

Out of Nowhere: Thoughts and Thinking and World Reconstruction (Complete Version)¹

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In this discussion my aim is to bring together, in greater detail than previously, some general notions that have been used in Descriptive Psychology formulations for many years. Among these are “thoughts”, “Actor-Observer-Critic”, “world reconstruction”, “world construction”, “language”, “behavior”, and “state of affairs”.

1.0 We begin with the notion of “thoughts”. One of the interesting features of thoughts is that we often experience them as coming *to* us rather than as coming from us. Equally interesting, our experience of thoughts is that “they come from nowhere.” That is, one moment the thought is not there, and the next moment there it is, fully formed.

To be sure, it isn’t just thoughts. Decisions, judgments, ideas, dreams, behavior, consciousness, conclusions, and so on all have the “come from nowhere” feature. Essentially, our entire mental life, it would seem, “comes from nowhere.” In the present discussion the focus will be on thoughts.

2.0 Because “thought”, “think”, and various cognates are used in connection with a variety of phenomena, let us at least distinguish between thoughts as standing conditions and thoughts which are occurrent episodes:

- a. I think that P. For example, I think that the cat is on the mat, that $E = mc^2$, or that my French grammar could be improved, and so on. In such cases, I take it that P is the case, and this is a standing condition codified by

- the Person Characteristic of “Knowledge” (which includes beliefs, convictions, opinions, etc.).
- b. I have the thought that Q. That is, the thought that Q “crosses my mind”. In this case, I don’t, by virtue of having that thought, in fact take it that Q is the case. My having that thought is an occurrent episode, i.e., it happens at a certain time, and place, and then I don’t have it. It is not a standing condition.
 - c. There are no necessary relationships between thoughts that are standing conditions and thoughts that are occurrent episodes. For example, I can think that P is the case without ever having had the thought that P cross my mind. And I can have the thought that P cross my mind without taking it, then or later, that P is the case. To be sure, there is a familiar paradigm in which I discover that P, have the thought that P cross my mind, and thereafter take it that P is the case.

In the present discussion I shall be concerned with thoughts that cross my mind on a particular occasion and not with thoughts that are beliefs, convictions, opinions, etc.

3.0 It is the thoughts that cross my mind, not those that are simply beliefs, that “come from nowhere”. However, the idea that thoughts might really come from nowhere is evidently unsatisfactory, because we commonly do ask, and try to answer the question, “Where do thoughts come from?” Our answers refer to God, the Unconscious, my authentic self, my brain, and so on.

The dissatisfaction with the idea that thoughts simply do come from nowhere seems to reflect the classic intuition that “From nothing, nothing comes.” One version of this intuition, formulated in positive terms, is the Onstage-Backstage model. For example, this is what is suggested by the phrasing above, i.e., “... and the next moment it is there, *fully formed*.” In this model the thought is a complex construction because it is clearly the product of a syntactic system. Because it is a complex construction, there must have been a complex *process* of construction. Because we don’t observe any

such process, it must take place somewhere out of sight. This process takes place Backstage, and after the construction is complete, and the thought is “fully formed”, it moves, or is moved, Onstage, where it can be viewed by an audience of one. The different explanations of where thoughts come from can be recognized as different theories of what constitutes Backstage. Experience, of course, is Onstage.

Now, although it is natural to raise the question of where do my thoughts come from, there is also something seriously wrong with doing that.

Lewis Carroll: “Nowhere must be a pretty busy place because all thoughts come from there.”

If we take seriously the idea that my thoughts come from somewhere else, two major questions arise immediately, and both are highly problematical. And there are other embarrassing questions as well.

The first question, as we have seen, is “What are the candidates for being the place or the source that my thoughts come from?” The list of candidates, as we have seen, is not impressive, and it is difficult to take any of them seriously, even though their transcendental character makes it impossible to say flatly, “It ain’t so!”

The second question is even worse, namely, “How did it get from there to here (and where is “here”)?” What is the pathway, the traversal of which gets a thought from that transcendental source to my consciousness? Now we are into real absurdity since there are *no* candidates for such a pathway, except, perhaps, again, transcendental ones of completely unknown character.

And one might ask, “How do I know the right thought made that transcendental journey?” And if it wasn’t, was it nevertheless my thought, since it reached *my* consciousness?

4.0 There is also a counter argument to the supposition that my thoughts come to me from somewhere else. The argument is this: No matter where a thought comes from, transcendental or otherwise, if it doesn’t come from me, then it isn’t *my* thought.

In such a case, I would be merely a vehicle for the transmission of the thought, not its source, like the CD is the vehicle for the transmission of the song or the message but is not the author of the song or the message. But the question was about *my* thoughts. It's my thoughts which seem to come from nowhere.

The simple conclusion is that my thoughts don't and can't come from somewhere else. If I'm going to have thoughts at all, they have to "come from nowhere." However puzzling it might be substantively, coming from nowhere is merely a formal mark of the fact that *my* thoughts *originate* with *me*.

(I take this argument to be decisive; I know of no adequate counter to it.)

5.0 One might respond by saying, "Well, yes, but you've been shooting a fly with a cannon. Asking, "Where do my thoughts come from?" is just an innocent metaphor. It's a way of asking, "What accounts for why we have the particular thoughts we do have?"

