsy-doodle structure called the cerebral cortex."

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All these quotations document the psychologist's confusion between the mind and the brain. Achenbach and the other psychologists whom he quotes use "*brain" and "mind" interchangeably*. Back and forth they go, from brain to mind and from mind to brain, as if the two were the same thing.

The error made by most psychologists is called *reification* (from the Latin word *res* = "thing"): This is when you *make a thing out of a concept*. In other words, when someone *makes something real and tangible out of something which is not so.* For example, take the idea of "evil." When we personify this idea into, say, the "devil," we *reify* it. Or take the concept of "society." When we say that "society is racist," we reify it, because in reality only people can be racist. There is no such thing as "society," over and beyond a large collection of individuals.

To what extent sociologists reify "society" is a long-standing controversy. The accusation comes largely from micro-sociologists such as myself. We feel that the idea that "society" is an independent agent, over and beyond its individual members, which is associated with Durkheim, reifies society. But we do not need to debate the pros and

cons of Durkheimian Sociology here. I merely use this as an example of reification. The reader may prefer another example.

Psychologists also commit the error of reification when they equate the mind with the brain. They give the mind a substantive material existence. They describe it as "a hunk of meat that…contains about 30 billion cells, called neurons." But of course that is not at all what the mind is.

> *Reification* is when you make a thing out of a concept, when you make something tangible out of something which is not so. This is the error psychologists make when they describe the mind as a "hunk of meat that contains about 30 billion cells (neurons)."

Sometimes psychologists use the words "mind" and "consciousness" synonymously. This is actually closer to the truth. However, they do so without understanding what sort of thing consciousness is. They still believe that consciousness, like the mind, is a physical object. They believe that it can be studied with the empirical tools of neuroscience, observed empirically and measured quantitatively.

This, too, is a misunderstanding of the true nature of consciousness: consciousness is not an object, but it is a state of being, a quality, a condition. It belongs in the same category as other conditions which human beings experience - hunger, anger, fear, thirst, fatigue, pain, pleasure.

To be sure, all these conditions have physiological correlates, and these can be studied in the laboratory: fatigue is accompanied or caused by muscular decay, glucose depletion, etc. Fear and anger are accompanied by increased adrenalin flow, accelerated heart beat, etc. Pain can be the result of tissue damage, etc. But these physical correlates are *not the thing itself.*

Take hunger: Where is hunger located? The *cause* of hunger - insufficient food intake - takes place in the stomach. But hunger itself, the sensation and awareness of hunger, does not. If we were to locate this awareness anywhere in our body, we would probably say that it emanates from our brain, since that is where we claim to do our thinking. But wherever we decide to locate our awareness of being hungry, the very fact that it is not in our stomach - after all, we don't do our thinking in our stomach - proves that (1) the physiological fact of insufficient food intake and (2) the resulting sensation of hunger are not the same thing.

And so it is with all our experiences: Pain is the sensation, the experience which *results* from tissue damage. It is not the tissue damage itself.

Consciousness, too, is an experience. It may be the *result* of chemical processes in our nervous system - just like pain is the *result* of tissue damage - but it *does not consist of* chemical processes.

To ask where consciousness (i.e. the mind) is located - in which part of our brain, for example - is similar to asking in which part of our body "life" is located. Life is a process, an action, a verb, not a thing, not an entity, not a noun. It is the same with mind and consciousness. These are actions. Mind and consciousness are not located in "Brodmann area 46" or in the "anterior cingulate sulcus" or in any other region of the brain - any more than "life" is located in your knee or in your toe.

True, different functions are performed by different organs. Your eyes enable you to see, your stomach enables you to digest, your sex organs enable you to experience orgasm.

Do, similarly, different areas of the brain perform different mental functions? True, it is said that the cerebral cortex is responsible for linguistic function, the right brain for intuitive capabilities, the left brain for analytic skills, etc.

However, no scientist will ever be able to observe "language" by examining the cerebral cortex under a microscope. The cerebral cortex does not "contain" language. It *enables* language. It no more "contains" language than the eye "contains" sight or the objects which it sees , or our legs "contain" walking. Organs and cerebral areas *enable* certain actions. They do not "contain" them.

There is nothing mysterious or difficult about this conception of the mind. It is based on the distinction between *structure* and *function* - a distinction as old as Darwin's breakthrough in biology.

