

## *Lecture One*

### **Meaningful and Enchanted Lives:**

### **A Threat from the Human Sciences?**

*Abstract:* Tonight's lecture is devoted to two tasks: First, I pose a problem about how science, especially, the human sciences might be seen as disruptive relative to other familiar ways we have for making sense of things and living meaningfully. Second, I examine what there is to say now about the *scientific image* of persons. This will position us to see whether the alleged threat is real or imaginary or, more likely, something in-between.

#### **1. The Philosopher's Vocation.**

In 1960, Wilfrid Sellars began a famous pair of lectures with these words: "The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term." In these lectures I take up Sellars challenge by examining whether, and if so how, the synthetic ambition expressed might work, or better how it might proceed, so that the aspirations, theories, traditions, and images associated with *art, science, technology, ethics, politics & law, and spirituality* could be seen as hanging together now, or with some adjustments and refinements, down the road in some not too distant future.<sup>1</sup> The general theme of these lectures is *Human Flourishing in the Age of Mind*

---

<sup>1</sup> Many philosophers think that Sellars' description of the philosopher's vocation describes a fool's errand. What is certainly true is that it does not describe what most philosophers do or aim to do. And that is fine for many philosophical problems are too technical to work profitably on them while at the same time doing what Sellars suggests. But here I take a stab. CAVEAT: You might wish to note with concern that philosophy is not in the list. It would be too glib and too puffed up to say, "Right, philosophy is above 'all that' stuff. It is the queen of the disciplines and it is needed to do the job (that the rest of the disciplines are not up-to)." In the other direction, it would be dishonest and excessively self-effacing to say: "Oh, don't worry philosophy is just a tool and I am just your humble underlaborer". Philosophy, including my philosophy, is not just a neutral tool. Philosophy as I do it, indeed as all professional philosophers practice it, is theoretical, opinionated, critical, and criticizable. One reason I leave it off the list is that professional philosophy is not a space that most people interact with to make sense of things and find meaning. I do, but it's my thing, my passion. Many people, of course philosophize, even have

*Science*, so my eye is especially on how mind-science (and to a lesser extent, other sciences and technology) relate to the non-scientific members of the set.

These six are worth examining because they each individually and together as a dynamic set comprise familiar ways of making meaning and sense of things, including ourselves. I call this sextet, this set with six members, a *Goodman Set*, in honor of Nelson Goodman's classic book *Ways of Worldmaking* in which Goodman shows how such abstract social objects contribute to the constitution of our worlds.

A Goodman Set is a set that (a) contains members that can be individuated in a principled way, by family resemblance criteria, but not in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions; (b) each member names an abstract scheme, a 'form of life', which humans intersect with, participate in, and utilize and deploy in making sense and meaning of things, including themselves. It is only by living in these spaces that we make sense of things, orient our lives, find our way, and live meaningfully. Thus each member of a *Goodman Set* is a *space of meaning*. A *Goodman set* of spaces of meaning and correctly characterized for some group is the Space of Meaning for that group.<sup>2</sup>

The particular *Goodman Set* I aim to speak about constitutes what I'll call the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21stcentury</sup>. I am a bit hesitant to describe it this way since not all inhabitants of the earth,

---

philosophies, and I'll be asking all of us to philosophize together the next two weeks. So, trust me, I am aware that I must, we must, keep our critical eyes on the philosophy I'll be doing and that we'll be doing together. Or, as a friend of mine says: "That's for *after* the discussion period."

<sup>2</sup> Suppose, as seems plausible, that when the ice melted at the end of the Pleistocene our cognitive schemes were only rich enough to enable us to achieve biological fitness. We knew where and when to forage and hunt. We made tools for these tasks and shared skills. And we possessed cognitive schemes that expressed the relevant know-how, possibly not in a consciously expressible form. Questions of who we are, what we are like deep-down inside, how we are situated in the cosmos were possibly not asked or theorized. But whatever ways we had then for getting around, for interacting with conspecifics, and so on, constituted the *Goodman set* for these distant ancestors.

possibly a full 20%, have little commerce with *Space of Meaning*<sup>21stcentury</sup>. These are fellow humans who live in a condition of “absolute poverty” as defined by economists. Insofar as they can be said to live in a *Space of Meaning* at all, it is one constituted by a spiritual or religious view that may provide some small hope against their otherwise utterly hopeless lives. I’ll come back to this problem several times over the course of the lectures.

The basic picture is this: We humans are *cognitive-affective-conative* creatures who live as beings-in-time with our feet on-the-ground interacting in and with the natural, social, and built worlds. Living is a *psycho-poetic performance*, a drama that is our own, but that is made possible by our individual intersection and that of our fellow performers in a *Space of Meaning*. How we act, feel, move, speak, and think in the world depends in large measure on how we weave a tapestry of sense and meaning by participation in various subspaces within the spaces of meaning that constitute the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21stcentury</sup>.

One concern is how, if they do hang together, such ‘non-thingy things’ as the practices, forms of life, and ways of world-making that shape and partly constitute our individual *psycho-poetical performances* interact, intersect, and ‘hang together.’ These ‘non-thingy-things’ are the stuff of schemas, cognitive models. forms of life, world hypotheses, modes of inquiry, disciplines, *Weltanschauungs*, the Background, and the Horizon, social imaginaries, master narratives, and meta-narratives. They form at least a significant part of the Background within we live our lives. But they are all “on the move.” So they are also a Foreground, places we extend our selves into – what I call the Horizontal Zone.

These ‘non-thingy-things’ all have visible public lives at least in the West, and, I think, in all three other geographical directions as well.<sup>3</sup> How seriously and respectfully each is treated, how much each aspiration or set of practices is socially supported is, however, a matter of considerable variability. And, again, how and to what degree any particular individual ‘participates’ in these spaces, or creates her own *psycho-poetic performance* by intersecting with them, is variable. The variability is one way we express our individuality.

In his mature phenomenology Edmund Husserl called the individual instantiation of life among the *spaces* constituting the *Space of Meaning*, the *Lebenswelt*. For each person in, say, a particular community there is a *lebenswelt*,  $l_1, l_2 \dots l_n$  that constitutes the lived-world, the *psychopoetic performance* for each individual. The lived-world has a subjective, ‘something-it-is-like’ nature, that is the way it is experienced first-personally, as well as an objective side, which is captured by the individual’s enactive, embodied being-in-time-in-the world. Some of the things we do, we know about and understand first-personally. But there are cases where well-positioned third parties see and understand what we have done, are up-to better than we do ourselves (Wilson, 2003).

Sticking with the West for present purposes, there are socially available images of what each of these ‘non-thingy-things’ does, what each is for, what each aims to get at, and what sort of homage each individually and they collectively deserve.

