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Beyond the Enlightenment: Relational Being

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We look back today to the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries as a period during which the Western world shifted from faith to reason as its core value. Interestingly enough, both faith and reason are quintessentially psychological concepts. In this sense, the transformation from the Medieval to the "modern world" was dependent upon a radical reconstruction in the concept of the person. In the place of spirit or soul, the capacity for rational thought became the focal ingredient of the self. This shift from a sacred to a secular conception of the person has been accompanied by enormous changes in the character of cultural life. At the outset, the governing powers of church and crown were substantially curtailed, making way for the establishment of the democratic state. By displacing the soul with reason as the central ingredient of self, neither church nor crown could sustain its position as chief agent of condemnation and approbation. As many see it, the authority for evaluation is increasingly vested in the modernist institution of science. The creation of the modern State also owes its power to the accumulated agreement of the individual citizens. And at least in the United States, the centrality of the individual mind is accompanied by a constitutional guarantee of rights, however inadequately they are honored in the breach.

Yet, as many believe, the zenith of modernist culture has now passed; its fruits have been absorbed and its adequacy to contemporary world conditions is increasingly questioned. In certain respects the extension of modernist conceptions and practices seems inimical to the future well-being of the planet. Although there is much to be said on this account, the problematics of modernist culture can be traced in significant measure to the dominant conception of the person. When we make

a fundamental distinction between self and other, we create a world of distances: *me here* and *you there*. We come to understand ourselves as basically alone and alienated. We come to prize autonomy - becoming a "self made man," who "does it my way." To be inter-dependent is a sign of weakness and incapacity. To understand the world as constituted by separate individuals is also to court distrust, as one never has access to the private thoughts of others. And if alienated and distrustful, what is more appropriate than "taking care of number one?" Self-gain becomes an unmitigated virtue - indeed for the economist, a rational calculus that necessarily governs individual choice. It is in this context that ethical injunctions to "love the other as the self" become intelligible. Self-love is presumed. Loyalty, commitment, and community are all thrown into question, as they potentially interfere with "self-realization." Such views now circulate widely though the scholarly culture.[1]

In my view many of the attempts within the social sciences - and indeed within the pages of the present volume - to move beyond the logo-centered conception of the person represent steps toward what may be viewed as a major historical transformation. It is a transformation that would lay to rest the Enlightenment conception of the person and its attendant travails, and locate an alternative that links the individual more fully to the social and cultural context. In effect, these attempts signal an openness, a curiosity, and a concerted investment in fostering a conception of the person in which separation, alienation, and contention are replaced with a sense of profound connection.

These have been central concerns for me over recent years, as I have grappled first with the conceptual problems inherent in dualist epistemology, the impasse of a hermeneutics of inter-subjectivity, and the presumption of psychological or self-knowledge.[2] Such critical work has also formed the basis for a non-dualist alternative to the Enlightenment conception of the person, one centered not in rational but in *relational* activity. In what follows I offer a brief sketch of the directions that I have found most promising. This account will be divided into three

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[2] See, for example, Bellah et al (1985) and Lasch (1979).

[2] See, for example, Gergen, (1988, 1994.)

parts. First, it is important to illuminate more fully the background of my endeavors, namely their roots within the social constructionist turn in scholarship more generally. Following this account I will briefly develop the concept of what I term *relational being*. From this perspective, relationships are not constituted by individual persons, but rather, it is out of relational process that the very concept of the individual emerges. Finally, I wish to illuminate means for re-constructing conceptions of mental process in relational terms.

The Constructionist Turn

For me, the initial opening to the development of a relational account of human action emerged with the social constructionist turn in the scholarly world more generally. There are many stories to be told about the emergence of social constructionism, and I offer here but one, although one that is congenial with much common understanding. To be sure, one may trace the intellectual roots of social constructionism to Vico, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Wittgenstein, among others. More recently, Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) was a landmark volume with strong reverberations across disciplines. However, the social movements and intellectual ferment taking shape in the late 1960s in the United States and Western Europe were significantly influential. Resistance to the Vietnam war and to the country's political leadership was intense, and within this protest movement profound skepticism of the established order emerged. The academic community was deeply engaged in such resistance. The times were optimal for critically reassessing the established rationale and practices within the sciences and other scholarly traditions.

