MINDS IN THE WORLD

Radman, Zdravko

Minds in the World

Introductory

What Augustine says about 'time', that one knows what it is so long as one is not required to define it, is equally true of the 'mind', for our common sense understanding of it capitulates under the scientific quest for explanation. The thinking mind knows what it does so long as it is not required to think itself. But the very act of the mind 'thinking itself' cannot escape the profound hurdle that arises when one cognitive system (the mind of a researcher) tries to decipher another cognitive system (the mind as an object of research). The mind of a researcher attributes certain characteristics to the mind, and thereby tries to explain whatever means and tools it has at its disposal. From the history of investigation into the nature of the mind, we learn that the mind has been described in numerous ways: it has been likened to a 'catapult' (the ancient Greeks), the 'heating system' of a thermal bath (Gallen), a 'musical instrument' (such as an 'organ' during the Renaissance), a '*camera obscura*', an 'electric switchboard', a 'telegraph' (Charles Sherrington), a 'fluid' (William James' 'stream of consciousness'), a 'hydraulic system' or 'three storey building' (Sigmund Freud), a 'parceling service' (Semir Zeki), 'digestion' (Walter Freeman), a 'symphonic orchestra' (Wilder Penfield), and so on. It seems that a more appropriate model of the mind is readily found at every new stage of technological advance. It is no wonder, then, that nowadays the computer metaphor so powerfully dominates our understanding of the ways the mind functions.

Being the elusive 'thing' that it is, the mind is always thought to be somewhere else or simply *is* something else (as the historical account illustrates). Indeed, the notion of 'ideal' (1:1) identity is tautological and uninstructive (the brain is the brain; the mind is the mind), which in turn justifies explanatory detours that usually make use of mostly metaphorical tools. But problems arise when extended explanatory leaps frequently forget the nature of the initial object of explanation.

'Seeing in terms of' is certainly a legitimate (and useful) philosophical method, and may open new perspectives on what is still one of the big mysteries of our age. But there are virtually no restrictions on the modes of seeing – except that their excessive restriction can become problematic. The somewhat pluralistic approach to seeing of the mind *in terms of* something else is currently dominated by an exclusivist mode of understanding. As a rule, reductionist procedures and eliminativist tendencies lead to the exclusion of everything but an element or aspect of that which is under investigation. It may even be the case that the mind is not only explained away, but eliminated altogether. The accompanying 'no more than' and 'nothing but' rhetoric linguistically frames the selective and restrictive approach. On this score, Francis Crick's comment is exemplary:

"'You', your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact *no more than* the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules."[1]

Others claim that the mind is *nothing but* 'brain configurations', a 'dispositional response to stimuli', a 'system of functional relations', a 'computer program', a 'language

of thought', a 'proposition', and so on.

In this context, it is worthwhile noting that reductionism reveals a tricky relation between necessary and sufficient conditions. It is possible to explain 'life' in terms of breathing, for instance, but it is wholly inadequate to reduce the former to the latter. For knowing that breathing is necessary for life still does not mean that breathing itself is sufficient for explaining what life is. In like manner, to find out that some neural processes are necessary for mental states does not provide us with sufficient grounds to conclude that the mental is *nothing but* the neural. And though humans can rightly be described as 'language users', it still does not follow that everything we experience, think, feel, guess or imagine is reducible *in toto* to words simply because they can be articulated in words.

The passionate (and perhaps panic-driven) efforts to fight the Cartesian ghost demand of us that we supply scientific explanations of the mind, which in turn produce an irrational fear of a (supposedly unscientific) language of psychology and keep phenomenological accounts within the domain of philosophical speculation. "Anything (that has empirical touch) goes!" Following the discovery that the emergence of pain is detectable in neural activity (C fiber), for example, it is happily concluded that pain is *nothing but* C-fiber firing. Accordingly, we might infer that love is reducible to the limbic activity of the glands, and thus *no more than* that the language of bodily chemistry.