The collective Background, as well as the Horizon or set of horizons they gesture towards, constitute a vast public space – a space that no individual could possibly get her head around or

---

<sup>3</sup> Of the six spaces, two -- religion and science seem the most comprehensive. Religion typically includes an ethical vision so this is one reason why it seems comprehensive. The situation of science is different. Most people, even well educated ones, don’t actually know much science. What they do know is that ‘science’ in our time – well the situation goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> c. – seems to offer opinions on matters that some conceive of as settled by religion, or perhaps just by culture. Ergo, the greatest conflicts occur between these two spaces.

fully into. Furthermore, in part because it is vast and social, the Background is not always well-articulated, and it includes a certain amount of meta-theory. There is art, but there are also theories about what art is and isn't, views about kinds and degrees of beauty. Aesthetic theories. There is science and there is philosophizing about science. The Background, as a container of theory(ies) and meta-theory(ies), has its origins and roots in embodied human practices – the production of art, scientific theorizing and experiment, moral education, political debates, the enactment of legislation, spiritual experience, meditation and prayer, building sacred spaces. So there is bi-directionality. The spaces of meaning are created collectively and emerge from collective activity. They then, as emergent products, grow and develop and constitute spaces we each enter to make a life, to live out the *psycho-poetic performance* that is our life. We capture the story of who and what we are, the story of our individual *psycho-poetic performance* in autobiographical narratives that have all the usual epistemic problems – misdescription, misconstrual, and self-serving spin – that autobiographies in print have.

The philosopher's job as depicted by Sellars is to speak about how all, or at least our most important practices, relate, interconnect, interpenetrate, hang-together or fail to do so. This task is beyond my talents and expertise. And even if it were not, my projected life span does not permit taking on the job. Thus my tactic is to focus on how contemporary mind science, informed by Darwin's theory of evolution, a sub-species of science in the *Goodman Set*, interacts with the other spaces and thereby affects human well-being. Is neo-Darwinian mind-science – by which I do not mean evolutionary psychology -- a source of disharmony or not? If so, why? Are there ways to make the relations more harmonious? Or is it ok if we live among and interact

with disharmonious spaces? Does science generally and the human sciences specifically disenchant the world?<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Where We Live: Psycho-Poetic Space.

One might worry about my *Space of Meaning*<sup>21stcentury</sup> for a number of reasons. It is too abstract, and it is incomplete, are two concerns that come to my mind. Let me concede that there is merit to both objections. I'll come back to these concerns shortly. First, I need to flesh out what it means to conceive of life *psycho-poetically*. Understanding this will explain why I think that a *Goodman set*, especially one that captures the *Space of Meaning* for a people, is a useful explanatory device or probe despite its abstract nature and the possibility that any such description of this space may be incomplete.

Thinking about human lives *psycho-poetically* is more richly textured, more complete, less abstract, and thus a more realistic way of conceiving of life than as seen from the rarified heights of *Space of Meaning*<sup>21stcentury</sup>. Still it helps explain why the more abstract inquiry might work usefully to understand life as normal humans live it. Here's the idea.

*Psycho-Poetics* refers to the creative ways persons attempt to make meaning and sense of things and thereby to live well. A person who lives well, in a way that makes sense and is meaningful, is what the Greeks called *eudaimon* – literally 'happily blessed.' *Eudaimonia* is

---

<sup>4</sup> When Max Weber coined the idea of the "disenchantment" of the world, he thought that "disenchantment," insofar as it was a problem, had many causes: capitalistic economic arrangements that set everyone's sights on accumulating wealth as the way to happiness, deep economic inequality, industrialization and horrific pollution of the environment. But *Naturwissenschaften* – forget about the human sciences -- played a role in 'disenchantment.' The magic, mystery, and majesty of the traditional narratives of the human situation are displaced by stories whose main actors are impersonal causal forces. Atoms whirl, galaxies move, gravity does its thing, and so on. Bacteria and viruses cause illness, not evil spirits of the sort a shaman might expel. Weber like many others saw the prospect that there might in fact be such a thing as *Geisteswissenschaften*, human sciences that were poised to attempt to explain human behavior without *geist* at all, that is by denying that human action had in sources in anything like an incorporeal mind or a soul. Such things would go the way of phlogiston.

flourishing. Aristotle said, and I agree, that all humans seek *eudaimonia*, although importantly they disagree about what makes for *eudaimonia*.

The compound term *psycho-poetics* is designed to draw attention to the fact that the human attempt to make meaning and sense of things is akin to a performance executed ideally with style, grace, feeling and a certain amount of mindfulness. To say that persons are engaged in *psycho-poetics* has a descriptive and a normative component. Individual persons co-create their performance with others inside the space of socially available modes of being, thinking, and feeling. That is, we each, in as many different ways as there are individual persons, enter into accessible portions of the expansive spaces of art, entertainment, sport, education, work, ethics, economics, politics, friendship, family, community, social associations, spirituality, science and technology, in commerce with the natural world and the built-world, in order to live well, in order to make meaning and sense of ourselves and our world. All of these grounded spaces can be understood as embodied modes of intersecting with aspects of the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21stcentury</sup>.

In relation to some of these spaces we are actively engaged; in relation to others we are audience, sometimes inattentively or disinterestedly so. There are various reasons why some, possibly many, persons do not engage with every one of these spaces – possibly not even as inattentive audience. One tragic reason is that at least 20% of the people on earth live in absolute poverty and are thus, of necessity, pretty much solely devoted to staying alive (although as I said earlier, some form of spirituality is usually available even to these sad souls).<sup>5</sup> Among the remaining 80%, who have enough to survive, few devote equal time and energy to each of the

---

<sup>5</sup> There are many Buddhist texts, for example, the various teachings of *lam rim*, a prominent set of guided meditations from Tibet -- “the path to bliss” -- that make much of the importance of learning to live with, and thus need and want, almost nothing. Most philosophers, west and east, think one needs basic necessities to have any chance of flourishing. But Aristotle (and for all I know the World Bank) may set the bottom too high. In the Buddhist case, the poor folk who can ascend the path of *lam rim* need to be provided with basic sustenance (often in the form of *dana* – gifts from others) and to be positioned to receive education, to be instructed on how to follow the path.

activities or practices mentioned. One reason is that no one deems each equally significant to finding her way. Especially in the West where no one needs to live in absolute poverty and where communication media are intrusive and speak about all these forms of life and all these ways of being, it is hard to be completely oblivious to ‘what’s goin’ on’ even in domains one cares little about. Thus it is a rare bird who does not intersect and interact with most of these social spaces in some way or other.

Such interaction, such intersection, is so much expected that the *norms* governing our ideals of good and meaningful lives require **(a)** that we interact in some way or another with most of these spaces, and **(b)** that we be able to narratively track to some degree how we are doing so. The standard sort of narrative that expresses who we are, what we are like, what we believe and care about will be enough to capture the nature of our *psycho-poetic* performance. The self-expressive, self-locating narrative by which we describe who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed is by and large the report on our own *psycho-poetic performance*.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, we are in some significant way the person constituted by this *psycho-poetic performance*.