In brief, one can locate at least three major forms of broadly shared critique. The amalgamation of these forms of critique largely serve as the basis for most contemporary scholarship identified with social constructionism.[3] Perhaps the strongest and

[3] For a more detailed account of these critiques within psychology, see Gergen (1994). Additional accounts of social constructionist premises and potentials in psychology may be found in Potter (1996) and Gergen(1999).

most impassioned form of critique of the dominant orders has been *ideological*. In this case, critics call into question taken for granted matters of fact and logic, and reveal the political ends that they serve. In effect, such analysis discloses the constructed character of "the real," in the service of liberating the reader from its subtle grasp. Within the scholarly world more generally, such "unmasking" has played a major role, from Marxist and feminist contributions to the work of Foucault (1979, 1980), and then onward to include critical voices in cultural studies, queer studies, and virtually every other group marginalized by mainstream, modernist traditions. The second major form of critique may be viewed as *literary/rhetorical*. With developments in semiotic theory in general and literary deconstruction in particular (Derrida, 1976), attention was variously drawn to the ways in which linguistic convention serves as the forestructure for all claims to knowledge. Whatever reality may be, its representation is always dominated by such conventions. The third significant critique targeted foundational science (the supposed apex of the modernist tradition), and was stimulated largely by the 1970 publication of Thomas Kuhn's, *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Kuhn portrayed normal science as guided by paradigms of thought and practice shared by particular communities. In effect, the outcomes of science were not demanded by the world as it is, but are the result of communal negotiation. This social account of science was further buttressed by a welter of research in the sociology of knowledge and the history of science (see, for example, Feyeraband, 1978; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Woolgar, 1988).

These three movements are all inter-woven in contemporary constructionist inquiry. Together they also yield three major orienting assumptions forming the groundwork for my particular orientation to a relational account of human action:

The Social Origins of Knowledge

At the outset, constructionist writings serve an enormous liberating function. They remove the rhetorical power of anyone or any group claiming truth, wisdom, or ethics of universal scope - necessary for all. In this way they underscore the culturally and historically situated character of the Western self. They call into question all forms

of psychological essentialism, including the concepts of cognition, emotion, motivation, intention, creativity, and so on.[4] Moreover, they serve as a vital stimulus to innovation. They enable us to bracket traditions of discourse, and launch inquiry into new and more serviceable intelligibilities. Constructionist writings also point to promising directions for this kind of reconstructionist inquiry. Perhaps the most generative idea is that what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships. What we take to be true as opposed to false, objective as opposed to subjective, scientific as opposed to mythological, rational as opposed to irrational, moral as opposed to immoral is brought into being by communal activity. This view stands in obvious contrast to the Enlightenment valorization of the individual knower, the rational, self-directing, morally centered and knowledgeable agent of action. In effect, constructionist writings invite an appreciation of relationship as central to human understanding and action. It is not the individual mind in which knowledge, reason, emotion, and morality reside, but in relationships.