Yet most psychologists and most of the public - because of the contemporary hegemony of positivism (see below) - are unable to accept it. Most psychologists and most of the public believe the absurdity that different parts of our brain contain different "thoughts."

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The popularity of the computer analogy proves this. Most people see the brain as a very complicated computer. But this is wrong. Think about it for just a moment: Why is a computer able to produce documents, words, sounds, pictures, etc? Because it *contains* these on its drives.

True, sometimes even a computer "creates" something new, i.e. something which is not just the retrieval of a pre-existing file. This happens for example when the computer solves a mathematical problem. But this, too, is based on pre-existing information, namely the mathematical rules which have been pre-programmed into the computer.

So, anything produced by a computer is *retrieved* from pre-existing files, or it results from the combination of pre-existing material, or from the application of pre-programmed rules. And all of these *exist*, *in physical form*, even when the files are closed and inactive. They even exist - on the computer's drives - when the computer is shut down!

And this is where the analogy between the mind and the computer totally breaks down: After all, isn't a shut-down computer the equivalent of a *dead* person? Isn't it clear why a computer can be re-activated, and its files re-opened, whereas a human cannot, and his thoughts cannot be brought back after death?

The reason for this is that computers never produce anything new, whereas just about everything the human brain produces *is* new, and it is called *thought*. Unlike the computer's output, the brain's output consists of the realization of *potential*, and it is *not* the expression of pre-existing material, such as a file which has just been opened, or a mathematical operation which has just been performed on the basis of pre-programmed rules.

This is why computers can be said to be "brains," but they cannot be said to have thoughts, or a *mind*. Humans, on the other hand, have both. The human mind is an emergent activity. A human thought is new every time it occurs.

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My explanation of what consciousness and the mind are, is simple. Yet, a majority of psychologists are unable to grasp it, as are many scientists and other academicians.

Even the famous Berkeley philosopher Colin McGinn is confused. For example, a June 1999 *New York Review of Books* article titled, "Can we Ever Understand Consciousness?" by McGinn only reveals his helplessness, failing to even mention some of the most important contributions on this subject, for example those of the Pragmatists. Perhaps McGinn suffers from that familiar psychological syndrome whereby one loses the meaning of a word or an idea by repeating it too many times. Having devoted his life to the problem of consciousness, having read and written about it for so long, he can no longer see the issue with clarity. He has become confused.

How is it possible that our erudite academic elite, the Harvard and Berkeley Ph.Ds of the world, are unable to grasp a conception of the mind which my freshmen students can understand?

The answer is simple: The social scientific establishment is blind because it is wedded to the wrong paradigm. ~~namely the paradigm of *positivism.*~~

What is this paradigm? Essentially, it is a view which is heavily influenced by the tradition of *positivism*: Positivism has been defined as "that tendency in thought which

rigorously restricts all explanation of phenomena purely to phenomena themselves, preferring explanation strictly on the model of exact scientific procedure, and rejecting all tendencies, assumptions, and ideas which exceed the limits of scientific technique." (Martindale: 52-53).

It is often said that positivism no longer dominates, or even plays an important role in the philosophy of science. Some even claim that the doctrine has been defunct at least since the 1950s, under the impact of the critiques of such philosophers as Willard Van Orman Quine and Carl Gustav Hempel. These claims misstate the situation:

In the first place, the term positivism means several different things. Its meaning in the natural sciences differs from what it means in the behavioral disciplines. 20th century philosophers have often debated *logical positivism*.

Furthermore, my focus here is only upon one aspect of the vast debate about all manners of positivism: the meaning and the importance of positivism *in the behavioral disciplines*. In the fields of Psychology and Sociology, for example, I take positivism to mean the belief that *the study of human behavior - including psychological behavior, i.e. thinking - should not differ from the study of physical phenomena, because the two are basically similar.*

In this limited sense, and within the confines of the behavioral disciplines, there can be no doubt that what I call positivism remains the reigning orientation. Except for a small minority of sociologists and psychologists, most behavioral "scientists" believe that quantification, measurement, observation and induction are the best, if not the only, tools of social research. The very fact that they call themselves behavioral "scientists" attests to their claim that their methods and their subject matter do not fundamentally differ from those of the physical sciences.

Positivism can be defined as the belief that the study of human behavior – including psychological behavior, i.e. *thinking* – should not differ from the study of physical phenomena, because the two are basically similar.