*Psycho-poetics* also refers to a meta-activity: philosophical examination of the abstract or idealized *psycho-poetic* space that is “out-there” in a socially embodied form and from which we are each invited to partake. What shape does “our” public *psycho-poetical space* have? What are the major components of “our” *psycho-poetics*? What “forms of life” constitute the public *psycho-poetic space*? How do the various ways we have of making meaning and sense of things relate, interpenetrate, and hang together? The double duty name *psycho-poetics* serves to describe both the performance of individuals engaged in making meaning and sense and the description and analysis of the public vehicles that carry the possibilities for making meaning

---

<sup>6</sup> See Dennett (1991), Flanagan (1991, 1992, 2000,2002), Fireman, McVay and Flanagan (ed.) (2002) on the conception between narrative and selfhood.

and sense. If, as I recommend, we conceive of persons as engaged in *psycho-poetical performances*, it follows that how we fare involves questions (and answers) about how we each intersect with the publicly available life forms available to us. One plausible way of describing that space is as the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup>.

## 7. Abstraction

I hope one can see how by moving between the *lebenswelts*, the *psycho-poetic performances* of individuals and cohesive social groups, and the *Goodman set* that constitute the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup> provides the right sort of analytic space for the present inquiry.

Despite the fact that the six *spaces of meaning* that constitute the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup> (I don't claim that the list is exhaustive) are each abstractions, they are useful abstractions. In the language of linguistics the name for each space is a superordinate terms like 'vehicle.' Cars, trains, planes, jets, motorcycles, and rickshaws are all vehicles. A retro 2004 Vespa '*Serie Americana*' 150cc is my vehicle. Starting with the superordinate categories, despite entailing that we are starting the conversation in abstract space, has several advantages. First, public discourse about conflict between spaces commonly occurs using exactly these abstract terms. There is, for example, the alleged conflict between science and religion. But there really isn't any such conflict since neither science nor religion names a single, determinate, or homogeneous practice. There is, as I write, a conflict between Darwinism and creationism and intelligent design (*ID*), especially in America. Some say *ID* is creationism-in-disguise. I plead agnostic -- suspiciously agnostic.

But chemistry, anatomy, and medicine are parts of science, and they are not bothering most religious folk. Second, not all spiritual traditions are having trouble, or need to have trouble,

with evolution. If certain Christians stopped claiming that the Genesis story (which of the two?) is literally true, part of the problem would disappear. The Dalai Lama is pretty comfortable with evolution. Many spiritual folk, the earth over, have not yet heard of or absorbed the theory. Time will tell how they respond. So one advantage of starting at the high level is that when conflict occurs, it allows us easy descent to the exact location of the problem. If after discussion the problem seems bigger, such as the sense that science in general is disenchanting, then we can ascend and talk about that.

Relatedly, starting at the abstract level, thanks to the inclusiveness of the superordinate categories, allows us to think, speak, and compare what the *psycho-poetic performances* are like for any two individuals by descending from the abstract to where each lives among the spaces in *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup>. A male Celtic-Catholic-Buddhist from Durham, North Carolina, who has raised two atheists of great charm and integrity, who does philosophy, is impressed by and knowledgeable about biology and mind science, who loves both Bach and the Beatles, and is on the political left, participates in *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup> in one recognizable way. The female Muslim from Dearborn, Michigan who works as an engineer, enjoys reading books like *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, paints in water color, has a son in the army, supports the war in Iraq, and has raised her children to be devout, participates in *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup> in another recognizable way. We can live happily in the same country and find our way, making meaning and sense of things. Could we marry and live happily ever after? Doubtful. The Masai thirty-something who runs safaris and Kilimanjaro ascents from Dar es Salaam, who listens to African hip-hop and west Indian reggae, who sculpts Masai folk images in teak, who has deep

knowledge of the flora and fauna of Tanzania and Kenya, and who works at a distance against the genocide in Sudan, can also be easily seen as working in *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup>.<sup>7</sup>

One more point relating to the interplay between the abstract and the concrete. One might think it would be wisest to narrow the topic to the highly visible conflict between science and religion. The first point is that this visible and noisy conflict may not be as deep or widespread as it might seem. And truth be told, I fear that if I give it more attention than it deserves, I encourage the conflict in just the way one encourages a naughty child by giving him too much attention when he is naughty. Second, I am certain we do best if we frame whatever conflicts exist between this dyad within the wider space of the multifarious things we do to make meaning and sense.<sup>8</sup> Forget for a moment about science and its relations to religion. If one conceives of science as the only epistemically “first-class” way of speaking (I believe Quine used this expression for physics and he had no hope that any human science could ever achieve “first class” status), it is not at all clear how ethics and politics are to be conceived. Ethics and politics

---

<sup>7</sup> The interplay between individual lives and the *Space of Meaning* is best described in terms of dynamic systems theory. There is real time interaction in every direction, including bottom-up and top-down.

<sup>8</sup> To get a feel for the myriad horizontal and vertical tensions within the Space of Meaning consider just a few example. Science in our time is seen as causing trouble for religious belief. But mutual revulsion between Muslim women in burkhas and Western women in jeans and tank-tops involve conflicts between *mores* that have nothing to do with any scientific matter. Nor, although many think otherwise, are such matters discussed in the *Q’ran* or *Bible*. The *Q’ran* does say that women should cover their breasts, which both burkhas and tank-tops do. This is a conflict about sexuality modesty and is part of a larger conflict about cultural values. Similarly, many Americans (I include myself) appreciate rap and hip-hop as art – a truthful artful way of depicting aspects of life that ought to be seen and depicted. Picasso’s *Guernica* is art that depicts the horror of war. Rap and hip-hop are art – melodic, poetic, clever, often fun and amusing—that depict ways of being and thinking that run from the unusual to the depressing. Some think that rap and hip-art are not art for reasons that are internal to, say, their conception of music. Others think rap and hip-hop, even if art are ethically repulsive and socially dangerous. The first attitude is a conflict within aesthetics the second is one between aesthetics and ethics. . I think rap and hip-hop are often musically good and morally and politically necessary. Or take the debate about the use of stem cells. Recent scientific discoveries make the debate worth having. But the debate itself is a debate about values, moral, political, and I think, aesthetic values. Then there are debates within science. For example, within contemporary mind science there are heated debates about the nature and causal efficacy of consciousness, about whether mental properties are *sui generis* or identical to brain states, about the relative roles of affect and cognition, about whether and, if so, what kind of ‘free will’ humans have, and so on.

have to do with virtues, values, norms, and practices productive of the common good. They ask the perennial questions: How shall *I* live? How shall *we* live?

Many scientists will claim that science is unopinionated on such matters. But if we grant to science, its findings and methods, the broad scope that *global metaphysical naturalism* and *scientism* seem to entail, then it is not clear how anyone could be legitimately opinionated on such matters. *Global metaphysical naturalism* is an imperialistic ontological view of maximal scope: what there is and all there is, is matter and energy transformations among natural stuff. *Scientism* says that everything worth expressing can be said expressed in a scientific idiom. If either or both views were credible, it is hard to see what art, music, ethics, and politics even are, do, or are about.