Language as Social Action

By placing the origin of knowledge in the communal sphere, constructionist writings also invite a major shift in the conception of language. On the modernist account, language was primarily a vehicle for the public expression of private mental states. It gained its significance primarily as a means of conveying the results of personal experience and reason. With observation and reason working in concert, the individual could become an arbiter of the real, a teller of truth. And because language could be shared, others were invited to judge the legitimacy of such declarations. Objectivity and truth became synonymous with a language that accurately pictures or mirrors the world as it is. Yet, given the social and linguistic critiques outlined above, this vision of language is thrown into question. There is no privileged route from observation to language. Rather, the language and practices of a community furnish the forestructure essential for processes of observation and thought to take place. It is here that Wittgenstein's (1953) proposal for a use-based conception of language becomes pivotal. Language gains its meaning not through its reflective capacities, but through game-like processes of relationship. And these

[4] For further discussion of the historicizing of the modernist self see especially Taylor (1989) and Seigel (2005).

game-like practices are lodged within broader "forms of life," or traditions of practice. Thus, as people coordinate their actions a major outcome is a system of signals or words. The words may serve to name the world for the participants. This is "a reward," you are "depressed," that is "a mammal," and so on. Such words are enormously important to sustaining these relationships. Not only do they represent the agreements regarding what exists for the participants, but they essentially constitute the glue by which their very forms of life - or traditions - are held together. There is no tradition of a jury trial without a language of guilt and innocence; no profession of psychology without a language of the mind; and little religion if the discourse of divinity were abandoned.

Theory as Political Action

Social constructionism shares much with a pragmatic view of knowledge claims. That is, traditional issues of truth and objectivity are replaced with concerns about practical outcomes. It is not whether an account is true from a god's eye view that matters; rather we ask about the results for our lives that follow from taking any truth claim seriously. There can be many truths, depending on community tradition, but as the constructionist asks, what happens to us - for good or ill - as we honor one as opposed to another account? There are no meaningful words without consequence. Such a conclusion has had enormous repercussions in the academic community and beyond. This is so especially for scholars and practitioners concerned with social injustice, oppression, and the marginalization of minority groups in society. If communities create realities (facts and good reasons) congenial to their own traditions, and these realities are established as true and good for all, then alternative traditions may be obliterated. Regardless of whether we are speaking of scientific fact, canons of logic, foundations of law, or spiritual truths, as we formulate the world we implicitly favor certain ways of life over others. Thus, for example, the scientist may use the most rigorous methods of testing intelligence, and amass tomes of data that indicate racial differences in intelligence. However, to presume that there is something called "human intelligence," that people differ in their possession of this capacity, and that a series of question and answer games reveal this capacity, is all specific to a given tradition or paradigm. Such concepts and measures are not required by "the way the world is." Most importantly, merely

entering the paradigm and moving within the tradition is deeply injurious to those people classified as inferior by its standards. Or to put it another way, the longstanding distinction between *facts* and *value* s - objective reflections of the world, and subjective desires or feelings of "ought" - cannot be sustained.

The implications for a sociocultural reconstruction of the concept of the person are clear enough. The primary question to consider in such efforts is one of political consequence. One need not be constrained by empirical evidence in such attempts, as such evidence is already constrained by the assumptive base on which the research was premised. Rather, the question is one of political poetics, how can we hammer together a "mobile army of metaphors" in such a way that they contribute to new and more promising forms of social practice? Nor should one be constrained by the styles of writing that we inherit within the scholarly tradition. To write in the favored ways of the academy may be serviceable only within these communities. Outside such writing is scarcely intelligible. Or in terms of many critics, such accounts are "elitist." If cultural transformation is a chief goal of theoretical work, then alternative forms of communication are required. This may include writing in more popular vernaculars, but it may also include expanding the arena of communication to include art, photography, film, multi-media, and more.

Toward Relational Being[5]

Developments in constructionist scholarship open a significant space for socio-cultural reconstruction of the person. They demonstrate the constructed character of the modernist self, and replace the individual with social process as the origin of knowledge. They further suggest that we view language neither as a representation of the world or of the mind, but as an action within social space. And finally, they invite the development of theory as a vehicle for social transformation. Yet, while the mental world is essentially de-ontologized, the question of how to proceed remains open; how could a theory of the person be constituted that did not rest on the presumption of an inner world of mind? Indeed, for Mead and Vygotsky, both progenitors of

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5 An extended account of relational being is contained in Gergen (2009).