~~Positivism is the reigning paradigm in the social sciences. It claims that there are no fundamental differences between the methods and the subject matter of (1) the natural sciences, and those of (2) the behavioral disciplines, for example psychology.~~

This epistemology is based on a deeper ontological assumption, namely that of *materialistic reductionism:* This is the belief that only physical reality is real, and that all other manifestations - the mental, the social, the cultural, the moral - can ultimately be reduced to physical building blocks

Materialistic reductionism is the belief that only physical reality exists, and that all other manifestations - the mental, the social, the cultural, the moral – can ultimately be reduced to physical building blocks.

The reason that such a positivistic and materialistic conception of science dominates the social sciences is that science itself has become defined as a materialistic enterprise. After all, the cornerstone of science is inductive empiricism. Science can only be certain of the reality (= the existence) of those things which can be observed through tactile means.

While this conception of science is not problematic for the natural sciences, it presents so-called social science with a conundrum: Social science must (1) either severely limit the scope of its subject matter, or (2) it must admit that it is not a "science" in the current limited sense of the word.

(1) The first option follows the doctrine of materialistic reductionism: The biologist believes that organic life is basically only a more complex version of inorganic chemistry. In other words, the difference between chemistry and biology is only *quantitative*, not *qualitative*. It is the same at the next level: The psychologist believes that his subject matter ultimately consists of biology. Psychology is just a more complicated form of biology. And so on up the ladder: the sociologist believes that his subject matter is just a compilation of psychological facts. He too, is a reductionist. –

The scientist must exclude a great deal from his research: phenomena such as freedom, choice, morality, good, evil, injustice, love, beauty cannot be studied positivistically. Reducing love to a chemical reaction renders the concept meaningless. Thus the scientist misses most of what is interesting and important in human life.

(2) the alternative is for the social "scientist" to admit that he is not a scientist - at least not in the narrow materialistic way in which science has come to be defined. For better or worse, science by the 20th century has become synonymous with philosophical materialism. The definition of science is tautological. Science is defined as the study of phenomena which can be verified empirically. Concepts which can not be so verified have no scientific status. Thus, science says: only that which is scientific is part of science.

The behavioral disciplines - psychology, sociology - could bite the bullet and accept the fact that they are not "scientific" in this narrow, tautological sense. However, vested economic interests prevent this. Thousands of universities and hundreds of thousands of academicians' financial survival depends on NSF and NIMH grants.

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Conformity to a dominant perspective is nothing new in the history of ideas. In fact, it is more often the rule than the exception. A power structure is generally wedded to a ruling belief system, and such a system is only dislodged through a scientific revolution (see Thomas Kuhn's classic book on this, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*).

Modern-day psychologists/social scientists are like medieval alchemists. They pursue an unattainable goal. Their effort is doomed because, just like the alchemists who thought that they could change common metals into gold, they are attempting the impossible, namely the transmutation of flesh into the mental. And tragically, because psychology reigns, its error is accepted by the world at large.

II. The Mind-Body Dualism

Towards the middle of the article quoted earlier in the present essay, Achenbach finally realizes that the "mind problem" is philosophical and not scientific. Indeed, the problem is *epistemological* and not *ontological.* That is, the question is not what the mind *is*, but how we should *conceptualize* it. The challenge is not to document the mind under a microscope, but to understand what it is!

Like most psychologists, Achenbach is ignorant of the fact that there are many intelligent people who already understand quite well what the mind is. Most of these people are not psychologists, nor do they include so-called "experts" such as Colin McGinn.

No. if you wish to understand what the mind is, you need to go back to the philosophical Idealism of Immanuel Kant and Wilhelm Dilthey, to the Pragmatism of William James and George Herbert Mead and to the modern-day social-psychological school of *Symbolic Interactionism*. (For a discussion of this, see my book *Social Interaction*).

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When a psychologist like Achenbach finally begins to approach the question of the mind through philosophy instead of neuroscience, I light up, thinking that he may be on the verge of enlightenment. He mentions the doctrine of *Dualism*: This is the belief, originating with Plato and associated with Descartes, that the mind and the body are two separate realms of reality, and that mental phenomena are non-physical.

Philosophical Dualism is the doctrine that the mind and the body are two separate realms of reality, and that mental phenomena are non-physical.