Similarly for the arts. Music, literature, poetry, painting, drama (serious and comic) and dance are all ways in which and through which humans try to make meaning and sense (this is so whether one is situated as artist or as audience). What is art? What is it for? Paintings like Picasso's *Guernica* or Munch's *The Scream* are said to speak truthfully about something. How can art speak truthfully about war and existential despair if everything real is matter and energy transfers among natural stuff? What could war and existential despair even be? If the arts are speaking about matter and energy transfers it is well-disguised and we are seriously confused about what they are doing. Politics (and I guess ethics too) could be analyzed as forms of engineering, something science makes sense of, indeed that it gives rise to. Machiavelli, before science was really big, had this idea. And Quine advanced the idea late in the last century. But if we allow that politics often expresses, occasionally embodies, views about goodness and beauty, and is not exclusively concerned with matters of social coordination, conflict management, and

the like, then the problem of the place of these things in the world that science purports to describe and explain resurfaces.

With such worries in the open, I can't emphasize enough that insofar as there are conflicts and tensions across the horizontal spaces comprising the *Space of Meaning*, so too there are abundant conflicts and tensions within each space, vertical tensions. Many people in my experience will point to physics as the science that has its own house in order. But this is a fiction. Indeed, in so far as *metaphysical naturalism* depends on physics for support, and it does, it faces this serious problem. Physicists don't know what nature is or consists in. As I write, theoretical physicists agree that two of the biggest feats in 20<sup>th</sup> physics have been the theory of quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity. The problem lies in trying to fit the two together, which is impossible in three dimensions. In fact, the two theories if embraced simultaneously as true, rather than as instrumentally useful – with small stuff and big stuff, respectively -- are inconsistent.

Thus one of the biggest goals in physics today is to unify the strong, weak, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces into one unified force, or what physicists call the "Grand Unified Theory."<sup>9</sup> The point is that physics is not unified and there is no agreed upon answer to how the world works or even what it consists of or in. Thus even saying that "everything is 'natural'" lacks content; it is merely a promissory speech act. No one knows what

---

<sup>9</sup> It has already been discovered that at high enough energies, electromagnetism and the weak force are the same force, known as the electroweak force. It is theorized that if energies are increased even further, all the known forces will boil down into the same force. If the standard model can be simplified in this way, it may lead into areas of further study in order to get a better grasp of the world around us. Another research program designed to merge the two into one theory is *string theory* was proposed. It is a theory that states that particles are made up of tiny strings and membranes, which exist in 10 or more dimensions, three being the ones we experience, plus other "tiny" dimensions. *Grand unification, grand unified theory, or GUT* theorizes that we might be able to unify the three "fundamental" (we don't really know if they are truly fundamental) gauge symmetries: hypercharge, the weak force, and quantum chromodynamics. The idea is that at extremely high energies, all the symmetries have the same gauge coupling strength. This is consistent with the speculation that they are at root different manifestations of a single overarching gauge symmetry. So far, physicists have been able to merge electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force into the electroweak force, and work is being done to merge electroweak and QCD into a QCD-electroweak interaction. Beyond grand unification, we MIGHT merge gravity with the other three gauge symmetries in a theory of everything, *TOE*. Very cool. But very much a work-in-progress.

‘everthing’ is, nor do we know what, sticking with the familiar natural world, what it is made of – elementary particles (which ones?), strings (what kind?).

## 8. Geisteswissenschaften: Our Peculiar Situation

The six ways of making meaning and sense that constitute our *Goodman Set* and thus the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup> all have long histories. But, possibly only in the West has science been on, and stayed on, the list for several centuries. *Naturwissenschaften* began really blossoming in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the official appearance of *Geisteswissenschaften*, anthropology, sociology, and psychology as well as new ways of conceiving of history and political science as scientific or potentially so.<sup>10</sup> *Geisteswissenschaften* joined *Naturwissenschaften* in the pursuit of describing and explaining (in some cases predicting and controlling) whatever can be described and explained naturally. This fact created a special situation. The human sciences, in our time -- especially but not exclusively the mind-sciences are opinionated about the nature and status of the other ways of making meaning and sense. Indeed, the very idea of the human sciences implies that all human practices can, in principle, be understood scientifically.

Here’s the Possibility Proof:

- Humans are natural creatures who live in the natural world.

---

<sup>10</sup> I have been known to fuss about the standard depiction of the emergence of psychology (Flanagan, 2002; Flanagan forthcoming). The “official story” is that scientific psychology begins in Leipzig in 1879 when “brass instruments” and labs are used to test memory for non-sense syllables and the like. True, that is when and where this sort of inquiry began. But systematic empirical inquiry into the nature of mind is very, very old. For example, the portions of the Buddhist Pali canon, specifically the parts of the *Abidharma*, devoted to a descriptive and normative taxonomy of mental states, is arguably still the best we have; and it was written down in 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE. In the West, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle offer deep psychological insight that, arguably, is being rediscovered.

- Humans according to the neo-Darwinian consensus are animals: *Homo sapiens sapiens*, mammals who know and know that they know.
- Human practices are natural phenomena.
- Art, science, ethics, religion, and politics are human practices.
- The natural and human sciences can, in principle, describe and explain human nature and human practices.
- Therefore, the sciences can explain, in principle, the nature and function of art, science, ethics, religion, and politics.

## 9. The Threat of *Scientism*

What might explaining our practices involve? Presumably we'd try to understand the nature and functions of these practices, as well as their causal antecedents and consequences. This would lead us to understand the nature of *Homo sapiens sapiens* more deeply. It would almost inevitably require changes to traditional narratives of self-understanding. If the changes involve filling in blank, open spaces, there may be no special problems. If, however, well-entrenched views about the nature of ourselves and our world are asked to yield to better ways of understanding, the task is more complicated and stress-inducing. It may involve undermining stories that we think of as necessary for living meaningfully.

One surprisingly common idea is that science in explaining some phenomenon makes it something it isn't or wasn't.<sup>11</sup> It tries to dis-close that every thing is a "mere thing." It takes the

---

<sup>11</sup> Some think that whether science demystifies or explains phenomena it – in doing what it does -- disenchant the world. This attitude is related to the idea that if science can explain some phenomenon, then the phenomenon isn't

world-as-we-know-it and turns it into a mere collection of scientific objects. ‘Reductionism’ is the disparaging name for this phenomenon. Something like this view is out-there. But it rests on a silly mistake. To say that some phenomenon can be understood scientifically, even that it can be reduced, is not to say that the phenomenon is itself ‘scientific’ nor does it entail that the phenomenon we began with disappears or evaporates – whatever exactly that might mean. Consider a simple case: Water is H<sub>2</sub>O. Water is not explained away; its nature is understood more deeply. Water is a natural element. It is the *explanandum*. H<sub>2</sub>O is the *explanans*. Is either water or H<sub>2</sub>O itself ‘scientific’? The question makes no sense. Water is a natural phenomena and science helps us to understand its microstructure. That’s all there is to it.

There is a view that I mentioned earlier called ‘scientism’ that might be the source of some of the dis-ease with contemporary science. *Scientism* is the brash and overreaching doctrine that says that everything worth saying or expressing can be said or expressed in a scientific idiom. Arguably some of the European logical positivists of the 1920’s and 1930’s came close to embracing scientism.