contemporary excursions into sociocultural conceptions of the person, the individual mind remained focal. For Mead, persons are related via a subjective or symbolic interdependence; for Vygotsky cultural action formed the basis of what he viewed as "higher mental processes." There is virtually no socio-cultural theorist writing today who parts with the subjective world, who embraces a conceptual space in which the self is emptied of content. [6] I fully appreciate the resistance to abandoning the psychological being. Yet, such resistance is itself a victim of the modernist dualism, an "in here" that registers or constructs an "out there." In my view, we proceed more fruitfully by abandoning the dualist tradition altogether. Rather, we may view human action as whole cloth, not driven, motivated, planned, intended, or otherwise fashioned by an inner world, but acquiring its very intelligibility as action only in relation to other actions. With this conception in place, we may fruitfully return to the potentials of psychological discourse. To appreciate the possibility of a fully relational account, it is first essential to explore the socio-cultural constitution of intelligibility.

The Relational Origins of Meaning

If we cut discursive action away from a mental origin, we remove the locus of meaning from within the head, and place it in the social sphere. If we can render intelligible a means of understanding relational process as the origin of meaning, then it is compelling to view social process as the font of all that we take to be real, true, objective, rational, and good. And by implication, social process becomes the originating point for the very conception of a mental world. It is in this context that I find rich implications in the following propositions:

An individual's utterances in themselves possess no meaning.

We pass each other on the street. I smile and say, "Hello Anna." She walks past without hearing. Under such conditions, what have I said? To be sure, I have uttered two words. However for all the difference it makes I might have chosen two nonsense syllables. You pass and I say "Umlot nigen..." You hear nothing. When you fail to acknowledge me in any way, all words become equivalent. In an important sense, nothing has been said at all. I cannot possess meaning alone. One may object that even if not acknowledged, what I say might mean something to me personally. That may be, but the question then

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[6] See, for example, Bruner (1990),and Wertsch (1985).

becomes, how did your utterances come to have personal meaning? We take up this issue shortly.

The potential for meaning is realized through supplementary action.

Lone utterances begin to acquire meaning when another (or others) coordinate themselves to the utterance, that is, when they add some form of supplementary action (whether linguistic or otherwise). Effectively, I have greeted Anna only by virtue of her response. "Oh, hi, good morning..." brings me to life as one who has greeted. Supplements may be very simple, as simple as a nod of affirmation that indeed you have said something meaningful. It may take the form of an action, e.g. shifting the line of gaze upon hearing the word, "look!" Or it may extend the utterance in some way, as in "Yes, but I also think that...." We thus find that to communicate at all is to be granted by others a privilege of meaning. If others do not treat one's utterances as communication, if they fail to coordinate themselves around the offering, one is reduced to nonsense.

To combine these first two proposals, we see that meaning resides within neither individual, but only in a process of coordinated action, or *co-action*.[7] Both act and supplement must be coordinated in order for meaning to occur. Like a handshake, a kiss, or a tango, the individual's actions alone are empty. Communication is inherently collaborative. In this way we see that none of the words that comprise our vocabulary have meaning in themselves. They are granted the capacity to mean by virtue of the way they are coordinated with other words and actions. Indeed, our entire vocabulary of the individual - who thinks, feels, wants, hopes, and so on - is granted meaning only by virtue of coordinated activities among people. The birth of "myself" lies within relationship.

Supplementary action is itself a candidate for meaning.

