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MAKING UP OUR MINDS

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With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in Nature. I may be either the drift-wood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I may be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I may not be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it; and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbors and friends sometimes.—Thoreau, *Walden*

I

“I...am sensible of a certain doubleness...” The feature of experience which Thoreau remarks upon here is both remarkable and commonplace. This sense we sometimes have of being apart from ourselves is an instance of what I believe to be the constitutive feature of human thinking, its doubling power.

We notice things and notice our noticing; we observe events and appraise them, hear statements and affirm or deny them, act and assess our actions; we see one thing as being like another and employ it as a simile; we make something into a sign and, like a string around our finger, let it stand for something else. We count, tell time, chronicle the

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past, anticipate the future and memorialize the dead. We worry and regret. We can speak the truth or tell a lie. We play with words and pun; we laugh and tell jokes. We wear clothes, apply make-up and use deodorants. We accept little pieces of paper with faces stamped on them in exchange for the goods of life. Without "a certain doubleness," without the ability to stand apart from the things and feelings we experience, and momentarily at least, even to be other than ourselves, we would not do any of this.

"We are not wholly involved in Nature," as Thoreau reminds us. Our doubleness brings us into the sight of ourselves and sets us apart from everything else. It marks us off from our animal kindred who, if they share in it at all, do not partake fully in the ability to observe themselves from afar. Animals close to us in evolutionary terms and those born and bred to share our domesticity, display something like our doubleness at times, but this power seems rudimentary in them at most. Despite their lively awareness and evident intelligence, it would be a stretch to suppose they can stand aloof from themselves and appraise their own actions as humans habitually do. They are "wholly involved in Nature" in a way that we are not.

We do have, it is true, moments of active work or play when, fully immersed in our actions, we think of nothing but what we are doing and do not think to watch ourselves doing it. These vivifying moments, complete and sufficient as they are, give us a sense of what it means to be at one with ourselves.

When we experience it deeply and for its own sake the power of witnessing can induce in us a blissful state of oneness which is at the other pole from our immersion in immediacy. In such a moment the notion of an undifferentiated, enduring and unalterable consciousness overarching all of existence and containing it, yet neither affecting it nor

affected by it, is but a thought beyond. "Indra in the sky looking down" in Thoreau's account is, according to the ancient Indian religion, a manifestation of the highest consciousness: "He is the unseen Seer, the unheard Hearer, the unthought Thinker, the ununderstood Understander."¹ "The witness, the sole thinker, devoid of qualities....without parts, without activity, tranquil, irreproachable, spotless..."² as it is characterized in the Upanishads. This Vedic conception has affinities with the view found in the western theological tradition that the divine mind is eternally single, simple, whole, unchanging and impassive. It knows no doubleness. (The old Greek gods were of a different sort. Sharing everything with humans but our mortality, they were as double-minded as could be.)

An animal never leaves nature. The Most High, according to many traditional accounts, lies beyond and never enters it. We dwell somewhere in the middle, between Nature and the pure Empyrean, confounded and confounding, looking up and down.

One of our muddles here in the middle is what to think about our own thinking. That we can think about thinking at all is, of course, a consequence of our doubling power, but we are often confused by this ability even as we exercise it. What we are doing when we look at our thinking, how we look at it and what we think we see--as well as what words such as 'looking' and 'seeing' are doing in this context--are among the most vexing of questions.

In thinking about these aspects of our experience I have arrived at beliefs which, although not unique to me, are far from the usual ones. My aim in what follows is to state my beliefs as boldly and simply as I can. It would please me to find that they are more widely shared than I suppose, but I am afraid I cannot count on this. To put the matter

provocatively, I am not trying to sweep the cobwebs out of the mind, but to sweep the mind out along with the cobwebs. Preposterous as it may seem, I do not believe we think in our minds or even that we have minds to do our thinking in.

II

When we want to express our thinking we do a peculiar thing. With lips, teeth and tongue we bite and rend and pummel the air. Out of our breath we sculpt our thoughts and send them on their way. The medium of the air--so nearly unresisting it scarcely seems to be a body at all--briefly, evanescently, takes the shape of thought and carries it abroad to rap at the portals of the public ear. Speech is a plastic art. Our words are not so much winged as wind-carved. Perhaps we ought to pause now and then in our palavering and pour a libation to the mellifluous air.

It is utterly remarkable that so slight an alteration in such a thin and subtle medium could produce such great effects. Of all the capacities we have for shaping things this is surely the most potent. No human activity has done more, directly or indirectly, to change the world than the artful expulsion of these little bursts of air.