However, the psychologist once again disappoints, showing great confusion: When Achenbach discusses Descartes, it is only in the context of neuroscience. He does not even mention that the French philosopher is *the* single most famous proponent of the mind-body dualism! Instead, he presents us with the psychological party-line, which is that dualism "solves the (mind) location problem by defining it away: The mind is perceived as separate from the body, something that can't be reduced to machinery. It's unreachable by the tools of the laboratory. Dualism flatters us, for it suggests that our minds, our selves, are not merely the result of ...chemistry, and we are thus free to talk about souls and spirits and essences..." He then adds that "dualism is pretty much dead to serious researchers."

Whether dualism is "dead to serious researchers" depends on how you define "serious researchers." If only chemists, neuro-scientists and anyone else who uses a microscope qualifies for that status, then positivists are right. However, I know many "serious researchers" who use other methods than "the tools of the laboratory."

The blindness of most psychologists, including Achenbach, is due to the fact that they are positivists (although they would deny this). In essence they say that if something cannot be studied under a microscope or in the laboratory, it does not exist. What they should say is that if something cannot be studied under a microscope, then other methods must be used to study it. It would be preposterous for me to say that the mind should not be studied, or that it should not be studied systematically. This article says precisely the opposite: In my opinion, few phenomena are more interesting and deserve more scrutiny than the human mind. I would be the last person on earth to wish to shut down Psychology. But my point is that at this time, most researchers of the mind use the wrong *methods.* The proper and rigorous methods must be *phenomenological*, as explained by by Edmund Husserl and Alfred Schutz, among others.

III. A False Solution: The Mind Does not Exist

Another solution proposed by positivists is that the mind "*does not exist*." To quote Achenbach again, "*we just imagine it*," adding that "the human brain is a ...complex machine, but it doesn't ...have a driver" (a mind). He quotes the philosopher Daniel Dennett, author of *Consciousness Explained* and a spokesman for the view that "the notion of a "central executive" in the brain *is an illusion*." Extrapolating from this, Achenbach then quotes other philosophers who claim "that the *self* is illusory, ...that you are not really there."

All these erroneous statements are, again, the result of these positivistic biases. Consider their words: We are told that "the mind" and "the self" "do not exist," that they are "illusions," "we just imagine them." By this logic, mind, consciousness and self refer to the same category of objects as Santa Claus, Mickey Mouse and pink unicorns. True, these objects do not exist. But the same logic would also compel us to put mind, self and consciousness in the same category of concepts as patriotism, capitalism and racism Do these concepts also refer to "illusions?" Do they only exist in our imagination, like Santa Claus?

Before answering this question, a brief note about the relationship between a concept and its referent: The extent to which a concept resembles – or is even identical to - its referent varies. For example, the word "water" refers to a transparent, liquid substance, but there is nothing liquid or transparent about the word "water." On the other hand, we sometimes use a picture of a skull as a sign of something deadly, such as poison or dangerous electric wiring. Here, the symbol/sign begins to *resemble* its referent.

But for us the issue is not the extent to which a concept and its referent resemble each other, but whether or not a concept's referent *exists*. For example, the referent of the word "water" exists. That of the word "unicorn" does not.

What, then, is the difference between Santa Claus and patriotism? Santa Claus owes his existence to children's belief in him. He is, indeed, a product of our imagination. The empirical referent of the idea "Santa Claus" - a fat, bearded old man who lives in the North Pole - does not exist. But this cannot be said of patriotism. The empirical referents of the concept of patriotism do exist. They include attitudes, beliefs, emotions and behavior, and they have major social, political and military consequences.

The difference between a fictitious idea and a real one is in their empirical referents: An image which refers to a non-existent man is false. A concept which summarizes real behavior is true

True, the idea of Santa Claus also fills the hearts of millions of people with emotions, and it also has major social and economic consequences. However, the personification of Santa Claus is an *empirical* fiction. On the other hand, the concept of
patriotism summarizes a huge array of behaviors which are very real. Thus, the difference between a fictitious idea and a real one is in their empirical referents: An image which refers to a non-existent man is false. A concept which summarizes real behavior is true.

Contemporary scientists are wrong to want to (1) either locate the mind in physical form in the brain, or (2) if they cannot, to conclude that it does not exist. Only ~~such~~ materialistic reductionists would argue that physical

reality is the only reality. As I have just shown with my comparison of the idea of Santa Claus and the concept of Patriotism, if a concept's referents are real, then the concept is true. The mind is such a concept. The mind exists.