Any supplement functions twice, first in granting significance to what has preceded, and second as an action that also requires supplementation. In effect, the meaning it grants remains suspended

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[7] The concept of co-action owes a debt to both Herbert Blumer's *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method* (1969, New York: Prentice Hall), and to John Shotter's writings (especially, *Action, joint action and intentionality*, in Brenner, M. (Ed.) The structure of action. 1980, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Conversational realities, 1993, London: Sage)both of whom employ the concept of *joint action*, but with different conceptual implications.

until it too is supplemented. Consider a therapy client who speaks of her deep depression; she finds herself unable to cope with an aggressive husband and an intolerable job situation. The therapist can grant this report meaning as an expression of depression, by responding, "Yes, I can see why you are depressed; tell me a little more about your relationship with your husband." However, this supplement too stands idle of meaning until the client provides the supplement. If the client ignored the statement, for example going on to talk about her success as a mother, the therapist's words would be denied significance. More broadly, we may say that in daily life there are no *acts in themselves*, that is, actions that are not simultaneously supplements to what has preceded. Whatever we do or say takes place within a temporal flow that gives meaning to what has preceded, while simultaneously forming an invitation to further supplementation.

Acts create the possibility for meaning but simultaneously constrain its potential.

If I give a lecture on psychoanalytic theory, this lecture is meaningless without an audience that listens, deliberates, affirms, or questions what I have said. In this sense, every speaker owes to his or her audience a debt of gratitude; without their engagement the speaker ceases to exist. At the same time, my lecture creates the very possibility for the audience to grant meaning. While the audience creates me as a meaningful agent, I simultaneously grant to them the capacity to create. They are without existence until there is an action that invites them into being. Yet, my actions also set constraints upon supplementation. If I speak on Freud, as an audience member you are not able to supplement in any way you wish. You may ask me a question about object relations theory, but not astrophysics; comment on the concept of repression but not on taste of radishes. Such constraints exist because my lecture is already embedded within a *tradition of act and supplement*. It has been granted meaning as a "lecture on Freud," by virtue of previous generations of meaning givers. In this sense, actions embedded within relationships have *prefigurative* potential. The history of usage enables them to invite or suggest certain supplements as opposed to others - because only these supplements are sensible or meaningful within a tradition. Thus, as we speak with each other, we also set limits on each other's being; to remain in the

conversation is not only to respect a tradition, but to accede to being one kind of person as opposed to another.

Supplements function both to create and constrain meaning.

As we have seen, supplements "act backward" in a way that creates meaning of what has preceded. In this sense, the speaker's meaning - his or her identity, character, intention, and the like - are not free to "be what they are," but are constrained by the act of supplementation. Supplementation thus operates *postfiguratively*, to create the speaker as meaning this as opposed to that. From the enormous array of possibilities, the supplement gives direction and temporarily narrows the possibilities of being. Thus, for example, the therapist, who inquires into a client's depression establishes a form of constraint. If the client is to remain sensible, he or she may readily accede to being depressed. A therapeutic question can harbor implications for an entire life trajectory.

While act/supplements are constraining, they do not determine.

As proposed, our words and actions function so as to constrain the words and actions of others, and vice versa. If we are to remain intelligible within a tradition, we must necessarily act within these constraints. Such constraints have their origins in a history of co-action. As people coordinate actions and supplements, and come to rely on them in everyday life, they are essentially generating a way of life. If enough people join in these coordinated activities over a long period, we may speak of a cultural tradition. Yet, it is important to underscore that our words and actions function only as *constraints*, and *not as determinants*. This is so for two important reasons: First, the conditions under which we attempt to coordinate our actions are seldom constant. We are continuously faced with the challenge of importing old words and actions into new situations. As we do so, such words and actions acquire new possibilities for meaning. For example, you are visiting a farm and you point out to your child, "look...that is a chicken." The word "chicken" thus gains its meaning from the way it is embedded in this configuration of events. Later that day, the farmer's wife comes to the dinner table bearing a large platter, and announces, "We are having chicken for dinner tonight." Now the word used in referring to the live and clucking animal refers to the individual pieces of cooked meat. As new situations develop, so will the same word acquire other potentials

for meaning. More formally, all words are *polysemic*;" they may be used in many different ways.