Now, it's true that if I say something and someone asks in that special tone of voice, "Where did *that* come from?", it's pretty clear that they are asking for an explanation for how come I said that. So the suggestion can't be rejected out of hand. But it can be rejected quickly.

First, if the question is, "Why do we have the particular thoughts that we do?" the answer is that we have a perfectly good, though informal, system for answering the question.

- a. The reason I thought, "I have to go to the store" is that I was getting hungry and needed potatoes to make dinner with.
- b. The reason he thought, "I'll invest in the Swiss Francs" is that the opportunity arose and he regarded it as a sure thing.
- c. The reason she thought, "I've got to get out of this job" is that the work she was assigned just wasn't challenging enough.
- d. The reason she thought, "This is a good day" is that nothing but good things had happened that day and that was unusual.
- e. And so on.

Over most of the range of human activity and interest such explanations do not leave us with something missing that is of a very different sort and is crucial to our understanding. The thoughts I have are non-extraneously related to the behaviors and activities that I do or might engage in or those that I can't engage in but would like to, etc.

To be sure, the more we push for “complete” or “precise” or “predictive” (etc.) explanation, the more we face the same problem we face in predicting the weather with micro-accuracy. The process is so fraught with historical particularity that we never have all the relevant facts, and so, for most such questions the answer is “We'll never know.” And yet there is no mystery there.

Under these conditions, you have to wonder why anyone would think it was advantageous to bring transcendental sources like the Unconscious, the Brain, God, etc. into the picture if all they had in mind was explaining why we have the thoughts we do.

Second, any explanation of why I have the thoughts I have, is beside the point. Whatever that explanation might be, it doesn't address the issue at hand, which is “one moment it isn't there and the next moment it is there.” This is the feature of thought that was puzzling enough to initiate our inquiry, and this is the issue we are pursuing.

6.0 Returning to this issue, we recall that there were two items of interest about thoughts. The first is that my thoughts often seem to come *to* me rather than from me. The second is that thoughts “come from nowhere”.

There is at least one other feature that is of interest. Usually, I experience my thoughts as a voice saying those thoughts. Moreover, the voice is almost always my voice. Thus, there is something experiential that ties my thoughts empirically to me rather than to some transcendental source. Given the other characteristic, experientially, I am both the source and the recipient of my thoughts.

In one sense, this is familiar ground, since we are all familiar with the notion of a reflexive relation, and any reflexive relation will generate this structure.

(Consider a two-place relation R , where ${}_p R_m$. A two-place relation is a reflexive relation if ${}_p R_p$ is a possibility. For example, $R = \text{“shaves”}$ fits this specification, since both “ p shaves m ” and “ p shaves p ” are possibilities. On the other hand, “ p is taller than m ” is a two-place relation but it is not reflexive, since “ p is taller than p ” is not a possibility. The question of reflexivity is still present where R is part of a more complex relation (i.e., an n -place relation, $n > 2$). For example, “shaves” is really a 3-place relation, i.e. “ p shaves m with y ” where y , clearly, is a razor.)

Now, consider an intermediate case, namely, “ p tells m that Q is the case.” Is this reflexive? Well, there doesn’t seem to be any contradiction in accepting “ p tells p that Q is the case.” But it does sound nonsensical or absurd. We know that it is not, however.

All this suggests that we are not just dealing with the logic of reflexive relations here, but rather with something more or something other, something of a substantive sort.

Pursuing this notion, we may ask, “Where in connection with persons do we find a phenomenon where the person is both the source and the recipient of something like a message?” What we find is that the only obvious candidate is the Actor-Observer-Critic schema. Let us review these notions briefly.

7.0 To begin with, Actor, Observer, and Critic are not homunculi. They are statuses. I generally characterize them as jobs. Mastery of these jobs is essential to being a person. The corresponding job descriptions are as follows.

- a. *Actor*. As an Actor, I act. I do my thing. I follow my inclinations, express myself, pursue my projects, do what comes naturally. I am spontaneous, creative, expressive.
- b. *Observer-Describer*. As an Observer-Describer I merely take note of how the behavior is going.
- c. *Critic*. As a Critic, I evaluate how things are going, based on the Observer’s descriptions. If things are not going well, I evaluate the situation in terms of how it has gone wrong and

what might be done to improve matters. We usually call this “diagnosis” and “prescription”.

Actor-Observer-Critic functioning forms a natural feedback loop, with the Critic’s diagnosis and, especially, prescription being the feedback to the Actor. The feedback loop structure accounts for the ability of persons to regulate their own behavior, which is one of the essential characteristics of being a person.

(Parenthetically, the feedback loop structure distinguishes Actor-Observer-Critic cleanly and fundamentally from Id-Ego-Superego, Parent-Adult-Child, and any of the other triads which populate clinically oriented psychological theories and self-help books. If we try to arrange these other trios into a feedback loop, we fail because the members of the trio don’t have the right characteristics or the right relationships with the other members.)

Let us elaborate the notion of Actor-Observer-Critic functioning with the following Paradigm Case Formulation.

I. Paradigm Case

As an Actor I engage in a course of behavior. As an Observer-Describer I note how the course of the behavior is going. As a Critic, I evaluate how the behavior is going and (a) if it is going well enough I leave well enough alone, but (b) if it is not going well enough I generate a “diagnosis” and “prescription” for the Actor.

II. Transformations

TI. Change the Actor’s course of behavior to an imagined behavioral enterprise.