In addition to a pronounced fragmentation in contemporary theories about the mind (which cries out for a more unified or at least *broader picture of the mind*), there is a widespread methodological fallacy that consists in attributing the *means* of investigation to traits of the *object* of investigation – and so confuses the *explanatory tools* with characteristics and constitutive features of the *explanandum*. The mind could be seen as mathematical or logical, even though mathematics and logic belong to the minds of the investigators, and not to the minds they are investigating. Thus even if it is insightful to use algorithm to analyze the mind, it does not follow that the mind is thereby algorithmic. And if nowadays computation seems indispensable in the study of the mind, this does not necessarily mean that the mind is like a machine. (Other sciences, natural and social, also use computation in their investigations, but they do not deem nature and society to be computational.)

Reductionism – especially in its radical 'nothing but' form – sins against the true nature of the (living) mind which is not to be found, contrary to Crick's conviction, in the (dead) masses of molecules. Though there are as many true natures of the mind as there are major theoretical views, it is surely the case that the mind is not *of* the processes in the brain, but rather concerns what one experiences as the *world*.

The brain is alien to consciousness. To put it bluntly, the brain is not the matter of the mind, just as the eye is not the matter of seeing. And if the argument from perception tells us that the eye, like a camera, is blind, then is it not possible, by that same token, to claim that the brain, like a computer, is dumb? Yet talk of a 'blind eye' and a 'dumb brain' is deceptive insofar as it attributes features and capacities that isolated organs cannot possibly have: the eye is neither capable of seeing (and so cannot be blind), nor is

the brain susceptible of intelligent behavior (and so cannot be dumb). Only the embodied human being, as a cognitive person, can see, consciously react, understand, act, believe, desire, feel, want, reason and imagine.

In many modern approaches, however, the whole of the human mind is stripped of everything that would have even the slightest allusion to the realms of the psychological and personal, and this is in accord with the demand to conquer the mental ghost with (natural) scientific means. The upshot of the strategy is: The mind does not matter! It is matter that matters! The person's mind is dead! Long live a (dead) mass of molecules! Yet the advocates of the scientific approach hasten to declare that the personal 'lives' in matter. In a strange way, and by the same move, the mind is first *depersonalized*, and then matter is promptly *personified*. The 'it' is elevated to the status of a true mental agent and is merited as constituting the 'self'. A bounty of book titles and subtitles[2] clearly illustrates this: it is the brain that creates the 'self', it is matter that makes the mind.

Perhaps the whole strategy of defining the mind in terms of something else, and thus identifying it by means of whatever seems most suitable, is misleading. We might subsequently be well advised to apply the exchange proposed by the philosophy of art of Nelson Goodman[3] – rather than ask "*what* is art?" it may be more useful to ask "*when* is art?" Analogously, one might find it reasonable to replace the "*what* is the mind?" question with the "*when* is the mind?" question.

Confronted with the hypothetical "*when* is mind?" a phenomenologist would probably respond that it emerges at the level of *appearances*. It is crucial to realize, though, that appearances are not related to underlying physical processes; they are not *of* brain states, but are *about* the *world*. Thus if we were to place the mind under an imaginary mind-scanner, as part of some sort of thought experiment, it would not reveal anything concerning brain activity, but would 'mirror' elements of the world. Nothing we mentally deal with lies within the scull, but is oriented *to* the world. The mind's landscapes are made of human macro-experiences of objects and events in the world. On the other hand, 'brain prints' (if something along those lines were possible) would reveal nothing of the person's mental life – which explains, for example, why researchers sought in vain to find traits of Einstein's genius in his brain.

The brain is alien to the contents of thought, and the mind is not oriented towards bio-chemical and physical processes in it. Rather, it orients itself towards the world. Expressed otherwise, the mind's interests do not consist in its underling processes (to which it has no access), but in the *intelligibility of the world*. And it is precisely this intelligibility that marks out human authenticity more than the specificity of *qualia*. Hence instead of dwelling on the existence of *qualia* (which is evident in human and non-human animals), is it not more challenging to ask: How is the world intelligible for the mind? The reality of pitches and itches (*qualia*) cannot be denied, but the reality of the experienced world (both in the ordinary and scientific sense) is more fascinating. The problem of *qualia* might be considered 'hard' not because the concept conceals a theoretical complexity, but because it is eventually promoted to something which it is not – and is thereby supposed to mean more than there is.