A second important reason for our relative freedom of action lies in the fact that meaning making is always local. That is, coordination is always located in the here and now, in momentary and fleeting conditions - in the kitchen, the boardroom, the mine, the prison, and so on. These local efforts to coordinate give rise to local patterns of speaking and action - street slang, academic jargon, baby talk, jive talk, signing, and so on. And, because those who enter into such coordinations may issue from different cultural traditions - new combinations are always under production. In effect, we inherit an enormous potpourri of potentially intelligible actions - each arising from a different form of life - and the repository is under continuous motion. Our actions may be invited by history, but they are not required. In this sense, we can indeed "step over our shadows," and in order to function adequately in continuously changing circumstances, creative combinations will always be necessary.

Meanings are subject to continuous reconstitution via the expanding process of co-action.

In light of the above, we find that what an utterance means is inherently undecidable. No amount of discussion, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, or other attempt to determine what has been said, can be determinative. Indeed, all such attempts to fix meaning are themselves entries into the relational process, and their own meaning is now in question. The meaning of any utterance is a temporary achievement, born of the collaborative moment. Further, as relations continue over time, what is meant stands subject to continuous alteration through an expanding arena of action/supplements. Such expansion may be far removed from the interchange itself (e.g. consider a divorcing pair who retrospectively redefine their entire marital trajectory), and are subject to continuous change through interaction with and among others (e.g. friends, relatives, the media etc.).

In summary, we find the exclusive focus on the face-to-face relationship is far too narrow. For whether "I make sense" is not under my control; nor is it determined by you, or the dyadic process in which meaning struggles toward realization. At the outset, we largely derive our potential for coordination from our previous immersion in a range of other relationships. Actions

within these relationships typically derive their intelligibility from traditions of long standing. We arrive in the present relationship as extensions of the distant past. And, as the current relationship unfolds, it serves to reform the meaning of the past. These interchanges may be supplemented and transformed by still others in the future. In effect, meaningful communication in any given relationship ultimately depends on an extended array of relationships, not only "right here, right now," but how it is that you and I are related to a variety of other persons, and they to still others - and ultimately, one may say, to the relational conditions of culture and history. We are all in this way interdependently interlinked - without the capacity to mean anything, to possess an "I" - except for the existence of an extended world of relationship.

The Relational Reconstruction of Mind

While the concept of co-action enables us to view relational process *sui generis*, and not as a byproduct of inter-acting minds, this move is not in itself sufficient. In particular, if theory is to enter into social life a far richer discursive palette is required. It is tempting to embark on the development of a new vocabulary for describing and explaining human action. However, such a vocabulary would be alien and obscure. It would not figure in any significant way in daily or institutional practices. This has indeed been the problem faced by various philosophers who have attempted to break the boundary of subject and object, person and world. I have deep admiration for the work of Heidegger, Merleau Ponty, and G.H. Mead, for example. But their vocabularies of understanding are both obscure and lacking in practical consequence. Thus, let us not abandon the enormously rich vocabulary of inner life; instead, let us attempt to transform its meaning. We may refigure our understanding of this vast vocabulary so that it no longer contributes to the presumption of all against all. Rather, it is possible to unfold the concept of relational being in such a way that the mental vocabulary is fully a vocabulary of relationship. To illuminate the way, it is useful to consider four major proposals. If these logics are clear and compelling, the way is open to understanding the entire mental vocabulary as relational in origins and functions:

Mental discourse originates in the process of co-action.

It follows from the preceding proposals that the origin of all words referring to mental process emerge from the process of co-action. Terms such as thought, emotion, intention, and the like, are not the result of an inner assay, but participation within a tradition of relationship. Thus, children do not first recognize that they think, or feel, or intend, and then locate a label for these states. Rather, within relationships they acquire a vocabulary of the mental world that implies the existence of such states. It is only within these relationships that sadness, anger, and the like become realities for the child.

Mental discourse functions in the service of relationship.