Speaking is a public art and a public act. Once the art is acquired it may be privately employed but that is an accidental feature of it. The possibility of its private employment is derived and secondary, not primary or essential. An individual who learns to speak acquires what is never the learner's alone. The common tongue belongs to all who speak it. It lives in the customary practices of its users. If all the beings who know

how to employ it cease to exist, it dies with them. Its being is in its active use. While it is alive, it is a potent influence, yet it is nowhere locatable. A language, the common practices of a people's speech, is not in the organs of propulsion or reception; it is not in the air between; it is not in the brains of its speakers and hearers. Its occurrence may require all of these, but it does not belong to or inhabit any of them.

We can see, though, that there is a doubling here. The art of speech is more than the making and hearing of sounds. The sounds can be names that stand for things. In the giving of names we stand apart, like an Adam in Eden, and know both that the thing is other than the name and that the name stands in for it. This capacity arises from the doubleness already noted--the power to be seer and doer, observer and actor at once--and it greatly enhances it. Only with the burgeoning of speech, it seems, does our doubleness reach full and telling strength. In speech doubleness finds a vehicle that once and for all, for good or ill, transports us out of nature. Double now, our fate pronounced, we rise--or fall--into the world, there forever to contend with the partial stranger each of us calls myself. Givers of names, bearers of names, we are now fully and forever beside ourselves.

Language and doubleness are at least fraternal twins. To say which deserves the elder's status is probably impossible. The evidence which would establish the birthright of either one is lacking. No testimony can be given until we have learned to speak, and then it is too late: the witness is impeached.

Like talking, the doubling power is physiologically grounded and it, too, is an acquired skill. It develops over time, improves with practice and is enhanced by circumstances and structures which invite it and support it. We see this in children as they grow. Early in life they start to notice and attend to things around them and learn their

names. They begin to distinguish between themselves and others, to ask questions, to deliberate and choose. They become capable of thinking about persons and things which are not immediately present, they undertake projects and pursue goals. In time they become aware of possible opportunities or dangers and learn to direct their own conduct and look out for themselves. The developing skills of language grow along with this process and are instrumental to it. Through doubleness and its linguistic accompaniments they extend their awareness beyond what is immediate and present at hand, thereby increasing their ability to meet their needs, satisfy more of their desires and pursue their long term interests.

Something like this must have happened to us as a species, too, although we cannot say how or when. Our remote ancestors, who were anatomically and perhaps emotionally very much like us, apparently existed for hundreds of thousands of years before they began to speak. Not very long ago in the span of evolutionary time, their doubling power developed and languages came to be. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, perhaps to buttress his claim that pity is so natural to humans that they could not even have learned it at their mothers' knees, imagines the first humans living solitary lives practically from the moment of birth, gradually acquiring language, then becoming social beings. But this is surely backwards. Language and doubleness grow out of our social nature. In the presence of others who respond to our gestures, return our gaze, alter their facial expressions and aid or hinder us, we begin to speak and to recognize ourselves as belonging to a community which simultaneously contains each of us individually yet is separate and apart from us.

We are not born into Nature, but into an established world, a world founded in our doubleness. This world is shaped by the language, customs, beliefs, institutions, artifacts, and practices of the people we are born among. It has developed over time, may have undergone many changes and may be changing even as we are born into it. Any particular instance of it may be in conflict with itself, threatened from outside, and gathering or losing its influence, but it is our human home. It is what gives or denies meaning and significance to what we do. It shapes who and what we are, provides the boundaries--more or less plastic--of our thinking and acting, and establishes the grounds of worth.

The self is the private counterpart of the world. It develops in dialogue with it; sometimes in discord and opposition, sometimes in seeming consonance. I am partly the story I tell myself, partly the story the others in my world may wish me to be, allow me to be or take me to be--and also something as yet to be disclosed in the on-going reciprocity of self and world.

Neither the self nor the world is primordial. Both are artificial productions arising from human effort, articulation and invention. (Artificial is not, here, the antonym of real.) Both are fluid to varying degrees. Each can change relatively independently, but changes in the one can, and often do, affect the other. Nothing metaphysical need be implied by the existence of this pairing. Self and world are names for patterns of activity, and may be and have been shaped by deliberation and choice as well as circumstance. They are especially intimate and important to us since they represent for us the extremes of our existence; the mine and not mine; what I am and what I am up against, what I want and what is available to me. They are akin to poetry and myth, but not necessarily illusions because of that and certainly not without meaning.

Our bodies and the natural forces at work in the things around us energize the stories of self and world and are in turn incorporated into their unfolding episodes. From our cultural surroundings, our personal experiences and our thinking--including forays beyond the cultural givens--we frame the story of the world and under the impetus of our aspirations, interests and fears we undertake to act in ways that will make the details of our own adventures in it come out as we want them to.