The claim that science can, in principle, explain everything we think, say, and do, that it can, in principle, provide a causal account of human being --a causal account of *Dasein* -- needs to be distinguished from the claim that everything can be expressed scientifically. Consider art and music. It is patently crazy to say that the work of Michelangelo, da Vinci, Van Gogh,

---

what we thought it is. The plea to “save the appearances” is a plea to stop science from explaining away what it explains. Let me give an example. Wilfred Sellars, inspired by a problem posed by the great physicist Sir Arthur Eddington, was worried about such problems as making sense of my firm conviction that this lectern is a solid with the knowledge that it is actually made up of between 80-90% empty matter. Can I, should I even if I can, hold in my head at once both the picture of this lectern as solid and the picture of it as a mostly empty field in Hilbert space whose components are held together by the laws of quantum mechanics? Is it better, indeed mentally necessary, to see the two pictures in quick alteration, the way a Necker cube, and other Gestalt images, are seen? Can I say both pictures are true in their own way? Or should I let one win over the other as the truth along appearance vs. reality lines? My own view on this case is that lecterns are solid and clouds aren’t. If I want to understand more deeply why this is so, I go to quantum physics. But explaining solidity doesn’t explain it away.

Cezanne, or Picasso, of Mozart, Chopin, or Schönberg, or of Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Bob Dylan, or Nirvana could be expressed scientifically. Assuming something like the best case scenario for science, we might want to say that artistic and musical productions can be analyzed in terms of their physical manifestations -- painting in terms of chemistry and geometry, and music in terms of sound waves and mathematical relationships. Furthermore, some very complex combination of the culture, individual life, and the brain of some artist might allow for something like an explanation sketch of why he produced the works he did. Kay Redfield Jamison has done very interesting work on the high incidence of bi-polar disorder among great 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c. poets and musicians.<sup>12</sup> Such work might lead us to understand more deeply what ordinary and creative imagination consist in. There is nothing remotely odd about these kinds of scientific investigation of art or music, or of the creative process itself. But although such inquiry takes artistic or musical production as something to be explained, it does not take the production itself as expressing something that can be stated scientifically. The claim that not everything can be expressed scientifically is not a claim that art, music, poetry, literature, and religious experiences cannot in principle be accounted for scientifically, or that these productions involve magical or mysterious powers. Whatever they express, it is something perfectly human, but the appropriate idiom of expression is not a scientific one. The scientific idiom requires words and, often, mathematical formulae. Painting, sculpture, and music require neither. Indeed, they cannot in principle express what they express in words or mathematical formulae. Therefore, whatever they express is not expressible scientifically. Poetry, literature, and music with lyrics uses words. But their idiom is not a scientific one.

---

<sup>12</sup> There is also some interesting work on personality types that do not suffer severe bi-polar disorders or deep depression but by who have an “over-inclusive” cognitive style and who are more creative than average. (A. Abraham, et al., “Conceptual expansion and creative imagery as a function of psychoticism.” *Consciousness and Cognition* 14 (2005): 520-534).

Historians of literature and art often tell us useful things about art—about how poets (John Donne) and artists (Da Vinci) were influenced by scientific ideas, for instance, and psychologists can explain important things about the physiology of perception. Despite the illumination provided, neither provides anything approaching a complete or satisfying explanation of what any interesting artistic work means or does. The simple and obvious point is this: Not everything worth expressing can or should be expressed scientifically. So any and all ‘scientific’ types can pack up shop.

The result, I think, will be to quell some of the anxiety. I like this outcome because temperamentally I don’t like for people to be anxious. If there were a basis for legitimate fear and trembling, sickness unto death, and the like, I’d have to say so. But there isn’t, so I don’t.<sup>13</sup>

## 10. The *Scientific image of Persons*

What is emerging in our time is a picture that I’ll call *the scientific image of persons*. In the second half of this evening’s lecture I say how that image looks to me from the vantage point of *mind science*, a sub-space of the space of science. In the six lectures taken together I’ll discuss, as best I can, some of the adjustments and modifications that this emerging picture might require

---

<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that *science* is on the list of practices that can be studied by the human sciences. And it is so studied in programs in the sociology, history, and philosophy of science. In my experience, most mainstream scientists ignore or disapprove of this work – usually claiming that it is advanced by extreme relativists who wish to undermine their claims to objectivity. Whatever. This reaction among scientists who are themselves studied scientifically is quite general. The very existence, even the possibility, of human scientific scrutiny of our nature and practices familiarly causes dis-ease, unease, and discomfort among those scrutinized. There are worries about reduction, elimination, explaining away, undermining the significance of cherished practices, and so on. When Max Weber introduced the idea that a certain “disenchantment” with life was the price paid for modernity, he had science in his sights as one significant causal contributor. Science like a mirror reveals things as they are and perhaps we’d prefer not to see what she can reveal so plainly. Vanity and all that.

to how we conceive of the relations among the members of the *Goodman Set* that constitutes the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup>.

Any member of the *Goodman Set* might create pressures to change how we live or to expand or adjust the narrative(s). Plato, for example, used politics and ethics to put pressure on artists to stop producing art that he thought corrupted the youth. The Roman Catholic Church used religion to shut up Galileo. Mao used politics against religion. Picasso's *Guernica* represented a powerful genre of contemporary art with a moral and political agenda. Sixties music tried to rock the American moral and political world. Liberation theology in Latin America waged war with dictatorships and with capitalism. I could go on.

One thing worth saying at this point is this: the fact that our present situation calls for narrative expansion and adjustment due to developments across various axes within and between the *spaces of meaning* that constitute the *Space of Meaning*<sup>21st century</sup> is nothing new. We are beings-in-time, the story isn't over until it's over, novel experiences lead to new ideas, and so on. Thus expanding and adjusting our narratives of self-understanding is – and always has been -- everyday business.

What might be novel about our situation is first that the rate at which we are asked to re-configure our stories has sped up. Thus the occasional the urge to howl “slow down you move to fast,” makes sense. Second, science now wields much more weight on the shape of our lives and our self-locating narratives than at any previous time. One reason that pertains to mind-science especially, is that it promises to explain with some measure of precision, more precisely than say evolutionary biology, history, anthropology, and sociology, the proximate causes of thought, feeling, and action. Furthermore, since about 1990, and thus over the last decade and one-half mind-science has set out explicitly to explain the nature of consciousness. This last fact makes

many “closet Cartesians” (those still gripped by mind-brain/body dualism) anxious because, well, consciousness is something that makes humans special, is inherently mysterious, and thus not scientifically explainable. This belief that consciousness can’t be explained scientifically is held by a surprisingly large number of naturalistically inclined thinkers as well. Thus one hears much talk of the so-called unbridgeable “explanatory gap” between subjective experience and the objective features of brains, as well as the “hard problem of consciousness.” In 1991, I dubbed naturalists who think consciousness is a natural phenomena that can’t be explained scientifically “*mysterians*.”<sup>14</sup> One kind way to describe them is as believing that there are epistemic limits, such as Heisenberg limits or Godel limits, or the limit that can’t get us closer than  $10^{-43}$  seconds to the big Bang, that pertain to our capacity to solve this problem of consciousness. However, no *mysterian* has provided any Godel-like proof that this is so. Instead, they count on intuitions of the form “to say that my perception of blue is realized by activation of the blue detecting neural network in my visual cortex is very unsatisfying.” My response, then and now, is that intuitions like this shouldn’t be trusted, especially ones predictably hardened by long adherence to Cartesian views of mind; and furthermore, that there is all the difference in the world between an explanation that is intuitively satisfying and one that is scientifically satisfactory.