Thus, as an Actor, I imagine initiating a course of behavior. As an Observer, I imagine how that could be expected to go. As a Critic I evaluate the latter and generate feedback having the general form “OK to do, because” or “Not OK to do because”, or “OK to do, but...”

T2. Extend the scope of A-O-C beyond the Actor's behavior.

As an Actor, I extend the notion of my own behavior to something that meshes with other people's behavior and with the world in various ways, and vice versa; I think in terms of "our" and "their" behavior. As an Observer, I note everything—how things are going, what goes on, how things work, how things usually go, etc. Noting everything includes noting normative, statistical, law-like, and theoretical generalizations as well as situations that have nothing particular to do with me, and historical facts, that have no special bearing on my behavior or connection to my behavior. As a Critic I move beyond evaluating how my behavior is going, and develop my potential for evaluating anything and everything in whatever respect and in light of whatever standard.

T3. Change A-O-C functioning from sequential to simultaneous.

Actor-Observer-Critic paradigmatically form the structure of a negative feedback loop, and that calls for an A-O-C *sequence*. That sequence is preserved for any given behavior that may be at issue. However, as soon as the consequences of T1 and T2 begin to accumulate, each of the A-O-C jobs becomes a full time job and in general, at any given time, Actor, Observer and Critic activities are being carried out.

Unless otherwise noted, Actor-Observer-Critic "functioning" or "activities" will refer to the Paradigm Case above augmented by the possibilities given by Transformations T1, T2 and T3.

8.0 There are two further aspects of A-O-C functioning which are of interest in connection with the questions we have about thoughts. The first is brought out by the question, "How does the Critic communicate a diagnosis and prescription to the Actor?" More generally, how does communication take place among the three? The second has to do with an asymmetry between Actor, on the one hand, and both Observer-Describer and Critic on the other hand.

With respect to communication among Critic, Actor, and Observer, we have two choices. Either there is no channel of

communication here, and none is needed, or else there is one and it is the Person.

Recall that Actor, Observer, and Critic are jobs, not homunculi, and it is the Person who performs those jobs. The person knows what the person knows. What the person knows as a Critic he also knows as an Actor and as an Observer. Therefore, there is no problem of how, or via what channel the Critic communicates a diagnosis and prescription to the Actor.

The asymmetry between Actor, on the one hand, and Observer and Critic on the other hand is this: As an Actor I know ahead of time, or “before the fact”, what my behavior is, and I have to know that in order to enact the behavior on purpose. As an Observer or Critic I have only “after the fact” access to my behavior. As an Observer or a Critic I have essentially the same access to my behavior that other people have—I have to wait for it to happen before I can observe it and evaluate it. (This holds equally, the necessary changes having been made, for the case of imagined behaviors.)

The rationale for the asymmetry is obvious and well known—I have to know beforehand what behavior it is in order to then do it on purpose. In the present context we shall also be interested in how this asymmetry works—in how I can routinely know ahead of time what behavior I am going to enact. It is not a simple matter.

In this connection we often speak of having an author’s knowledge of my behavior, in contrast to an Observer’s knowledge. It seems obvious that in order to engage in a behavior on purpose, I have to distinguish that behavior ahead of time in order to do *it* rather than something else. Here, we ask, “What is involved in having an author’s knowledge of my behavior?”

Conceiving my action, P ahead of time, is not to be understood on the model of a thought that crosses my mind, i.e., “P”. That is not our experience of the matter. I don’t routinely think to myself the names or descriptions of the actions I am about to engage in or that I am engaged in, nor do I conjure up images or other such representations of them (nor would it be sufficient if I did).

9.0 In what way, then, do I “know what I do before I do it”? Plausible answers of any kind are not easy to come by. One approach is to begin with the following: I have the general and specific power, or ability, to select a course of behavior which is multilevel; i.e., has a significance/implementation structure, and which fits an identifying description, D, without that description having figured explicitly in the creation of the behavior. Because of this, I can say after the fact what it was I *did* without having done it on the basis of that description. (Of course, in the other case, where I tell you I’m going to do P and then do P, there’s no problem.)

To be sure, this is only a beginning, and some account of how this ability works is needed. For example, given that a description of the behavior is available after the fact, we need an account of why the description of the behavior is dispensable in the creation of the behavior. After all, if language is essential to the making of distinctions and if behavior involves the making of distinctions, why isn’t there a verbal component to all behavior, or at least, to all Deliberate Action?

However, the relation of language to the making of distinctions is not this one, and it is not a simple one, and it is not just one relation.

For one thing, language is not at all necessary for the making of distinctions. All “higher organisms” and perhaps all organisms make distinctions and act on them, yet only one species is known to have a language. A rat does not need to have a language in order to distinguish the red triangle from the blue square and jump to the former. The cat does not need to have a language in order to distinguish the sound of thunder from the sound of wind and rain or to distinguish light from sound, and so on.

What a language is essential for is to distinguish *which* distinctions these are. Without language, I can distinguish the red triangle from the blue square, all right, but I can’t know (distinguish) that *what* it is I’m distinguishing is the red triangle and the blue square. I also can’t know that what I’m doing is *distinguishing* something from something else. And if I can’t distinguish doing one thing from doing another, then I can’t do either one of them on

purpose, nor can I think about it. I can distinguish the red triangle from the blue square and jump to the red triangle, but I can do that only in the presence of a red triangle or a blue square (i.e., I can distinguish them only if they are there to be distinguished).