If mental language is not a reflection of inner states, why do we use it at all? We are guided to an answer by the preceding discussion on the use-based conception of language. On this account we abandon the search for the truth of mental discourse, and are sensitized to its function within the sphere of relationships. In effect, mental discourse comes to have constitutive value within a culture. When we say, "please come for a visit," "look at that sunset!" or "Is that the number 9 bus?" there are social consequences. The result of saying such things is that people board planes, cast their gaze into the distance, or give us information. Mental discourse functions in just these ways. When someone says, "You make me so angry," or "You give me such pleasure," certain actions are invited, and others discouraged. Bursts of anger may correct your behavior, and expressions of pleasure invite you to repeat what you have done.

Mental discourse is social performance.

As proposed, mental discourse is action within relationship. In this sense it is a performance for others. By viewing it as performance attention is drawn to the way in which such discourse is embedded in fully embodied expression. Expressions of love, for example, are typically accompanied by movements of the eyes, head, and hands, along with appropriate posture. The spoken language is but one component of a full social performance. We may speak, then, of *psycho-performances*, that is, actions with or for others (present or implied) that include the discourse of the

mind.[8] With the utterance, "I was thinking that…" the speaker is not likely to be screaming or writhing on the ground. Rather, the tone of voice will probably be measured and gestures minimal. With the utterance, "I am angry," one is not likely to be grinning or hopping on one foot. He or she is far more likely to speak with lips tightened and possibly with clenched fists. In effect, thought and anger are not inside, searching for release in expression. They are fully coordinated bodily performances in which the words, "thinking" and "anger" often (but not necessarily) figure. In this sense, we perform thinking and anger in the same sense that we might kick a ball or drive a car. "Thinking," "feeling anger," "kicking," and "driving" are all intelligible actions; it is simply that the first two carry with them mental terminologies.

Discursive action is embedded in co-active process.

It follows from the preceding logic that the meaning of a psycho-performance is not the possession of the actor alone. Its meaning is born in co-action. Thus, for example, a young man professes his attraction for a colleague in a beautifully coordinated way: words, gestures, tone of voice, gaze…an incandescent expression of devotion. Yet, from the standpoint of co-action, her supplement will ratify it as meaning one thing as opposed to another. She may respond with a reciprocal expression of affection, thus affirming that his actions were expressions of love. However, consider some alternative possibilities: "Oh, you are such a hopeless romantic," "You haven't a clue what you're talking about." Or "Yea…but you said that last week to Sue."

With these four propositions in place we are positioned for a full reformulation of mental life. Replacing the view of the mind as a private reserve of the bounded being, we move to social process as the origin of all that we take to be mental. In this light, "having a given state of mind," is to perform felicitously within a tradition of relationship. One does not so much possess a mental state as to act in such a way that the possession becomes a shared reality. To have a mental life is to participate in a relational life.

At this point the reconstitution of psychology as relational performance joins hands with much work in discursive psychology

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[8] I am indebted here to James Averill's account of emotions as cultural performances. See Averill (1982) and Averill, and Sundarajan. (2004).

(Edwards and Potter, 1992). Thus, for example, in their early work Potter and Wetherell (1987) demonstrate the utility of reconstructing the concept of "attitude," as employed in social psychological research, by removing it from its position as anterior to behavior and placing it within actions of social declaration. To declare, "I like Smith for president," is not a public expression of a private feeling, but a social act, or effectively, the doing of an attitude. Similarly, others have explored the potentials of viewing reason not as a mental phenomenon, but as a particular way of talking, arguing, or writing within a particular tradition (Billig, 1996). Scholars from a range of disciplines have contributed to a view of memory as a socially constituted phenomenon.[9] To "have an accurate memory" is to engage in a culturally intelligible action.