When we use written marks to communicate instead of making sounds, our doubleness is doubly confirmed. If proof were needed for the fact of doubling, the writing and reading of any sentence would provide it. Without the conventional marks employed by the writer as stand-ins for words there would be no sentence to read, and if the reader were not able to see them as standing for words they would be taken only for the little squiggles they really are and they would have no other meaning.

Writing, like speaking, depends upon and enhances our doubling power. It gives our words a more permanent body than air, extends their reach and greatly increases their sway.

We are inclined to say that an author puts concepts, images, feelings, characters or events in a text, but it would be more accurate to say that the writer, using the conventions of a written language, provides a set of tacit instructions which the reader follows in order to enact or constitute the thoughts or events which the work elicits. Literally speaking, there are no thoughts in any book.

We are also disposed to say that the thoughts which the work conveys enter the reader's mind and may be stored in the memory and later recalled. But it would be more accurate to say that in the act of remembering, the reader's initial activities when

encountering and comprehending the work are reiterated, rehearsed, or re-enacted and thereby reconstituted.

Thus, just as we should circumspectly say there is nothing in the book, so we should also circumspectly say there is nothing of it in the mind or memory. When, as practiced readers, we look something up in a book, we do not attend to the marks on the page as such and scarcely notice they are there although they are the means by which we understand what the book says. When we remember something, the means by which the memory is activated are not available for our inspection, as the marks on the page are if we happen to distract ourselves by noticing them, but in both reading and remembering there are embodied procedures which make the acts possible. In the act of reading, static embodiments are re-activated by procedures dynamically embodied in living tissues; the procedures of memory are dynamically embodied in living tissues alone; *We know how* to read and to remember without, in either case, really knowing how we are able to do it.

III

It is surprising, when we stop to notice it, how much of our thinking lies openly before us. Thinking is manifest in all the things presently at hand. This table, the chairs, the carpet, the lights, the drapes, the pictures on the walls, the doors and windows, the walls themselves, all embody thinking. Our needs, interests, hopes, fears and fantasies have forged out of the elements a multitude of things. Whether planes, trains or automobiles the reality is the same: thinking makes them and thinking makes them go. In

this respect, thinking is the least mysterious enterprise there is. We see it everywhere we turn and know it well.

Thinking is made evident just as surely, if less tangibly, in the ordering of our common life. Courts, colleges, corporations, cities, states, musical concerts and baseball games are all embodiments of thinking. Our organized forms of work and play, of commerce and of art, are beings of thought. Seemingly more real than the events and things they order, they cannot be directly seen or pointed to and have no actual location in space and time. They show up only in the activities they circumscribe. The rules of the game, the charter of the college, the laws of the land, govern invisibly. Much metaphysical hay might be made of this if one were so inclined, but there is no need to loft the formal aspects of experience into eternity to preserve what is real in them.

It would be pointless to ask, where is the justice system in the body politic? We can locate the courthouses and the statute books, but the system lives in the customs and practices, the activities of its constituents. Without buildings, books or human bodies, there would be no system, yet, real as it is, we cannot locate it in any one of them or all of them taken together.

Again, we might ask, where is the English language? We can point to dictionaries and grammars, as well as books which are written in it, but the language is not in them. It lives in the habits and practices of those who know how to use it, but it is not in their bodies. The language is real, it has effects and consequences, the world is different because it is employed, yet it is not anywhere. Speaking the language and thinking thoughts are alike in this respect. The organs which make them possible are locatable, but the language and the thoughts are not.

Where is a game of chess or soccer? And where, we could also ask, are science and poetry? For that matter, where in the world is the world?

It is amazing when we stop to think about it how many things there are which cannot be said to be in any place and yet are constantly assumed, repeatedly invoked and powerfully consequential. We speak a language. We speak our minds. There is a similarity worth pondering here.

There is a nearly unshakable conviction that the mind exists and can be looked into. Many tell us they have taken a look and have reported impressively on what they have seen. Withdrawing his attention from his surroundings and peering into his mind, Descartes plucked out his famous *cogito*. Hume took a long inward look and spied an assortment of discrete atoms of thinking which he called impressions and ideas, although the 'thinking I' which Descartes had seen so clearly and distinctly never manifested itself to Hume. William James, stepping into the celebrated chapter on the stream of thought in his *Principles of Psychology* says, "We now begin our study of the mind from within."³ In *Kinds of Minds*, Daniel Dennett declares, "It is beyond serious dispute that you and I each have a mind."⁴ And "...each of us knows exactly one mind from the inside, and no two of us know the same mind from the inside."⁵ We are not "something that is all outside and no inside like a rock or a discarded sliver of fingernail."⁶