The Cartesian picture of mind contains two components: the first regards the nature of mind; the second the nature of agency.

---

<sup>14</sup> As we say “some of my best friends are mysterians.” Joe Levine, Dave Chalmers, and Colin McGinn. Some philosophers who have picked up the term use it to disparage “mysterians,” Dan Dennett. I don’t. The term is designed to describe a position. I have reasons for believing that the explanatory gap can be closed by adopting the regulative assumption of “subjective realism” and then doing the nitty-gritty work it recommends. The mysterians are dubious. Colin McGinn for one is grateful for the moniker. That said, I did when I proposed the term distinguish between “old mysterians” who are Cartesians. Both the new mysterians and I agree that that view is a non-starter. I should mention that there are philosophers, Thomas Nagel, for example, who I referred to as a “principled agnostic.” The principled agnostic takes the standoff between the “new mysterians” and “constructive naturalists” (this is what I call my team) as reason for neutrality. As we’ll see in Lecture Three, the Dalai Lama’s position might be described as a form of “wait-and-see principled agnosticism.”

(1) Each person has an incorporeal mind that interacts with her brain and the rest of the body.

The interaction is bi-directional. In one direction, the body sends information to the mind about its own state and the state of the external world; in the other direction, the mind gives the brain orders to perform or resist performing certain actions.

(2) Each mind is equipped with a faculty of free will. Neither what our will wills nor how it wills what it does yields to scientific explanation. Science can explain what is physical and what obeys causal law. But free will in virtue of being a capacity of mind is not a physical phenomenon and it does not abide the principles of ordinary causation.

Descartes writes:

But the will is so free in its nature, that it can never be constrained...And the whole action of the soul consists in this, that solely because it desires something, it causes a little gland to which it is closely united to move in a way requisite to produce the effect which relates to this desire.

The 20th century philosopher Roderick Chisholm puts the point about free agency, what he calls “agent causation,” this way:

[I]f we are responsible...then we have a prerogative which some would attribute only to God: each of us when we act, is a prime mover unmoved. In doing what we do, we cause certain things to happen, and nothing -- or no one -- causes us to cause those events to happen.

How exactly the will wields its magic is hard to state in one neat and comprehensible formula – although Descartes’s and Chisholm’s formulations are the best we have. But the key is that when I choose to act in one way rather than another I make the choice and nothing internal or external causes me to choose the act I choose.

### **11. Preserving the *Explanandum***

The scientific image of persons rejects both pieces of the Cartesian picture. The mind is part of the natural fabric of things; and although we are agents we do not have any such power of free will as described by Descartes or Chisholm. In philosophical circles, the relevant view is called “the libertarian view of freedom of the will.”

The first substantive thing we can say about the scientific view of persons is that it denies the two components of the Cartesian view as stated. The scientific image does so because of its commitment to the neo-Darwinian theory of evolution according to which humans are mammals combined with the view that as such we are fully embodied being subject to the laws of bio-physics, bio-chemistry, and so on. These remain to be discovered, but the assumption that such laws or generalizations exist, regulates the research of mind-scientists. The assumptions are not “just assumptions,” as some like to say, they are put into position as regulative assumptions on the basis of the sound principle that our best science supports thinking that they are true.

It is crucial to understand that the denial of the two Cartesian assumptions, what Gilbert Ryle (1950) called “the official view,” and less kindly, “the myth of the ghost in the machine,” does not entail the view that we are not conscious beings or that we are not agents.

One plausible demand is that mind-science ought, as best it can, to try to explain all the attributes we think persons have. The demand is simply that if one starts with no objectionable

reductionist agenda, then the task is to explain the phenomena. The relation between that-which-is-to-be-explained (the *explanandum*) and that which does the explaining (the *explanans*) is explanatory not eliminative. Although obviously there will almost certainly be changes in how the phenomena is understood. Here is a credible, expandable list of features of persons that ought to be explained, not explained away:

- Consciousness
- Self-control
- Self-expression
- Creativity
- Individuality
- Reasons-sensitivity
- Rational deliberation
- Rational accountability
- Moral accountability
- The capacity to do otherwise
- Unpredictability
- Political freedom

As I understand the development of mind-science thus far, none of these features is explained away or in the process of being explained away.

I provide a comprehensive argument that this is so in [The Problem of the Soul](#) (2002).

Here I'll do some therapy on two issues, agency and consciousness.

## **12. Agency, Naturalized**

Even if there is no such thing as an incorporeal mind that governs the body and even if there is no such thing as libertarian free will, we are owed an account of the phenomenology that supports these ideas.<sup>15</sup> Aristotle and Dewey are helpful here.

Aristotle championed the voluntary-involuntary distinction long before there was a conflict between the *cartesian image of mind* and *the scientific image*. Dewey, an important late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and psychologist, was well aware of the conflict brewing between the humanistic image of persons, inspired by Descartes, and the assumptions made by the new scientific psychology.

In an early paper, “The Ego as a Cause,” written in 1894 when he was 40 years old, Dewey claimed that the main question facing the science of the mind was whether we can “carry back our analysis to scientific conditions, or must we stop at a given point because we have come upon a force of an entirely different order—an independent ego as an entity in itself?” His answer was that the myth of a completely self-initiating ego, an unmoved but self-moving will, was simply a fiction motivated by our ignorance of the causes of human behavior. He saw no need for the notion of a metaphysically unconstrained will or of an independent ego as an prime mover itself unmoved in order to have a robust conception of free agency. For there to be agency we need the ego as a cause, possibly even the proximate cause of what we do. But the ego may serve as the proximate cause of action and still itself be part of the causal nexus.

---

<sup>15</sup> One possibility, and it ought not to be ruled out automatically, is that phenomenology does not really support either Cartesian thesis. Mental experience seemed to William James, a great phenomenologist --but not a consistent friend of naturalism -- to involve what Buddhists would call “very subtle” physical experience, as it did for Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Regarding “libertarian free will,” the idea only gets really firmed up in the West with Descartes. In the East, in Chinese and Indic (Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist) philosophy nothing like it is posited. This much might lead one to think that the idea (possibly both ideas) become intuitively or phenomenological plausible only from inside a certain tradition. I like this idea, think there is something to be said for it, but don’t pursue it here.

Thirty-two years later, in Human Nature and Conduct, Dewey wrote this: “What men have esteemed and fought for in the name of liberty is varied and complex—but certainly it has never been metaphysical freedom of the will.”