Where then does language fit in here?

Let us advert to a common view we have of normal human behavior: Ordinarily, our behavior is merely a case of acting spontaneously in light of our circumstances (without thinking or talking about it) in ways that reflect our learning histories and our person characteristics. (This is the PC-C model for understanding human behavior.) The category of Person Characteristics includes the subcategory of Knowledge, defined as “the set of facts (states of affairs) that the person has the ability to act on.”

Note, however, that “our circumstances” refers to something that goes beyond what is here-now present to our senses. “Our circumstances” includes a structured world, primarily a social world, of objects, processes, events, and states of affairs, and what is here-now present to our senses had better well fit within that or we will be disoriented and unable to act effectively.

Now, once I have learned about red and blue and triangles vs. squares and about sight and sound and danger and safety, and so on, I will almost always perceive the world and think about the world in those terms. I will *see* the magazine cover as red (and not blue, etc.); I will experience myself as seeing the magazine (not hearing it, smelling it, etc.); I will see the lion as something dangerous (and not harmless, etc.).

It is because perception and understanding tend strongly to follow the lines laid out by our verbal distinctions and formulations that (a) I can spontaneously see the world in terms of distinctions that I *could* specify verbally, and (b) I can act on those distinctions in ways that I can also distinguish and describe without (c) going through a *process* of describing what I am distinguishing, or what I am doing, or what I am about to do.

(Something of this sort is a practical necessity, since many implementation behaviors, especially at the most concrete levels

occur more quickly than we could verbalize thoughts or descriptions of them. Thinking or talking about every behavior in advance is a luxury we couldn't afford.)

Here we have a certain kind of answer to the question of how it is that I can know what I do without thinking about it (without having had the thought of it cross my mind) or describing it.

However, the answer we have just arrived at still does not appear to do the entire job. What is missing is an account of how I can know what I do *ahead of time*, which is what Deliberate Action requires.

In this regard, let us consider a type of model, or paradigm, which I call "Reading Off the Features". (The philosopher holds up a tomato and says, "Now, when I say it's red, am I theorizing? Am I hypothesizing? Am I imposing something on what I see? Or am I just reading off the features of what is actually there?") The context here, however, is world construction and reconstruction, not merely knowledge.

In the "Reading Off the Features" paradigm, I acquire grounds for changing (correcting, adding to, elaborating, completing some part of, etc.) my world, *and I simply do that*. Paradigmatically, that happens when a trusted source (father, mother, teacher, authority figure) says that a certain state of affairs is the case. For example, the trusted source says, "Wolves are dangerous." Since it comes from a trusted source, I do not question that, or test it, or wait for conclusive evidence or anything like that. Rather, it is simply the case that thereafter I take it that wolves are dangerous. For me, that is simply part of how things are, and I will act accordingly. For example, if someone asks me, "Are wolves dangerous?" I will answer "Yes" without hesitation and without having to remember or reconstruct how I found that out. And if someone asks me about wolves, it will not be far down the line that I say, "Wolves are dangerous."

As with other PC's, once I have the PC of "knowledge that wolves are dangerous" I will continue to have that PC until and unless something happens whereby that changes.

As noted above, my PC category of “knowledge” is defined as “the set of facts (states of affairs) or concepts that I have the ability to act on.” Up to now we have pretty much taken this definition at face value, and we think of it as a specific set of facts, each of which I acquired somewhere somehow, and I have the ability to act on *those* facts.

As a PC definition it works well. However, it should be clear by now that what I have to act on is not simply a discrete set of facts, but rather a structure of facts, i.e., my real world, which encompasses logical, causal, empirical, explanatory, historical, human, and spiritual facts (among others). It also offers a multitude of implied facts, intuited facts, inferred facts, suspected facts, forgotten and half-forgotten facts, temporarily unavailable facts, relational facts, relativistic and absolute facts, summary facts, actual facts and possible facts, past, present and future facts, and so on. All of these are involved in my version of “how things are” or “my circumstances” or “the world”.

Now, although “reading off the features of what is actually there” in my circumstances is presumably not a simple matter like sticking in my thumb and pulling out a plum, it sort of works that way. It works that way in the sense that all of these facts in my world and all of that structure are *immediately* available to act on. I simply “read off the features” of my world. In its own way, this is extraordinary, and it tells us something about the logic of person and world and world construction. What it tells us is a far cry from the clichés of “Here we stand on a nondescript planet in the middle of billions and billions of galaxies.”

In emphasizing the radical difference between the notion of Deliberate Action and the usual run of psychological concepts of behavior, I have had occasion to comment that the logical scope of a single Deliberate Action is identical to the logical scope of the entire universe. Briefly, this is because, formally, the K (Know) parameter of a Deliberate Action could have as its value a description of the past, present, and future history of the universe. (We get a weak

version of this notion when we speak of “acting under the aspect of eternity.”)

One could say that each of my behaviors reflects my entire world and all of the facts it contains—it’s just that some of them are more relevant than others. What we commonly say is that the behaviors that I in fact engage in each involves acting on only a small number of the facts that I have immediately available.

10.0 This raises the question of how I select which facts to act on, on a given occasion? That is a natural question, but it calls for a circumspect approach which avoids dealing with the selection as being a prior behavior. (Earlier infinite regress problems threaten to reappear here.) In this connection, let us distinguish between behaviors that are evoked by circumstances and behaviors that are generated by me, since the answer will be somewhat different in the two cases.