The world as we experience and know it exceeds the scope of the senses to which animals are bound, and stretches far beyond the environmental realm to include the spheres of the created, symbolic or cultural. The human world is social and cultural, as well as natural. Nurture feeds nature in such a way as to contribute to the uniqueness of the human stance which is essentially emancipated from the present and the given. It enables us to transcend spatial and temporal constraints, and we do the transcending easily and deliberately.

Human perspectives are multiple and changeable. The world not only differs according to the 'first person' or 'third person' perspective, but is also transformed through time. Human views are typically from *manywhere*, instead of *nowhere*; they have their own (changing) history and memory of its mutations. Moreover, the mind is social and historical in a sense which is insufficiently recognized by modern science and philosophy of mind. And, perhaps most importantly, its distinctive feature is that it can be *about* the inexistent and impossible, the imaginary and fictional, all of which exist within the horizon of the world as experienced by us.

We can learn from the philosophical literature that the mind is *embodied* (and hence *embrained*), but it is also above all *enworlded*. Since there is no world prior to or apart from the mind – at least from an epistemological point of view – it is likewise difficult to conceive the mind as being devoid of the world. A mindless world is a logical impossibility, and a worldless mind is empirical nonsense. The mind and the world are co-constituted.

By affirming *enworldment*, a significant step is made away from the black-box conception of mind/brain, which signifies that the sources of the 'mysteries of the mind' are not to be found within the skull, but in the comprehensibility of the world. This also means that an adequate strategy in exploring the mind ought to take into account the active cognitive subject (*Handlungsperson*), rather than peer into the miniscule modifications of matter at the micro-level. A better way of understanding the mind, namely, requires the participation of the *Handlungsperson* within the horizon of actual and possible action, and not simply a strategy of inspecting the closed 'world' within. The *Handlungsperson* intervenes in the matters of the world and, by so doing, leaves a stamp or imprint on the ecological, social and cultural environment, as well as simultaneously shapes its own *self*. Every interference in natural and nurtural surroundings is also an intervening in the mind-order. Nothing we do is irrelevant to the doer's mind. And the *ways of doing* mold individual minds more decisively than the peculiarity of *qualia*.

It is with the *enworldment* of the mind that *intentional games* come into view. The core idea of intentionality is that all and every mental state have their intentional objects, which implies that mental phenomena are *directed to* or are *about* some object. But the question remains: What is that instance in the head which has the capacity to be *about* something? And who/what decides which *direction* to take? Is it the *brain* that has the power of *aboutness* (in which case the mind emerges as a late product of intentional encounters with the world), or is it the *mind* that undertakes directionality (in which

case the mind exists prior to the world, and is thus independent of it – and can, but need not be, 'directed to' it)? But this reduction of intentionality to 'aboutness' is not unquestionable. Further, it is unclear as to what or who is the *subject*, on the one hand, and what is the *object* of *aboutness*, on the other. Are these separate or independent instances, and at what level (instance) does the mind arise (which brings into sharp focus the relevance of the "*when* is mind?" question)?

In addition, and closely related to it, there is an assumption that the perspectival character of intentionality presupposes a particular 'aspectual shape' – a distinct way an object is presented to the mind. However questionable it may be, what is crucial about the 'aspectual shape' is that both the 'aspect' and the 'shape' are, more often than not, undefined, amorphous and fluctuating, such as when one has thoughts and memories of one's grandmother or an old teacher, and is yet unable to say whether they are sitting or walking, how are they dressed, what they are doing, what surrounds them, and so on. If the time distance is large, then one may even have difficulties remembering physiognomies, and yet have living remembrances of the persons. In this case, the reference to a person is provided in an unambiguous way, but the *mode* of reference is neither clear nor defined, and may lack concrete spatial and temporal attributes. Contrary to the widespread belief that mental states are not dominantly pictorial, and that memory images are not necessarily of this sort, they are primarily centered around *meanings* – and meanings are *emotionally* loaded. Neither of them can be said to have a particular shape. Meanings and *moods* therefore mold mental contents in a more decisive way than visual shape.