Dewey is right. Cries for “freedom” are typically pleas for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—i.e. for political freedom, not metaphysical freedom. Anybody who listens to lots of reggae, as I do, can tell you that Bob Marley, Ziggy Marley, Jimmy Cliff, and Peter Tosh are not calling for metaphysical freedom but for equal rights and justice.

Many people think they need a notion of free agency that involves a self-initiating ego in order to undergird the idea that they are free. Maybe something else can do the job, something where the distinction between voluntary and involuntary does not turn on a distinction between acts initiated by a completely self-initiating will and those that are fully explicable in causal terms.

In the fourth century B.C.E., in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle drew the involuntary-voluntary distinction this way: “What is involuntary is what is forced or is caused by ignorance. What is voluntary seems to be what has its origins in the agent himself when he knows the particulars that the action consists in.” What Aristotle had in mind was something like this: An action is involuntary if it results from some sort of compulsion against which effort and thinking are impotent, or if the agent in no way knows or grasps what he is doing.

Notice that our legal system diminishes the degree to which a person is culpable for a crime in accordance with Aristotle’s formulation. If an individual is ignorant of the difference between right and wrong, or compelled to do what she does by insanity, a brain tumor, or a gun

held to her head, she is not considered legally responsible for her act; at least she is less culpable than if any of these situations did not obtain.

Or take a nonnormative case such as the way the pupil contracts in response to light. Even if I know the rules governing pupil contractions and will that my pupils not contract to light, it won't work. Pupils are not governed by will. The pupil contracting system is, as psychologists say, "cognitively impenetrable."

Voluntary action, on the other hand, involves the agent knowing what action she is performing, and acting from reasons and desires that are her own. To stick with the same example, if I don't want my pupils to contract there is something I can do, namely close my eyes. If I know what is happening and can find a system or subsystem that is cognitively penetrable, in this case the motor system, I can intervene to get the result I want. This involves self-control

Rational deliberation, rational accountability, and reasons-sensitivity come into the picture in the following straightforward way. When I act voluntarily, I act from reasons (I include reasons of feeling and emotion), and I can be asked to explain them. Normally, I do so by explaining and defending my reasoning, or justifying my emotional reaction by explaining how it was appropriate to the situation. Even where my voluntary action has minimal effect on any other agent, I may be asked to explain myself. Suppose I get an algebra problem wrong. My teacher, who aims to help me do better, asks me why in this step I thought such and such a move made sense. I explain why I did what I did, why it seemed like a good idea. I give an account of my reasoning. I am told how what I thought led me down the wrong path. This, perhaps, enables me to reason better the next time. Like Dewey, I think exactly the same situation operates in the moral sphere. Dewey says the moral problem concerns the future. I treat you as an intelligent being, capable of self-control, if I call you on non-virtuous actions. If you are receptive and

paying attention, my response gives you reason to behave better in the future. I call this responsibility with an “a” to indicate that it incorporates the credible assumption that our character, our hearts and minds, are plastic to some degree. Social communities are dynamic systems in which complex feedback mechanisms help us adjust our beliefs, desires, feelings, emotions, and behavior.

Aristotle is silent about the source of the capacities to think and act with reason—although he does say that “what is voluntary *seems* to be what has its origins in the agent himself.” But this silence should not be taken for neutrality on the existence of natural causal origins for these capacities. For Aristotle, and for many post-Cartesians thinkers such as David Hume, John Stuart Mill, and John Dewey, the assumption is that the capacities that are deployed in the initiation of voluntary action are distinctive, but perfectly natural, human capacities with perfectly ordinary natural histories. That the will *seems* to be self-initiating is perhaps an understandable illusion. We are not in touch, first personally, with most of the causal factors that contribute to who we are and to what we do. It is hardly surprising that we are prone to overrate the causes we are in touch with first-personally. When I deliberate and choose among the options before me, I am in touch with the relevant processes, the processes of deliberation and choice. I am not in touch with—indeed I am normally clueless about—what causes me to deliberate and weight my options as I do. So I make a misstep and think deliberation is self-caused. It *seems* that way, after all.<sup>16</sup>

Something like this was Spinoza’s diagnosis of the source of the libertarian illusion:

---

<sup>16</sup> Designing persons to be in first-person touch with high-level proximate causes is a brilliant piece of evolutionary design. Were we in touch with *all* the causes of thought and action, the mind would be much too noisy, and it is doubtful that a noisy mind would enhance fitness. So a design that puts us in touch with proximate causes and screens off distal causes is fitness enhancing. But it has one unfortunate consequence. It causes us to overrate proximate causes and to think that how things seem from the first person point of view is how they *are*.

“Men believe they that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they have not the faintest idea, because they are ignorant of them.” *Appendix to Part I of the Ethics*

This is as much as I will say for now about how to think of humans as very smart social animals who are agents. Agency is real, but libertarian free will is an illusion.

I turn to the problem of explaining consciousness without explaining it away or ignoring it as behaviorism did.

### **13. Subjective Realism and Phenomenal Consciousness**

One thing many people fear about a naturalistic view of mind is that they think it will, in virtue of identifying mind with brain, make experiences a thing of the past. The worry goes something like this: The Cartesian picture of mind begins (and possibly ends) with recognition of the fact that we humans possess phenomenal consciousness; there is something-it-is-like first personally to be a subject of experience. We are not mere information processors. We have experiences. The scientific picture of mind identifies the mind with certain objective physical processes. But the subjective and the objective can't be meshed or melded. First-person phenomenal consciousness not only isn't 'objective,' it cannot even, in principle, be captured in the sort of third-person objective description normal science relishes.

A naturalistic theory of mind is not remotely adequate if it does not provide an account of phenomenal consciousness. But it can. Token physicalism is the view that each and every mental event, each and every experience, is some physical event or other -- presumably some

central nervous system event.<sup>17</sup> We can accept the truth of token physicalism, and thus reject the cartesian view that denies it, while resisting the conclusion that the essence of a mental event is revealed completely or *captured completely* by a description of its neural level realizer. The reason is this, and it applies uniquely to conscious mental events. Conscious mental events are essentially Janus-faced and uniquely so. They have first-person subjective feel and they are realized in objective states of affairs. Speaking counterfactually, water and gold would be H<sub>2</sub>O and substance with atomic number 79, respectively, even if there were no subjects of experience, no sentient beings, in the world.<sup>18</sup> *Objective realism* is true of water and gold.

But even if a conscious mental state token, say, your experience here and now of seeing the image on the screen on this stage, is realized, and realized necessarily, in some complex neural process *n*, it is *not* the case, speaking counterfactually that *n* could occur in a world without subjects. Specifically it could not and would not occur in a world in which I am not giving this lecture and you are not participating as audience. It is fine with the token physicalist if for each of you, the neural realizer of the experience of reading the exact same sentence on the screen behind me, is somewhat different so long as there is some neural realizer or other that is the experience of seeing or reading that sentence for you.

The objective states of affairs in brains that are conscious mental events are unique in producing first-personal feel -- phenomenality. If certain objective states of affairs obtain, then so do first-person feels, and if there are first-person feels, then the relevant objective states of affairs obtain.