Case I

Consider behaviors that are evoked by circumstances. The lion walks in the room and I run out the door. Why do I act on *this* circumstance (this state of affairs) and not some other? After all, this is no part of any plan I may have had.

The answer is given by a maxim: “A person values some states of affairs over others and acts accordingly.”

I value being safe over being in danger and I act accordingly. It is just such values that come into play when behavior is evoked by circumstances. I am sensitive to those facts which threaten or further one of my values. I am routinely on the lookout for such facts. (I am constantly appraising my circumstances.) I routinely conceptualize the world in these terms.

In short, in this kind of case the facts I act on are relevant to a high priority value that I have and to the behaviors that implement such values.

Case II

However, behaviors evoked by circumstances are the exception; most originate with me.

Recall that to engage in a Deliberate Action is to participate in a social practice (and further, generally, in an organized set of social practices (These are designated as “Institutions”).).

Thus, at the time when, formally speaking, I select my behavior, call it B1, in advance and know what it is, I am then engaged in enacting a social pattern of behavior (a “social practice”), call it SP25, which has a place for that behavior, B1. The latter is one of the possible implementations or partial implementations of SP25 and, in the circumstances, since it is the one I select, either it is the only one I can discern or it has a decisive advantage over the other possibilities.

Knowing ahead of time what I do is not a matter of *predicting* my own behavior. Thus, although I generally can’t tell you five minutes ahead of time what particular behavior I will be engaging in, at about the time it comes time to do it, I have at hand all the facts I need to have in order to know what that behavior will be. And I could tell you about it then, though I almost never do. (That would impede the flow of the action, most likely.)

To take a simple example, I could not tell you at the beginning of a game of chess (the social practice) what my fifth move would be. But anytime from, say, move three on I could tell you what move I expect to make on Move 5, and certainly, by the time it comes time to make the move I can tell you what it will be (and I haven’t verbalized or thought anything, either).

There are two angles here, i.e., “How do I know?” and “How can I be sure?” We have already answered the first. In general, knowing is the mark of having decided, and being able to say is the mark of knowing. Once I decide, then I know (and I don’t in general, go through any process of deciding, including any verbal process). For the second, we shall need reference to the heuristic image, “The Picture of Winston Churchill.”

The Picture of Winston Churchill

Imagine that I show you a glossy 8x10 photograph and ask you “Who is this a picture of?” You take one look at the photograph and laugh. You say, “It’s a picture of Winston Churchill—no mistaking that face!” Then I face you with a prosecutorial look and say, “Now, wait a minute. How do you know that this is a picture of Winston Churchill and not of someone else who happens to look exactly like this photo?” You hem and haw but eventually you have to admit that in fact it may not be a picture of Winston Churchill.

Then I give you a piece of paper and some colored pencils and say, “How about drawing me a picture of Winston Churchill?” After about five minutes you lay down the pencils and say, “OK, I’m done. There it is.” I look at the drawing, put on my prosecutorial face and say, “Now wait a minute. How do you know this is a picture of Winston Churchill and not of someone else who looks exactly like what you’ve drawn?” We go round and round on this, but eventually you get it right. You say, “I don’t care who it looks like. I know for absolute sure that this is a picture of Winston Churchill because that’s what I produced it as, and that *makes* it a picture of Winston Churchill.” And you’re right.

I have often commented in connection with this image that the same holds for our behaviors. I know that my behavior is behavior X because that’s what I produced it *as*.

In the present context it works out neatly to say not merely that I know after the fact that my behavior was B1 because that’s what I produced it as, but also that I knew before the fact that my behavior was going to be B1. Because I knew then that that’s what I was going to produce it as; I knew then that that’s what I was going to produce

it as because that's what was (already) called for by the social practice that I was already engaged in doing.

Thus, at last, we have a direct answer to the question of how I can routinely distinguish ahead of time the behavior I am going to engage in. The answer to how I know *ahead of time* is provided by the hierarchical and sequential structure of social practices and larger patterns (institutions) composed of social practices. Since every Deliberate Action is specified as one of the stages or optional stages in one or more social practice, as soon as I begin to participate in any such social practice, certain behaviors, including B1, are distinguished from the very beginning as being called for at a certain point. Thus, when I engage in that practice, I have distinguished the behavior ahead of time. As the time for doing it approaches, I have lost whatever grounds I might have had for doubting, or considering alternatives, and when the time to do it arrives, I can be sure ahead of time what it is I'm going to do, because I can be sure ahead of time what I'm going to produce that behavior *as*, namely as the behavior called for by the practice. (In the case of behaviors evoked by circumstances, the structure of social practices that is evoked is likely to be different, but that difference will not be generally significant.)

To summarize, the explanation for why I can know *at all*, what it is I do, and without thinking about it, is provided ultimately by the model that says that perception and knowledge follow the lines laid down by social and linguistic practice, and it is provided proximately by the "Reading Off the Features" model. The social practice model then explains how I can know ahead of time.

Recall that questions about A-O-C entered the present picture when we noted that Actor-Observer-Critic functioning is one of the few human phenomena in which I am both the generator and the recipient of a message, or something like a message. This was suggestive because the thoughts that cross my mind have this feature—they seem to come *to* me and also, since they come in my voice, they also seem to come from me. It appears that the functional separation of Actor, Observer and Critic and Person is strong enough

to support this duality. (For example, as is well known, I generally *hear from* my Critic; I seldom *talk to* that Critic.)