Although all people and all schools of philosophy, according to William James, affirm this inner realm, although many heroes of thought have dared the labyrinth hoping to see what thinking is really like when it is at home, I must remain outside and cannot go in. I have read the accounts of these interior expeditions often enough over the years but I

have never been persuaded by their individual claims or managed to see how their mutually incompatible certainties might be forged into a comprehensible whole. I would cut a sorry figure now if, like some Quixote of consciousness, I plunged into this legendary space and went adventuring to see what I might rescue there, then returned to defend my fugitive darlings trolled up from the inner dark. No; better, I think, to close the hole.

The putative effort to look into our minds, if nothing else, takes doubleness for granted; the agent examines the patient, although they are 'really' one and the same. The mind observes the play of mind upon the mental stage. As long as we are speaking metaphorically, and know that we are doing so, such fancies are innocent enough. Figuratively 'in' will do. Taken literally, it is a dose that is fatal to our understanding.

As one important piece of evidence that this metaphor is taken literally, there is the fact that, ever since Descartes, thinkers of all sorts have made it the basis for what they consider to be a real distinction between the internal and external worlds: there is an inner world, intimately experienced, directly accessible, and certainly known and there is an external world, which is represented in the mind in some problematic way that leaves its real existence doubtful. By some strange alchemy, what is so manifestly happening around us has been transmuted into an inner world with us, as knowers, somehow inside it. Once we have stumbled into this maze it is impossible ever to find our way back through our own mentations to reach the outside and see it directly and simply as itself again.

I am not ignorant of the circumstances and the arguments which led to this way of thinking about thinking but in my opinion this picture, of an inner reality and a represented but doubtful external world out yonder, is exactly backwards. To stay for the moment

with this inside-outside distinction despite its dubious character, I would have to say that thinking is constituted outside us and then imported. What is out there surrounding the body, encountered by it and engaging it, is the real. The inner world is its imaginary simulacrum, an invented counterpart. In making up our minds, we bring the outside in.

I began with speech and language and spoke in passing of political and social structures as well as the making of things because these instances of thinking seem to me to have more to tell us than can be learned by trying to turn our gaze inward in acts of introspection. I want to stay on this outward path even though to nearly everyone else all the signposts seem so evidently to point the other way.

IV

We are constantly telling ourselves how the mind works, and it is instructive to notice what we say. We forge an understanding, draw a conclusion, render a judgment, grasp a problem, shape an idea, build a theory, make a decision. We hit the nail on the head, are struck by a thought, see an idea clearly, approach a problem, keep things in mind, get a rough idea, have a touching thought. We *apprehend* and *comprehend*, but in either case, behind the Latinate terms for it, the plain English of it is, we grasp. All these motions of the mind are metaphors, grounded in our interactions with the things of daily life. Most of the time the mind is either a seeing eye or a grasping hand. The notion that the mind or consciousness does things--like a person moving in physical space--is itself a metaphor. The mind is, in short, the double of the body, its imaginary counterpart--and its mask. It only exists in a manner of speaking.

Recounting his efforts to observe his "palpitating inward life," William James says, "Whenever my introspective glance succeeds in turning around quickly enough to catch one of these manifestations of spontaneity in the act, all it can ever feel distinctly is some bodily process, for the most part taking place within the head."⁷ This picture of a mind pirouetting inside itself reminds us a little of the hope we had when we were children of stepping on our own shadow if only we were quick enough. We can eliminate such shadowy motions if we ascribe thinking to the body itself, something James often seems on the brink of doing. Time and again his inner exploration of the stream of thought seems about to beach on the shores of the body, but he backs water and paddles away.⁸

One aspect of his inward journey is particularly illustrative of the difficulties such ventures face. Describing his struggle to follow and observe his thoughts, noting how they seem to be concentrated in the neck and head, he says, "My brain appears to me as if all shot across with lines of direction, of which I have become conscious as my attention has shifted from one sense-organ to another, in passing to successive outer things, or in following trains of varying sense-ideas."⁹ Here William seems to have forsaken the role of scientific observer and taken up his brother Henry's art. An introspective faculty so agile and penetrating it overleaps the possible and spies the brain itself is simply too uncanny to be taken for a fact.

We may describe the mind as Hume does as "a kind of theater, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations,"¹⁰ but the actors appear before the footlights costumed in raiment which the solitary spectator has unwittingly sewn backstage before the play began. Habits, conventions, language, expectations, are part of the story of what

we see with our inward gaze. The inside story of our thinking is a work of inspired imagination. We do not look on thinking bare.