IV. The Correct Solution: The Antecedents

Achenbach's conclusion takes him back to where he started - biological reductionism. While agreeing that we may never be able to crack the code of the *mind*, he feels that we should "still take a whack at it," spending "ten years and $4 billion - a reasonable cost." He adds that "the evolution of the human *mind* is the most important *biological* event in the history of our planet... We should try to understand how the *brain* makes the *mind.*"

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However, the same article also quotes Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, who wrote in ***How the Mind Works*** that "our own awareness would be forever beyond our conceptual grasp." Achenbach summarizes this view, saying that "the mind isn't a specific single thing. It's more like a process, or an emergent phenomenon."

What is fascinating about this passage is that it *finally begins to scratch the surface* of a solution to the mind problem which has long been available. Here we see again that modern-day experimental psychologists, working in the loftiest towers of academe, are unaware of some of the most important work of earlier thinkers. They clumsily try to re-invent the wheel and touch, however inadequately, upon some aspects of the great solutions discovered by earlier scholars. Pinker's idea, above, is a tiny little reminder of George Herbert Mead's *magnum opus* - ***Mind, Self and Society*** (1934).

Mead, William James and the other American Pragmatists of the early 20th century developed a social psychology and established a tradition which solves the problem of the mind brilliantly. That tradition thrives today within Sociology. It is called *Symbolic Interactionism*.

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The philosophical underpinnings of the sociological solution to the mind problem go back to Immanuel Kant's neo-rationalism and to Wilhelm Dilthey's "humanistic" sociology.

The problem which both the Kantians and the neo-idealists were facing was positivism, i.e. John Stuart Mill's crass conclusion that "if we are to escape from the inevitable failures of social science when compared with the steady progress of the natural sciences, our only hope lies in generalizing the methods which have proven so fruitful in the natural sciences so as to fit them to the uses of the social sciences"(quoted in Marcello Truzzi, *Verstehen: Subjective Understanding in the Social Sciences*: 8)

The Kantians and the neo-idealists realized that this was an error. Wilhelm Dilthey argued that the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) require different methods, because their subject matters are fundamentally different. The natural sciences discover causal laws which explain natural phenomena. But the social sciences are cultural and historical. They provide knowledge of a different sort, namely an understanding (*verstehen*) of the *meanings* which phenomena have for human actors (See Don Martindale, *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory*: 378). This is the fundamental realization which informed the work of the greatest sociologist – Max Weber.

When Max Weber says that human action is *meaningful*, whereas the behavior of molecules is not, he of course is talking about *subjective* meaning. Molecules are not *aware* of their own conduct. They do not say to themselves, "I am moving a bit too fast, I better slow down." Humans do precisely that. Whatever we do, we also *judge* and *interpret* what we do. It is in this sense that our behavior is *meaningful*.

> "The world of *phenomena* is the world we can experience with our senses; it is open to scientific and rational investigation. Science observes the world of phenomena - the natural world - and reason orders those observations. The world of *noumena* is above scientific investigation; it cannot be approached by empirical observation, because it is not physical or empirical."(Joel Charon, *Symbolic Interaction*: 14).

Kant and the neo-Kantians were rationalists rather than idealists. However they, too, rejected positivism: Kant's famous attempt at integrating rationalism and empiricism consisted in his distinction between two worlds of reality - a world of *phenomena* and a world of *noumena.* "The world of phenomena is the world we can experience with our senses; it is open to scientific and rational investigation. Science observes the world of phenomena - the natural world - and reason orders those observations. The world of noumena is above scientific investigation; it cannot be approached by empirical

observation, because it is not physical or empirical."(Joel Charon, *Symbolic Interaction*: 14).

Heinrich Rickert was a follower of Kant who argued, in addition, that science differs fundamentally from social science in the following way: "The social scientist must study the individual and unique (*ideographic*) event, whereas the natural scientist studies the general and repetitive (*nomothetic*) events." (Truzzi: 18), and arrives at causal-law explanations. There cannot be a "social science" in the sense of a body of universal causal explanations of human behavior.