Research on communal memory has stimulated others to consider the social origins of what we take to be private experience.[10] If we view sensation not as a "receiving into the mental world," but an intelligible action in the social world, we gain purchase on the concept of experience as relational. What we mean by visual experience, on this account, is an act of attending, and attentional acts are not random but relationally born. Still others have challenged the view of creativity as an individual origination, and explored the way in which creative acts are generated within communal traditions or enclaves. There is a substantial literature, both anthropological and historical, demonstrating the culturally constructed character of emotional performance.[11] This literature also throws into question the common assumption of emotion as biologically given. Drawing from this scholarship, I have attempted to illuminate how emotional performances are constituted within relational scenarios (Gergen, 1994). This work specifically focuses on the co-active dimension of psycho-performances.

While robust in their implications, these various efforts raise many significant questions. For one, many scholars in the socio-

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9 See, for example, Connorton (1987) and Misztal (2003).

10 See especially, Middleton and Brown (2005).

11 See, for example, Rosaldo (1980), Heider (1991), Wulff (2007) and Lynch (1992).

cultural domain are loathe to abandon the concept of intentional action. Further, they are supported by the common sense that people do understand their intentions. We know that when we enter a bank, for example, we intend to deposit a check and not commit a robbery. To be sure, there is abundant literature demonstrating how intentions are attributed and negotiated in social interchange. However, the question remains as to how we can quite privately and quite commonly be so certain about our intentions. Let us answer the question in terms of psycho-performance. Like parts in a play, psycho-performances are culturally recognizable. When I am standing before a class I am engaged in a performance we call teaching. The students recognize what I am doing no less than I. There are unwritten rules about what I might do under these circumstances, and if I break these rules in a flagrant way (e.g. striking a student for making a mistake) I will lose my job. How, then, do I identify what I am trying (intending, attempting, endeavoring) to do in the classroom? It is evident to me not from looking inward but from participating in the performance. Without hesitation I can tell you that I am trying to teach or intending to teach because I am indeed engaged in a recognizable performance. I recognize my intentions in the same way an actor recognizes he is playing the part of Hamlet and not Othello. To name my intentions, is to name the performance in which by common standards I am engaged.

A second significant question concerns the fact that people are often alone, and during these times they seem to engage in what we commonly call thought, emotion, and desire. Do these experiences not count as *psychological* in the traditional sense of being separated from or independent of the socius? It is here that current work in cultural psychology, especially the Vygotskian tradition points the way. In Vygotsky's famous lines, "There is nothing in mind that is not first in all society."[12] Or, in present terms, whatever is taking place privately has its origins in the sphere of co-action. However, the relational view developed here abandons the mind/world dualism represented in this statement.

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[12] Vygotsky (1978). p. 142

Rather, it is more useful to view actions in private as relational actions performed on a minimal scale. In effect, they are *partial performances*. Instead of uttering rational words out loud to another, for example, one utters them without sound. In the same way an actor may rehearse his lines privately, or one "hums to oneself" without making a sound. In effect, what we do privately is not taking place in another world – called mind – but is essentially engaging in social life without the audience present. Implicitly there is always an audience for our private reveries.

In Conclusion

In my view, the scholarly development of a more historically and culturally sensitive conception of the person is essential. This is so not only because of the globally inimical consequences of the modernist/individualist tradition. But in addition, Western culture is moving rapidly toward a materialistic reduction of the person. The rapid expansion of brain science and its accompaniment in cognitive/neuro and evolutionary psychology is startling. Further, this expansion is fueled by major funding from both governments and the psychopharmacological industry. At this juncture, mental health professionals are virtually captive to the idea that the origin of human suffering inheres in individual brains. At the same time, I am skeptical of the potential for scholarly work alone to make significant cultural inroads. Abstract theory has little impact outside academic enclaves. In my view it is important that scholars work together with societal practitioners to translate into practical action the implications of their deliberations. Sociocultural accounts should move hand in hand with innovations in pedagogical and therapeutic practices. They should enter into efforts to transform both communities and organizations, replace conflict with peace, and bring about more viable forms of global life. It is within the context of action that the full meaning of such theoretical work will be realized.

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