The mind is an idea but there are no ideas in the mind. The mind does not produce thoughts; it is a product of them. The mind is a name for a complex of activities. It is nothing over and above these activities and apart from them it has no being. In this it resembles such terms as the English language, the judicial system, the game of chess, the college, or the city.

The mind is the ether of thinking.

We would do better, I believe, to speak of minding rather than a mind. The verbal form represents the facts more perspicuously than the noun. Activities are the real subjects here, and not a thing which acts. To quote James again, "If we could say in English 'it thinks,' as we say 'it rains' or 'it blows,' we should be stating the fact most simply and with the minimum of assumption. As we cannot, we must simply say that *thought goes on.*"¹¹

Our many mindings, although they reside nowhere, still go about their business unimpaired. The activities we denominate as sensing, feeling, wishing, opining, believing, liking, fearing, go on undomiciled, as do imagining, judging, reasoning and the like.

Such terms, it is worth noting, are highly generic. When we think of the range of our desires, wishes, feelings or beliefs we have to wonder if these general terms ever adequately express what occurs in any particular instance, especially when we notice how often these ways of minding infuse one another, commingling in varied ways and countless combinations. It is also true that many aspects of our thinking life are too indeterminate to be singled out and named. Subtle alterations of mood and inclination, flickering images

and passing fancies come and go without our pausing to acknowledge them, much less provide them with a moniker, yet they affect us and are often significant despite their lack of definiteness.

In contrast to this, some of our mindings are not only specified distinctly but are ascribed to particular faculties: the imagination, the judgment, the intellect, the understanding, the reason or the will. This helps satisfy our inclination to provide a mental doer for every thinking deed, even though there is nothing that actually answers to these names. A thorough renovation of our thinking would require us to renounce our inheritance and refuse to take title to them. The absence of most of them, outside of philosophical discourse, would probably go unnoticed but--having gained wide acceptance since its invention in Roman times--the will is now something of a popular favorite and likely to be missed.

V

In denying the existence of an inner realm I do not mean to deny that each of us has experiences uniquely our own and known only to us. Although a lot of what we undergo is not known to us at all, and a lot of what we know about what happens to us is known in the same way it might be known by anyone else since we use common words and concepts to recognize it, report it to ourselves and comprehend it, there is an irreducible something in each person's experience that is that person's alone. You cannot have my headache, and believe me, you wouldn't want to. But if we look at this closely I think it comes to very much the same as saying that we have different bodies and different

life experiences. I have mine with its sensations and you have yours and there is no possibility of the one being the other. We may mix our saliva in a kiss, but I cannot secrete yours and you cannot produce mine. We may extend our imagination to the fullest reach of its powers, but we can never know exactly what it is like to be each other--much less to be a creature like a bat.

If the mind is a metaphorical construct, as I believe it is, and therefore not a place for thinking actually to be in, where is thinking then? In the body? Well, perhaps, but can we say just where?

Often, as we struggle with a difficult problem or confront an issue important to us, we feel a mounting pressure in the chest, the heart pounds, the stomach churns. This might lead us to locate our thinking where most of humankind most of the time has felt it to be, somewhere between the navel and the chin.

When we are not trying to locate thinking it just seems to hover around; it is present without being anywhere. Sometimes it seems to float slightly above and before us, as if somewhere nearby in the sky. The cartoonists' use of the thought balloon may be as good a convention for locating it as any.

When we are conversing with a friend and trying vigorously to make a point, thinking seems to be located in the space between us. If we were cracking a safe we might feel it to be concentrated at our fingertips, and at the end of a stick if we were using it to feel our way in the dark over rough ground. With a little practice I believe we could learn to place it almost anywhere--on our back between our shoulder blades, or perched on our shoulder--if we were persuaded by a likely enough story to expect to feel it there.

There is, of course, something experientially plausible about locating thinking in our heads. The vocal organs are in the neck and head and, since so much of thinking is a kind of silent speech, as the stranger points out in Plato's *Sophist*, it is easy to feel that the mind is there, too. Likewise the organs of hearing, sight, smell, taste--and even touch if we consider the tongue--are in the same vicinity, so it is not surprising that we might come to take it for granted that our many mindings are housed somewhere in our heads. However, it is our present understanding of physiology and not the experience of thinking itself which leads us to locate thinking in our skulls where the brain is found. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein says, "...nothing in the visual field allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye."¹² So, too, there is nothing in the activity of thinking itself from which we could infer that it goes on in a brain.