If we agree with Kant that science is limited to the study of phenomena, then what might be some of the limitations of science when it comes to the study of human beings? Clearly the brain is a biological phenomenon, and therefore it is totally within the purview of natural science. However, the same cannot be said about all human behavior and about human thought. True, sociologists and psychologists frequently discover empirical regularities and probabilities in human conduct, especially at the aggregate level. However, the behavior and thought processes of human beings always remain unpredictable to some extent. As Peter Berger notes in ***Invitation to Sociology***, *freedom* always remains a possibility, and what is more, freedom cannot be demonstrated scientifically (p. 124).

True, sociologists and psychologists frequently discover empirical regularities and probabilities in human conduct, especially at the aggregate level. However, the behavior and thought processes of human beings always remain unpredictable to some extent.

Freedom, then, is an excellent example of Kant's noumena. It is very real, it exists, but it cannot be studied scientifically. It is not a cause of human behavior.

It is the expression of freedom - free will - which is the hallmark of the human mind. And because of this, "science can never reveal the whole truth about the human being." (Charon: 17). Science can apprehend the phenomenal aspects of the human being - his brain, his brain waves, brain functions and dysfunctions and certain behaviors that follow from them - but it cannot apprehend the human *mind*, which belongs in Kant's *noumenal* world, i.e. a world which exists, but which cannot be observed empirically - merely *inferred*.

For example, a favorite concept of psychologists is *motive*. This word usually refers to some prior, inner cause or desire which explains a person's behavior. However, a motive can never be established with absolute certainty, because it does not have an empirical existence. It is always an *inference*. It is a mental construct, and it is

always subject to possible change. Similarly, the human mind is also a mental construct, and it is also in a constant state of flux.

V: The Correct Solution: Pragmatism

What is the relevance of Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Dilthey and Heinrich Rickert for the question which this article tries to answer, viz. *What is the mind?*

These philosophers' relevance is this: They all understood the shortcomings of positivism. They understood the limitations of science and of the methods of the natural sciences for the study of human conduct and human thought, whose uniqueness and unpredictability - an irreducible element of *freedom* and *moral judgment* - they recognized.

However, the Kantians and the neo-idealists left us with cumbersome dualities: phenomena vs. noumena, ideographic vs. nomothetic knowledge, etc. It was left to the American Pragmatists William James and George Herbert Mead to come up with the synthesis which provides the most satisfactory answer to the question - *what is the mind?*

William James:

William James (1842-1910) was a Professor of Physiology, Psychology and Philosophy at Harvard. Of greatest relevance to this article are his book ***Principles of Psychology*** and especially his essay "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?" He was one of the founders of the philosophy of *Pragmatism* (along with John Dewey).

As I show in my book *Social Interaction*, Pragmatism is a fresh philosophical departure aimed at resolving age-old dualisms such as subject-object and mind-matter.

> *Pragmatism* abandons classical philosophy's - and positivism's – search for absolute truths. Instead, it locates the meaning and the worth of an idea in its *consequences.* For example, the question should not be whether ideas such as "communism," "fascism," "capitalism" and "democracy" are "scientifically "true." The task at hand is to ascertain their meaning and their value, on the basis of empirically ascertainable consequences.

In essence, Pragmatism abandons classical philosophy's - and positivism's - search for absolute truths. Instead, it locates the *meaning* and the *worth* of an

idea in its *consequences*. For example, the question should not be whether ideas such as "communism," "fascism," "capitalism" and "democracy" are "scientifically "true." The task at hand is to ascertain their meaning and their value, on the basis of empirically ascertainable consequences. (See Kando: 105).

As Martindale notes, "Pragmatism is an attempt to reconcile idealism with scientific method, and to unite a spiritualistic and biological conception of human development." (Martindale: 299). It has had a strong impact on 20th century social science. Its many contemporary advocates include the philosopher Richard Rorty and the sociological school of *Symbolic Interactionism* (see below).

William James concluded that there is no "entity" called consciousness. "There is no original being, contrasted with the being composing material objects, out of which thoughts of those objects are made." (Martindale: 300). "Consciousness" is a process. "States of mind are merely momentary incidents in this process. A permanently existing idea, which makes its appearance in consciousness periodically, is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades." (Martindale, 341).

Recall my earlier critique of the currently popular computer metaphor for the human brain, alleging that the human brain contains memories similar to the files of a computer hard drive. Had James written in the age of computers, he might have illustrated his argument as I have.

Following John Dewey and the other early Pragmatists, Richard Rorty once again notes in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) that much of the debate about the relation of the mind to the body results from conceptual confusions. He argues instead that there is no need to posit the mind or mind stuff as an ontological category. Pragmatists such as Rorty want to do away with the mind-body problem because they believe that it is a pseudo-problem, not a meaningful empirical question.