The suggestion here is that thoughts are generated by A-O-C activities. But we shall have to look and see what additional support for this suggestion may be forthcoming.

Why would there be an interesting connection between occurrent thoughts and A-O-C activities? In a word—the world, that total structure of states of affairs that codifies my behavior potential. My thoughts are about the world and/or my position with respect to some states of affairs or possible states of affairs. And the world that my thoughts are about is the world that I construct, maintain, and reconstruct through my behavior, which depends on A-O-C activities.

Thus, we need to bring world maintenance and world reconstruction into the picture in a systematic way. (In doing so we will be elaborating on the work of Tee Roberts, who introduced them to the Descriptive Psychology community as systematic concepts.)

Outside of Descriptive Psychology a reference to world construction, world maintenance, and world reconstruction is not unlikely to meet with a bright smile and a disclaimer: “You must be speaking metaphorically. *Surely*, you don’t mean, *literally*, world construction, maintenance, and reconstruction.” The appropriate answer in the present case is, “No, it’s not a metaphor, and, yes, I mean *literally* world construction, maintenance, and reconstruction.” Questions then tend to be along the lines of how one could do that, why one would do that, what guarantees does one have that it has been done right, and so on.

When it comes to world reconstruction, we can sometimes use the poets as a source of ideas. For example, we have our old friend Omar Khayyam, who says:

*“Ah, love, could you and I with Him conspire
To change this sorry scheme of things entire
Would we not shatter it to bits, and then
Remold it nearer to our hearts’ desire?”*

To those who look askance when we say, “No, I mean, *literally*...” I suspect it must seem that we are referring to some Godly exercise of power such as this. What Khayyam describes so vividly is what one might call a brute force approach to the matter. And it is not open to us. We can’t “shatter it to bits, and then remold it nearer to our hearts’ desire.” Unless we can, of course. (Perhaps putting a freeway through an urban area is as close as we come.)

How, then, and what, then? What mechanism, what procedure, what agency is available for reconstructing my world?

There is a certain kind of alternative to the “shatter it to bits” approach. Stanley Cavell, in explaining the difference between Wittgenstein’s philosophy and traditional philosophy, said roughly the following. “For Aristotle, to speak the truth is to say of what is *that* it is. In this new way of talking, to speak the truth is to say of what is *what* it is.”

In creating worlds, and in reconstructing worlds, we don’t do it by creating stuff and moving it around. Rather, what we create is its being what it is.

Recall that whereas my knowledge is the set of facts that I have the ability to act on, my world is the structure of facts that I have the ability to act on. It is my world that codifies my possibilities and non-possibilities for behavior, and that is the primary value of constructing a world to begin with. Typically, I engage in reconstructive efforts when there is something significantly problematic about my world. Against this background, what can we say about reconstructing my world?

- a. If I simply try to change it in any kind of arbitrary or brute force way, I find I have no basis. My world as it is already represents my last word on how things are and on what is possible or impossible for me. I can arbitrarily suppose that this or that is different, and I can to some extent arbitrarily make things different, and so that is not a hopeless undertaking, but neither, in general, does it seem to be very productive of change.

- b. If I start with the world as it is and try to generate new behavioral possibilities, I may well succeed in generating new behavioral possibilities. But even that is relatively unlikely to change my world, because that is what I started from and the new behaviors are likely to be compatible with it.
- c. If I start with behaviors which I did not already think of as possible for me, and from that start, construct a world which supports/enables those behaviors (a world in which those behaviors are possible), then if I succeed, that does seem to have a good possibility of changing my world. (By the way, this paradigm is a model for many kinds of problem solving, e.g., the kind where we “work backward from a solution” or the kind where we do a task analysis.)

If I proceed in the third of these ways and succeed, that implies that either my former world was an incomplete or an inexact codification of my behavior potential, or else that my behavior potential has changed or both. After all, there is never a guarantee of completeness or correctness. In fact, the presumption is to the contrary. (So that world reconstruction is a more or less routine activity along with world maintenance.)

In effect, I do not routinely reconstruct my world by doing something which makes it different from what it was before. Rather, I do it by discovering that it already was different from what I had taken it to be. (Recall that in the Degradation Ceremony, “What he is now is what, ‘after all’, he was all along.”)

How does this approach to world reconstruction compare with Roberts’ (1985) analysis of dreaming as a vehicle for world reconstruction?

- a. Roberts’ notion of dreaming begins with the multilevel structure of behavior, i.e., the notion that every case of Deliberate Action is a case of doing X by doing Y, with “doing X” being the significance of doing Y and “doing Y” being the implementation of doing X.