Although we frequently are aware of activity in many parts of our body--especially the heart and lungs, the digestive tract and our major muscles--and we can increase our awareness of these activities to some degree by paying attention to them, we have no sensations from the part of the head where the brain is housed and the brain, unlike some other organs of the body, does not enter our awareness. The unnumbered firings of its synapses, those diminutive and distant cousins of the lightning bolt, do not crackle in our ears. Thinking doesn't gurgle, wheeze, hiss or hum. This absence of sensible experience is laden with consequences and merits further consideration, but the main point of this quick survey is to see how irrelevant it is. No matter where we decide to place thinking in the body and no matter which bodily organ we attribute it to, when we look for it there, it is not to be found. Open head or belly or chest, look at brain, heart, liver, stomach or spleen and nothing like thinking appears. There is no mind there. This is too obvious to

need pointing out, perhaps. Still, it ought to cast a shadow of suspicion over the use of the word "in" when talking about our mental activities. The fact that 'I do my thinking in my study,' and 'I do sums in my head,' are grammatically similar expressions does not imply that both refer to equally locatable places where thinking actually occurs.

Thinking is a mode of bodily activity. It is like walking, swimming, playing a musical instrument. There is no place where these activities reside when they are not occurring. The fact that I know how to play the piano does not mean there is music either in the piano or in me.

Saying that thinking is a bodily activity invites us to compare it with other fundamental activities of the body. Breathing, like thinking, is something I would not do without my body. It seems locatable in a fairly straightforward way, even though there is more to respiration than simply filling the lungs with air and emptying them. All of its components (excepting, some might want to argue, its impulse) are physical things moving in physical space in detectable ways. Thinking is not so straightforwardly locatable. That the brain is a central organ in the process of thinking is surely true, but we cannot find our thinking there. The motions and activities in the brain are to some extent locatable, detectable, measurable, but they do not reveal our thinking. In this respect thinking is like living. In both cases the body is indispensable. We say, speaking loosely, that life is in the body and when we die it departs. But if we are more circumspect, we realize that life is not a thing, and is not in the body except in a metaphorical sense. The body's fundamental activity is living. All its organs, motions and processes participate in this activity, although not all in the same way, of course, or necessarily all at once. When the body is no longer active and all its motions stop we say life departs although there is nothing to go

anywhere, or anywhere for it to go. In this way, life and mind are alike. They are substantive fictions, naming complex activities and treating them as entities that are real.

Not surprisingly, the effort to understand thinking has about it some of the same difficulties that confound the attempt to understand life itself. It is a wonder that life arises from a combination of chemical elements. No explanation seems commensurate with this amazing occurrence, just as no account seems to explain adequately how the energies of the body are sublimed into the vapors of thought.

The body, to varying degrees and with alterable intensities, can be aware of itself and its activities, its thinking, its sensations, its feelings and impulses. It can also be aware of this awareness. Neither in the first instance nor the second is any other entity--substantial, spiritual or metaphysical--required either as a medium or an agent. The body's ability to do all this is prodigious, manifold, complex, astonishing--and not well understood. But it is the body and only the body doing it. There is nothing else to do our thinking for us.

VI

The activities and excitations of our bodies, especially of our brain and nervous system, are correlated, we are sure, with our sensations, desires, ideas and feelings, our thoughts of every sort. But how does this work? It may be as James says that "the passing Thought itself is the only *verifiable* thinker, and its empirical connection with the brain-process is the ultimate known law."¹³ Making this connection, however, is no easy business.

One problem is that the physical part of the correlation is not open to direct inspection. Even if I can see or feel what I am thinking, I cannot see or feel my brain. Another observer cannot see directly what I am thinking, or see directly what my brain is doing, even if my skull is open and the would-be observer is looking inside with the finest equipment available. Seeing what is going on in the brain requires a lot more than simply looking.

It is probably too obvious to need stating but a scientist examining brain processes employs theories, models and metaphors. The atomic theory of matter is taken for granted along with its attendant explanation of chemical reactions. The theory of electrical discharges and other more specialized theories about cells, neurons, synapses, are part of the picture as well. It might even be necessary, as some are now suggesting, to utilize quantum mechanics and the indeterminacy principle. Additionally, some investigators embed the affairs of brain and mind in the context of evolutionary theory. Thus it is safe to say that no account of how the brain works can be direct and literal. Oddly enough we can see it do what it does only because we have garbed it figuratively in thought.

Even to suggest the possibility of correlating thoughts and brain states might seem to imply that our mental life can be reduced ultimately to a complex of deterministic mechanical causes. But this prospect is less worrisome than it might seem to those who fear it and a great deal less likely than it is presumed to be by many who remain committed to it as the goal of their inquiries.