> The person thus appears in two ways, partly known and partly knower, partly object and partly subject...For shortness we may call one the *Me* and the other the *I*." (James, quoted in Martindale, 341). The me, then, refers to the self as known (the empirical ego) and the I refers to the self as knower (the "pure" ego) (see Kando: 106).

James shows us that one of the unique properties of human "consciousness is the fact that it always to some degree involves an awareness of the person's *self*. The person

thus appears in two ways, partly known and partly knower, partly object and partly subject...For shortness we may call one the *Me* and the other the *I*." (James, quoted in Martindale, 341). The me, then, refers to the self as known (the empirical ego) and the I refers to the self as knower (the "pure" ego) (see Kando: 106).

> *The consciousness of Self involves a stream of thought, each part of which as "I" can remember those which went before, know the things they knew, and care paramountly for certain ones among them as "Me" and appropriate to these the rest. The Me is an empirical aggregate of things objectively known. The I which knows them cannot itself be an aggregate; neither for psychological purposes need it be an unchanging metaphysical entity like the Soul...It is a THOUGHT, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but appropriative of the latter...(James: 215).*

VI: The Correct Solution: Symbolic Interactionism

George Herbert Mead:

Mead (1863-1931) was a professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. His *Mind, Self and Society* (1934) represents the bulk of his legacy, although it is the posthumous publication of his lecture notes taken by his students. Mead may be considered the founder of *Symbolic Interactionism*, which is the currently dominant social-psychological paradigm in Sociology (see below). In essence, Mead elaborated James' conception of the Self, anchoring it in social interaction.

A "self" can be defined as "that which can be object to itself." (Mead: 204), that which can be both subject and object" (Mead: 201). The self as object is the "me," and the self as subject is the "I." In other words, the self is that unique object which can turn back upon itself, direct itself, take those experiences that belong to its own organism and identify with them (Mead: 42). This is precisely the process called *thinking*, or *consciousness*! The self, then, represents reflexive experience. (See Kando: 111).

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How do humans acquire their unique capability for self-consciousness, i.e. their *selves*? Mead brilliantly demonstrates that this can only occur through social interaction, specifically through *language*. While infra-humans can possess complex systems of

communication, only humans have developed sophisticated systems of *significant symbols,* i.e. languages (see below).

Mead explains that the social process which produces the self is called socialization. The *sine qua non* for socialization is symbolic thought, or *language*. Language consists of *significant gestures* or *symbols*, and it is an inherently social phenomenon, since a gesture is only significant if it evokes the same response in oneself as it is intended to elicit in another. Such meaningful communication occurs through *role-taking,* i.e. taking the role of the other. By taking the role of the other, Mead means putting oneself in the place of another individual in such a manner that one arouses the same response in both. Only such symbolic interaction is truly social in the sense that it requires role-taking. The "social" organization of ants and bees, while complex and sophisticated, is based on instinct, not role-taking.

Mead distinguishes several phases of socialization, notably the *play* phase and the *game* phase. The former stage occurs when the young child begins to take the role of individual *significant others*. For the game stage, which is a later developmental stage, Mead uses baseball as a metaphor: In order to successfully participate in a game of baseball, the individual must take the role of the *generalized other*, i.e. the entire social structure and its rules. And so it is with participating in society.

The mind, Mead reminds us, is a process, not an entity. It is the activity of thinking. "It is the process of talking over a problematic situation with one's self, just as one might talk with another, that is exactly what we term 'mental,' and it goes on within the organism." (Charon 101). Mind cannot develop outside of the symbolic, social process.

Above all, Mead's central concern was to demonstrate man's fundamentally *social* nature. He sought to explain the emergence of the human self from the social process, a process which is largely symbolic, i.e. *linguistic.*

Symbolic Interactionism:

> *Symbolic Interactionism* stresses that (1) social interaction is the *source* rather than the result of individual consciousness; (2) language, i.e. symbols, is the activity which gives humans their selves, their consciousness and their mind; (3) human activity consists not only of reactions to objective environmental stimuli but, more importantly, of their *subjective interpretation and evaluation.*

Mead was not responsible for the name "Symbolic Interactionism." It was his student Herbert Blumer who coined that label to denote Meadian Social Psychology. Today, this is the only sociological brand of social psychology. It is a perspective and a study program. It guides social psychologists to study human behavior by focusing on the three following issues: (1) social interaction as the *source* rather than the result of individual consciousness; (2) language, i.e. symbols, as an activity which gives humans their selves, their consciousness and their mind; (3) human activity as consisting not only of reactions to objective environmental stimuli but, more importantly, also consisting of the *subjective interpretation and evaluation* of those stimuli.