- b. In this arrangement, with at least two behaviors involved (there may be intermediate behaviors) the top level behavior, B1, is what I am really up to and reflects primarily my being in the world. The bottom level behavior, B2, is what I visibly do, and that represents the exploitation of the specifics of my circumstances in implementing what I am up to. (Doing B1 is the significance of doing B2; doing B2 is the implementation of doing B1.) My circumstances (i.e., my world) thereby embody and codify the reality constraints, which determine which concrete behaviors, if any, are actually available that will effectively implement what I am up to.
- c. Dreams are notable for the absence of this last condition. Because I don't in fact have to engage in overt behavior when I dream, the usual reality constraints on how I can implement what I am up to are not present. And it is precisely this freedom from reality constraints which allows me to formulate solutions which I might otherwise not have access to.
- d. Correspondingly, the absence of reality constraints results in the need to interpret dreams in order to make explicit what solutions they represent. Since the concrete dream behaviors and, especially, the circumstances, do not have to be realistic, they can be almost anything. The way to recover the pragmatic content of the dream (the significant level) is to interpret the dream. This is done by following two principles:
 - 1) Drop the details and see what pattern remains.
 - 2) Don't make anything up. (Stick to what is *in* the dream.)
- e. The final step in dream analysis is to reintroduce the reality constraints of the dreamer's real life circumstances and apply the "solution" there. If it is successful, the dream solution remains a possible solution in real life, and if the dreamer acts on it successfully, the conditions for a successful world reconstruction have been met.

Now, if we juxtapose this formulation of dreaming to the preceding examination of world reconstruction we find that they mesh quite well. Specifically, the dream formulation appears to be a special case of the third approach, i.e., “If I start with behaviors which I did not already think of as possible for me, and construct a world which enables or supports those behaviors, then if I succeed, those do have a good possibility of changing my world.”

The reference to dreams also supplies us with another link between world reconstruction and A-O-C activities. Remembered dreams have been characterized as falling almost 100% into two categories, i.e., problem formulation dreams and problem solution dreams.

The solution to a problem generally demands a certain level of clarity concerning what the problem is. And if that level of clarity has not been reached in real life, then the formulation of what the problem is, is itself a problem that can be addressed in dreaming or in realistic problem solving or anything in between.

But although problem formulation dreams and problem solution dreams can both be formally characterized as “problem solution”, there are clear differences between the two genres. In particular, a problem formulation dream clearly involves Critic and Observer functions primarily (a problem formulation is a Critic “diagnosis”) whereas a problem solution dream clearly belongs to the Actor mode. (It is the latter that has been labeled as “wish fulfillment”)

Does all this answer the question concerning what specific mechanism, process or agency, etc. is available for routine world maintenance and reconstruction? Not yet as well as one would like.

Let us continue by introducing the notion of behavior as drama. And let us proceed by noting that (a) the description of a Deliberate Action is much closer to the description of a drama than it is to the description of a movement, and (b) the description of the social practice of which the Deliberate Action is a part *is* the description of a drama. The feature that is of specific interest here is that the specification of both the Deliberate Action (via the parametric analysis) and of the drama (via a process description) is completely

self-contained. It requires no reference to anything outside because it includes a specification of everything that is involved in the drama. One might say that the drama constitutes a world of its own and that, formally, *it has no circumstances*.

Returning now to the question of how world reconstruction is accomplished, the first thing to be avoided is to think of “changing” the world on the model of a child with a set of building blocks (facts or objects) rearranging them closer to his heart’s desire.

11.0 Instead, we have the familiar notion of status assignment and, in the context of the theater, the corresponding special case of “casting”. In the theater, “casting” consists of assigning each of a set of historical individuals, namely the actors, to play one of the parts (one of the characters) that the play calls for. The extension of the notion of “casting” to the non-human parts played by the various props is straightforward.

12.0 Similarly, if I want to engage in a social practice, I have to assign actual individuals to play each of the parts (persons and non-persons) called for by the practice. Of course, I hardly ever go through any *procedure* of assigning those statuses explicitly. I just act accordingly—I just treat them accordingly and expect the same from them (and I judge them accordingly).

13.0 Notice that this fits our prescription of “If I start with behaviors which I did not already think of as possible for me and construct a world which enables those behaviors, then if I succeed, that seems to have a good possibility of changing my world.” If I make my status assignments and act on them successfully, i.e., I do in fact carry out that social practice, who is to say that my status assignments were wrong *and the world isn’t that way*. (Darwin: “Don’t argue with success.”)

Notice too, that what makes it easy is that I don’t have to go through any separate *procedure* of “constructing a world which enables those behaviors.” That world is built in to the description of the social practices I am engaging in and through them it is built in to the description of the individual Deliberate Actions of which the

social practices are the Significance. Everything that the world needs to contain in order for the enactment to be both successful and a part of the real world is contained in the concept of the social practice. If the enactment was successful, there really were the “characters”, both human and non-human, called for by the social practice.

Here, again, the case of dreaming is helpful, this time in bringing out the potentially arbitrary character of casting, or status assigning. In dreams, to a large extent, the casting *is* arbitrary. (Recall that we can get by with that precisely because we don’t, in dreaming, have to carry off the action in the real world *with its corresponding reality constraints*.) It is partly because of this arbitrariness that we have to interpret the dream by dropping the arbitrary details and otherwise take it at face value by not making things up. It is because the drama and the characters, human and otherwise, are logically distinct from the individuals who play those characters on a given occasion, that we can indeed interpret the dream by separating the drama and the characters from the arbitrariness of the individuals who play those characters in the dream. We do this by means of Significance Descriptions (“Drop the details...”).

Except in some special cases, we do not, to be sure, wind up with neat before-and-after descriptions of the world. (“It used to be *that* way and now it’s *this* way;” or “I used to think it was *that* way and now I see that it’s *this* way.”)