One significant deterrent to such a mechanical mapping is the complexity of the task. To every subtle, difference, distinction, nuance and gradation of every different thought, feeling, insight or perplexity, some specific bodily event or series of events--a

brain-state or a brain-process--must correspond if we are to be told the whole affair. Imagine an account, in terms of neurophysiological activity, of all that any one of us has experienced since rolling out of bed this morning and arriving at this hour--all that we have felt, imagined, remembered, considered, decided, seen, heard, tasted, liked, disliked, sought or avoided. It would make for a mighty long story, even though for most of us nothing of much significance has happened. But suppose a loved one had died, or we had converted to Islam or become a socialist, survived a near-fatal accident, won the lottery, or been elected president? What would be the neurophysiological effects of such life-changing events? When the meaning and deliverance of everything changes, what goes on in the brain? Some physiological alteration must correspond to every change of every kind if the law which decrees their correlation is to be upheld. Where is the meter for this? Who will write the equations that capture it? Compared to this complexity and subtlety the motions of the planets are simplicity itself and the atom smasher, with its tinier and tinier fragmentations, a mere toy.

The crux of the matter, however, is not the size of the task. The mode of explanation contemporary science allows in these matters--the correlation of a mental event with an underlying mechanism or mechanisms--can work in only one direction if it works at all. A physical change in the brain may be asserted to have a mental consequence, but as the one turns into, produces or somehow causes the other, explanation loses its grip. The thought or feeling resulting from a change in the brain cannot enter as a term into the mechanical relationship which is said to have caused it. By the nature of the case it is immaterial and can have no mechanical efficacy. There is no mechanism on the thinking side of the presumed relationship which would make it

possible for mental activities to have consequences. There are no levers, thought to thought, or thinking wheels to turn the brain. This not only makes it impossible to say how one thought leads to another but also to say how any thought can alter a brain state. There is an explanatory gap here which mechanistic explanations fail to bridge.

Beyond this problem lies a deeper one. Scientific mechanism--somewhat ironically, given its historical roots--is a determined effort to explain natural phenomena without invoking ends, goals or purposes. Thinking, however, is naturally forward looking and goal oriented in many of its manifestations. Whatever a complete account of thinking might ultimately look like, if it should ever emerge, it would have to do justice to our purposiveness, our capacity for self-direction, our ability to deliberate and choose, our powers of origination making. These are aspects of thinking known to us directly and fateful in their consequences. Our powers of choice may not be always as extensive as we suppose, but they are real nevertheless. A science noticing that it itself could not exist or hope to go forward without them and thus enlightened by the vision of their actuality might in time pursue these powers to their natural ground and by describing their physical basis help us understand more fully how they do what they are able to do. But it will not work to rule out from the beginning and by fiat all purpose and direction and then attempt to conjure from this paucity the full story of how a human body thinks. This is not a demand that the idea of purpose be put back into our account of natural processes. It is only a recognition that whatever the place of thinking in nature may be, much of it is clearly purposeful and no tale can be persuasive which denies this telling fact.

VII

Taking the mind out of the picture and acknowledging the body as the thinker ascribes to thinking its proper origin, gives credit where credit is due, and brings home to us the body's true nature as an intelligent being. Even those researchers and theorists who take the reality of the mind for granted are unlikely to be satisfied until the mind's doings are understood in terms of body and brain, so one must ask them what explanatory aid this imaginary entity actually provides. It seems to be a real hindrance, multiplying entities beyond necessity and requiring additional explanatory principles without producing cogency or clarity. We have thought the body and its powers too small. If we let our minds go and think again we may see that it is proper-sized and will suffice.

The body and its energies are the foundation of the real. Although I know it only confusedly and imperfectly, I feel my body's encounters, its urges, its aims and intentions and know that my being is grounded there. I know some of its capacities, am aware of many of its possibilities and know its vulnerabilities all too well. I know it can be injured, get out of whack with itself, be invaded by other agents and become diseased. I know that it grows old and dies.

I am entirely a body, I can know only what can be known by my body and do only what it can do. In acknowledging this I do not deny to myself any of the real capacities or possible attainments that an embodied consciousness, mind or soul might claim, save one: I never have and never will go anywhere without my body. The end of my body is the end of me.

In a bodily sense, I have some inner awareness: some of my innards make something known of what they are doing some of the time. But speaking strictly and

literally I have no such inner awareness in a mental sense. I can be aware of my thinking, but I cannot see into my mind. Except metaphorically I have no inner being, no inner life, no mind. Those elusive sprites of consciousness--bare sentiences, raw feels, immediate awarenesses, pure sensations and all their evanescent kin--are strangers to me. When I try to look for them, they fail to appear. If I could see my own unmediated thoughts I would be like a playwright seeing my own play without having written it. I can enter such a drama only by passing through the looking glass and becoming a fictional character myself.