Symbolic Interactionism is an immensely productive research program. Sociological social psychologists have produced a large body of data on deviant behavior, crime, mental illness, child development, family processes, sexuality, recreation and leisure, drug use, illness, identity, self-esteem, racism, gender, education, power, conflict, and many other topics.

It is the only branch of modern social science which is relatively non-deterministic, i.e. non-positivistic. It is not necessarily concerned with the discovery of independent variables. It is the only school of thought in the social sciences which includes human free will in its analysis, and does not limit the domain of social "science" to the study of Kant's phenomenal world, but also dares to address Kant's *noumena.*

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Consistent with its Pragmatist roots, Symbolic Interactionism views human situations as subjectively *defined* rather than as objectively given. It sees the meaning of objects as determined by how humans respond to them, in a social context. Human beings *interpret* their environment and the stimuli which impinge upon them before they respond, and those interpretations are part of the human environment. Because the human environment is an interpreted environment, it is therefore fundamentally different from that of all other organisms. It is a *culturally constructed* environment.

One fundamental difference between our environment and that of other animals is that our environment contains one additional object - ourselves! And this object, too, is subject to interpretation and evaluation. For example, one can have high or low self-esteem.

One fundamental difference between our environment and that of other animals is that our environment contains one additional object - ourselves! And this object, too, is subject to interpretation and evaluation. For example, one can have high or low self-

esteem. Thus humans have selves, i.e. they are aware of themselves in their own environment.

Other animals have no selves. They have feelings such as pleasure and pain, but these belong to the organism, not to the self, for the feelings have no symbolic meaning. The human self is "essentially a cognitive rather than an emotional phenomenon" (Mead: 228), for even though the self includes self-feelings, such feelings do not become part of the self until I am aware of them, that is, until I label them. Hence the importance of language.

Animals employ signs at best. The use of signs by animals is largely instinctive, whereas the meaning and use of significant symbols must be *learned*. Infra-humans have occasionally been taught vocabularies of as many as eight hundred words under experimental conditions (Koko, Sarah and Washoe, for example), but these acquired skills never develop to anything remotely approaching human levels, and they atrophy once no longer practiced.

It is fashionable in our era of animal liberation to attribute human potential to animals, but the differences remain quantitatively so vast that they are qualitative.

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The Meadian perspective can be termed *humanistic*, in that it focuses on man's uniqueness rather than on our similarities with other species. Our ability to symbolize frees us from our environment and from our past. While much of human behavior is habitual, there always remains an element of unpredictability and freedom, which Mead conceptualized as the "I' phase of the self. The lesson which Mead teaches us is that in the end, no social theorist will ever be able to fully predict human behavior, be he a Behaviorist, a Structural-Functionalist, a Marxist or a neuro-psychologist.

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What, then, is the mind? According to Joel Charon, "the mind is best defined as symbolic action toward the self...It is active communication toward the self through the manipulation of symbols. (2004: 95).

So what is the mind? Does the mind exist? Of course it does. It is the product of *learning*. To study it and to understand it, we must study the social, historical and cultural contexts which create it. Not the cellular structures which allegedly contain it.

It is man's social and cultural experience which provides him with a "mind." Without that experience, man remains feral, not truly human. While Kipling's Mowgli and Romulus and Remus are mythical wolf children, there are confirmed historical examples of feral children, including the wild boy of Aveyron, and the cases of Anna and Isabella, documented by UC Berkeley's professor Kingsley Davis.

The point is that without *socialization*, humans do not become truly human. They do no develop selves, self-consciousness - a *mind*.

The mind is not genetic. Genetically, man has been pretty much the same for nearly 100,000 years. Take a Cro Magnon toddler from his cave in Lascaux, transport him forward 40,000 years to the 21st century, enroll him in school, and he is as likely to get a PhD in micro-biology and to become a Harvard professor as any baby born today. Unlike animals, we are not ruled by our instincts. We have minds.

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