What seems to be the driving force behind the idea of 'aspectual shape' is simply the emphasis on the singularity of mental states that *belong to us*, that they are uniquely ours, and not that they have either a particular aspect or a defined shape. It is not the shape that is unique; it is uniqueness *itself* that is characteristic of (individual) mental life. We obviously lack adequate descriptive means to account for the uniqueness of individual 'feels', the consequence of which is that every verbal expression we use easily and unavoidably turns into a conceptual trap that opponents readily use for refutation.

As is obvious from these brief introductory remarks, disagreements about some basic issues in the field of philosophy of mind are common, and competing views often turn into conflicting ideas – 'arguments' become the weapons of 'war'.

Bearing in mind the plurality of perspectives and the diversity of themes which are characteristic of modern philosophy of mind, the purpose in compiling this volume is not so much as to bring about a thematically coherent collection of essays, but to display a part of the spectrum of ideas and a portion of disputes that are representative of contemporary discussions. Yet it is possible, I guess, to find a common denominator which, though not explicitly stated, provides us with the elements that make up the assumption that the mind is not only a 'logical operator' (that is, computational), that it does not conform to the cognitivist scheme, and so resists successful simulation. We can use this common denominator further to contribute to an outline of the mind that is embodied and embedded, environmental and emotional, social and symbolic, intentional and historic, active and participating, flexible and capable of fictional leaps,

adaptive and anticipatory.

The authors in this collection deal with a variety of issues that are intensively debated in contemporary philosophy of mind. **Andrej Ule** relates Wittgenstein's views (basically his criticism of psychophysical parallelism) and themes that occupy contemporary cognitive science. **Tim Crane** argues that the distinctively philosophical problem of perception is the conflict between the direct perceptual awareness of objects 'in the world' and a possibility of hallucinatory vision. **Mark Wrathall** provides a phenomenological account of perception as bodily being-in-the-world, and explains how perception can provide justificatory support for thought. **Galen Strawson** provides an account of a naturalistic theory of intentionality and suggests ways of properly understanding 'cognitive experience'. **Dan Zahavi** inquires into the relation between phenomenal consciousness and intentionality, and insists on their inseparability. **Shaun Gallagher** argues against the denial of free will and sees it as a dimension of intentionality. **Jocelyn Benoist's** interest is in the interdependence of 'internal' and 'external' intentional relations. **Eduard Marbach** focuses on naturalizing subjectivity, and discriminates between its strong and weak forms. **Sonia Rinofner-Kreidl's** general scope of interest falls within the naturalism debate; more specifically it deals with Thomas Metzinger's self-model theory and Husserl's phenomenological conception of consciousness. **Klaus Mainzer's** concern is with embodied (implicit and unconscious) knowing, and the (im)possibilities of its proper representation. In my paper I maintain that background knowledge is crucial to the process of the mind's 'enworldment'.

It is my hope that the papers in this volume can be taken as contributing, in a general and individually distinct way, to the shift away from brains-in-a-vat to minds-in-the-world.

Zdravko Radman

---

[1] Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1994, p. 3.

[2] To name but a few: Karl R. Popper and John C. Eccles, *The Self and Its Brain*; N. Elsner and G. Lüer (eds.), *Das Gehirn und sein* Geist; Erich Harth, *The Creative Loop: How the Brain Makes a Mind*; Walter Freeman, *How Brains Make Up their Minds*; Joseph LeDoux, *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*; etc. In the personification of the brain it can have its own 'I' or 'self' (Robert R.Llinás, *I of the* Vortex), become emotional (Joseph LeDoux, *Emotional Brain*) or be capable of acting (Alexander R. Luria, *Das Gehirn in Aktion*).

[3] *Languages of Art*, Hackett Publishing Company Indianopolis 1976.