Although I have no inner life, in the sense in which it is usually avowed, I am not a robot or an automaton. I think and feel robustly and am vividly aware of it. I tend to muse incessantly and am constantly contending with myself. In fact, it is these musings and reflections, this almost obsessive monitoring and self-examination, which has led me to conclude that there is no mind lying open to our direct inspection and that we do not do quite what we think we do when we try to examine it. It is not the fact of these musings, feelings, urges and sensations that is at issue here, but their nature and ground.

What I am aware of when I am known to myself is my story, the life adventure in which I am engaged, and which I endure, enjoy, anticipate and almost unremittingly recount to myself. I wake to it in the morning and, if I am able, put it to rest at night. My dreams rise out of it and into it. Beneath its episodes are energies, urges, inclinations and desires whose origins and destinies exceed my understanding. I seek to guide them as they move me. I am boy and dolphin, black horse, white horse, chariot and charioteer; a protean shape-shifter which all the powers of science, philosophy, poetry and myth have not pinned to earth or caused to yield its secret up.

With its obscure prologue, its brief and feeble aftermath in public memory, this story, because it is the meaning of life, means as much as life itself. This is what passes in my experience for a soul.

VIII

Since 'the mind' is a story the body tells itself, how did it come to fall for its own fantastic tale? The lack of sensation associated with thinking is part of the answer. In physical work or play, when it is vigorous, the body lets us know it; the heart pounds, we begin to breathe rapidly and perspire. But we can think long and hard without ever breaking a sweat. Thinking arises with such magical ease--like a genie rubbed up from the lump of the body--nothing at all seems to be doing it or to be needed in order to do it. The casual way our thoughts drift off in memory or in reverie to far away times and places or worlds that never were, makes it easy to suppose this mortal clay to be but a prison house from which we might be freed. We might, it seems, be able to think without a body. The myth recounted in Plato's *Meno*, purporting to show that all knowledge is only the soul's recollection of what it saw in a prior existence, is plausible enough as far as direct experience can testify: so much of what we know seems to come to us out of nowhere, bearing no traces of its origins. Some more or less likely tale is always required to say how our thinking comes to us.

But there is a darker side to the story than this. When thinking--bright Ariel spirit--looked down, detached and self-aware, and saw itself bound to the body of a beast more rude than Caliban it revolted and began at once to sew itself a suit of clothes. But

this disguise was not enough: the body and its excrements still offended the delicate appraisal of its own nostrils. Worse yet, it lived by devouring its animal kindred after tearing them limb from limb, and when it ceased to live it betrayed its earthy origins, succumbed to a foul corruption, stank to heaven and drew flies. Wanting no part of anything so base, thinking revolted, took out an option on a place in paradise and began to dream of a bodiless bliss.

I would not claim much plausibility for this mythical portrayal of the ultimate doubling act, but without some such affront to our appraising gaze it is hard to understand what could have led one misguided expositor to say, and multitudes before and after him tacitly or explicitly to believe, "...I [am] a substance whose whole essence or nature consists entirely in thinking; and which for its existence, has need of no place, and is not dependent on any material thing; so that this I, that is to say the soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, and would not itself cease to be all that it is, even should the body cease to exist."¹⁴

How desperate for safety and certainty a man must be to willingly undergo, even in thought, such extreme self-mutilation. Modern philosophical and scientific thought, incredible as it seems, is founded on this unbelievable dictum of Descartes'--and still has trouble disbelieving it.

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- ¹ *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, trans. R. E. Hume (Oxford India Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1985), *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*, (-3.8.2) 117.
- ² *Upanishads*, trans. Hume, *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, (-6.11) 409 and (-6.19) 410.
- ³ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, (Dover Publications, New York, 1950), Volume I, 224.
- ⁴ Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds: Toward an Understanding of Consciousness*, (Basic Books, The Science Masters Series, Perseus Books Group, New York, 1996) 8.
- ⁵ Dennett, *Kinds*, 3.
- ⁶ Dennett, *Kinds*, 14.
- ⁷ James, *Principles*, I, 300, italicized in the original.
- ⁸ James, *Principles*, I, 301-302, is a conspicuous instance of this.
- ⁹ James, *Principles*, I, 300.
- ¹⁰ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Niddick, (2d ed, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), Bk.I, pt.4, ch.6, 253.
- ¹¹ James, *Principles*, I, 224-225.
- ¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961), ppn. 5.633, p.117.
- ¹³ James, *Principles*, I, 346.
- ¹⁴ Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part 4.

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