---

<sup>17</sup> Strictly speaking the whole person is the experiencer. “I see the yellow tennis ball.” My brain doesn’t. It is harmless, however, to speak of areas of the brain that compute or represent color, shape, motion and so on. Likewise, as John Searle recently put it: “I digest my food.” That’s the correct attribution. As far as where (the location) the digestion occurs, that would be in my digestive system.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, there would be no concepts of ‘water’, ‘gold’, or about atoms and molecules to *express* these facts. But imagine that God would know them.

The asymmetry between water and gold, on the one side, and conscious mental events, on the other, can be said to come to this: the nature of water and gold is essentially objective -- it is completely objective, ergo *objective realism*. The nature of conscious mental events is such that despite being perfectly natural, objective states of affairs, they have as part of their essential nature the subjective feel they have. Call the basic idea *subjective realism*. Subjective realism says that the relevant objective state of affairs in a sentient creature properly hooked up to itself produces certain subjective feels in, for, and to that creature. The subjective feel is produced and realized in an organism in virtue of the relevant objective state of affairs obtaining in that organism. The subjective feel is, as it were, no more than the relevant objective state of affairs obtaining in a creature that feels things. However, since the relevant objective state of affairs is only described or captured as the thing it is (in this case, a conscious mental event) as it is captured or felt by the organism itself, a completely third-personal neural description of it doesn't capture it. The reason is that third-personal descriptions don't capture feels. Certain third-personal states of affairs are the realizations of feels, but the feels are only had or captured by (or in) the creatures in whom those states of affairs obtain.<sup>19</sup>

Suppose 'blickety-block' activity is how seeing blue is realized for the type *Homo sapiens sapiens*. That is, suppose that unlike in cases of semantically decoding spoken or written speech, that the cell assemblies that underlie color perception are the same across members of our species. We can then say that when Pierre sees blue he is in blickety-block-state. Blickety-block-state is how seeing blue is realized in all people. But Pierre's seeing blue despite being

---

<sup>19</sup> The nature of colors is an area of controversy in neuro-psychology and the philosophy of perception with views ranging from realist to irrealist. Locke thought, and from what I know this still seems credible, light interacts with objective surface features of objects. This produces various reflectances, which are measured as waves on an angstrom scale. Organisms with different kinds of brains pick up these variable waves in ways that produce qualitatively distinct color perceptions. Usually the color perception space is determined in a species-specific way. We see the colors we can detect, dogs see in black and white, kestrels (a prey bird) detect vole urine as ultra-violet, and so on.

realized by blickety-block activity in him is not realized solely in virtue of being blickety-block activity; it is realized in virtue of being blickety-block activity in him. And it is in virtue of being realized in him in the right way that he sees blue. Pierre's seeing blue is nothing more than Pierre's being in a certain objective psycho-biological state. But it is a state that produces, or better, that has as an essential feature, a certain feel for Pierre. How and why it does so is, I take it, explainable fully in naturalistic terms. Imagine that there is a complete neural description of what is going on in Pierre -- a complete description of blickety-block activity as it is uniquely realized in his nervous system. This description as offered from the third-person perspective completely captures the fact *that* Pierre is seeing blue. Indeed, if the entire causal picture from the external blue object to his experiencing it were filled out we might claim to have explained fully *why* Pierre is experiencing blue. But neither description captures *what it is like* for Pierre to see blue. The experience is only captured by Pierre first-personally. It is not important that Pierre be able to say anything deep or interesting about what his experience is like. It is enough that he experiences blue or is seeing-things-blue.

This is enough, I hope, to see how one might be committed to the truth of physicalism (token or type) about the conscious mind without being committed to the claim that the essence of an experience is captured fully as the experience it is by describing its neural realizer.

For many it produces a mental cramp to think the thought that mental events are neural events but that their essence cannot be captured completely in neural terms. Such is the power of *objective realism*, a doctrine that is true for most of the things and types of things in the universe, but that is not true for experiences. The cramping can be eased, I propose, by accepting that the subjective realist is claiming nothing mysterious. It is simply a unique, but nonmysterious fact about conscious mental states that they essentially possess a phenomenal side. Don't mention

*that*, and possibly *how*, they appear first-personally and you haven't described one, possibly two, of their essential features. Your metaphysic is incomplete. See things in the Janus-way recommended and the intuition that gives rise to the thought that there is an unbridgeable explanatory gap between conscious mental states and their realizers is deflated, possibly it disappears. Or, so it seems to me.

There is another, related way to make the point in favor of *subjective realism*. This way of making the point turns on paying attention to indexicals, in particular to pronouns. "I" is an essential indexical from the point of view of the subjective realist because it essentially and uniquely captures, or at least, it essentially marks the first-person feels that I have been discussing. Description and explanation in normal mind science is in an objective third-personal or impersonal idiom:

When an individual organism, O, sees a blue cube, there is binding of activity in the color and shape sectors of the brain.

Generalizations of this sort do not capture first-personal feel. They *assume* that there is first-personal feel but they don't capture it. First-personal feel is only captured by the subject of experience. And this is why the first-personal pronoun is needed to explicitly mark experiences. I say "explicitly mark" because sentences like "Blue cube, here, now" also do the job, but only if it is assumed that the subject is, as it were, marking herself as the site of the 'blue-here-now' experience.

The main point of this last part of the therapeutic exercise can be summed up this way: The individual gripped by the Cartesian idea that we possess non-physical minds, makes this sensible demand on any naturalistic view that could even be entertained as a replacement view: "*Don't mess with phenomenal consciousness*. It is a given that I and all my compatriots are

subjects of experience. So you will need to say more than that a physicalist conception of mind is simpler than a dualist view to remotely capture my interest. There are all sorts of views that are simpler than their opponents -- for example, that water is the only element is simpler than every view which countenances more than one element -- but that fail because they are miserably simplistic. The simplicity of a view is only an interesting feature of that view when it explains everything that both views agree needs explaining. And in the case of mind, one thing, perhaps the main thing that needs explaining is how experience is possible, how there could be phenomenal consciousness in a material world.”

But we have now seen how this can be done. This of course does not mean that enough has been said to win over the Cartesian. The subjective realist is a physicalist who claims that she can meet the plausible demand of the Cartesian to account for, or at least to leave ample space for -- phenomenal consciousness. For the subjective realist, as for the Cartesian, it is a fundamental fact that phenomenal consciousness exists and is in need of explanation. Indeed, for her it is a law of nature that humans, as well as all other creatures that have experiences, have their own experiences in virtue of the way they are hooked up to themselves and to the world. It is this sort of thinking that makes it credible (although not decisive) to claim that the regulative assumption that mental events are brain events (in a suitably hooked-up nervous system) has reached the status of being a constitutive thesis. That is, it was initially assumed, but has panned out as highly plausible. It explains everything the Cartesian view can explain but in a nonmysterious way that fits much better than the Cartesian view, into a unified naturalistic picture of the world.

Ok, that seems like enough for tonight. Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to our discussion.

12/3/05