But why should we? Language is essential in the domain of behavior, but it is not primary. My world is not held in place because I have a complete or rigorous description of it, but rather because I know my way around in it. If the primary point of my having a world is that it codifies my possibilities and non-possibilities of behavior, and if the most fundamental way of knowing the world is knowing what it calls for by way of behavior (note that giving a description will be merely a special case of that), then characterizing a change in my world by reference to a change in what it is possible for me to do seems right to the point and not any kind of second best.

Note that, particularly in light of the Paradigm Case Formulation of A-O-C, I don’t have to actually engage in the new behavior. As

long as I can “see my way clear” I will take it that I *could* engage in that behavior and that is sufficient to mark a change in my world. That’s what happens in successful problem solving.

14.0 If thoughts are, in effect, verbalized A-O-C activities, how does it happen that only certain of these activities are verbalized? What accounts for which are and which aren’t? And how does it happen that I have any thoughts at all?

If we take an empirical approach and examine a sample of actual thoughts (our own or a collection of reported thoughts) we can detect some reasonably clear tendencies concerning which A-O-C activities appear as thoughts.

- a. The A-O-C activities which we experience are those that are closest to being overt behaviors. They represent possible behaviors that we might well have engaged in overtly except that something else had priority.
- b. The A-O-C activities we experience are those that have high priority—they correspond to *important* judgments, observations, actions, etc.
- c. The A-O-C activities we experience as thoughts are those that are closely related to the overt behavior we do engage in. (Cf. “Is it time?”)
- d. Conversely, we also experience as thoughts A-O-C activities, which are so unrelated to the overt behaviors being engaged in that the two do not interfere with each other. This case often requires that what we are doing overtly is especially simple and/or non-problematic so that “our thoughts are free to wander.”

Given some simple behavioral economics of the situation these results are not surprising although there doesn’t seem to be a neat and simple way of parsing it.

We begin with overt Deliberate Action. A Deliberate Action may be an Actor activity, an Observer activity, or a Critic activity. (Considered as behaviors, there is a simple set of logical relations

among them, i.e., Critic is a special case of Observer-Describer and Observer-Describer is a special case of Actor.)

Thus, as soon as we introduce the notion of simultaneously functioning in all three ways, we raise the issue of interference. We can't do all three overtly and simultaneously because they would interfere with each other. As soon as we introduce the notion of overt and covert functioning we provide a way out. Absence of interference may be presumed at a given time if only one of the three appears as overt behavior and the other two appear as covert activities, including those covert activities represented by thoughts.

Verbal behavior provides an intermediate case here. It is overt behavior but it interferes minimally with ongoing non-linguistic behavior.

Is there a question about covert Actor activities? That probably depends on how much we want to insist that there is. If I say "When she said that, I thought of going to the store right then", there doesn't seem to be much difficulty.

Thus, we might say that thoughts that are related to the overt behavior patterns being implemented occur because they correspond to Actor, Observer, or Critic activities that are involved in that behavior and because, being covert, they do not interfere.

Conversely, we might say that thoughts that are unrelated to the overt behavior patterns being implemented can occur because the corresponding A-O-C activities are unrelated enough not to interfere, and they occur if they are sufficiently important.

I would expect that there are exceptions to these general tendencies, and that if we pursued them, we would eventually be facing the weather prediction problem—no mystery in principle, but in fact we'll never know.

15.0 And how does it happen that I have any thoughts at all? This question is not answered by pointing out patterns in the range of thoughts that do occur. Indeed, it is probably best answered in the context of our primary task of understanding how it is that thoughts come from nowhere.

Surprisingly, perhaps, this answer is one of the cleanest and easiest to generate. Thoughts come from nowhere because having a thought is an event, as formulated in the State of Affairs System, and events come from nowhere. One moment they're not there and the next moment they are there!

TR6. An event is a direct change from one state of affairs to another.

Having a thought is an achievement, as is reaching a conclusion, making a decision, passing a judgment, or raising a question, and achievements have no duration, because they are events. Thus all of these mental phenomena “come from nowhere”.

It's pretty clear what kind of achievement it is to reach a conclusion, make a decision, etc. What kind of achievement is it to have a thought? Here, one might say that when I have a thought I have achieved some kind of position vis-à-vis the world.

I believe that that is essentially correct. However, the fact that I can have a thought, e.g., “They're not coming,” which does not correspond to a belief but rather expresses a hope or a fear, opens the possibility of, and the necessity for, some further complexity.

One can formulate the complexity along one or another of two distinct lines. The first merely calls for a shift from actual to potential. I have achieved an actual position or formulated a potential position vis-à-vis the world. I suspect this is too simple.

In the second approach, we use verbal behavior as a model. It is well known that the pragmatics of verbal behavior defies simple generalizations. But, for example, it is our familiarity with this aspect of verbal behavior that allows us to recognize cases where, when I say, “They're not coming”, I am expressing a fear, not a conviction, or, I am manifesting the hope that they will come. Since, in general, it is because we know how to do certain things with words spoken aloud that later we can do the same things with words “in our heads”, the use of that paradigm here has the appeal of verisimilitude.

Footnotes

1. This is the text of the paper that Dr. Ossorio prepared for the 1998 Society for Descriptive Psychology meeting. Previously, in Vol. 8 of *Advances in Descriptive Psychology*, we published a transcription of the paper as actually presented with questions from the audience and with his omissions and condensation of his argument on the fly, so to speak. This version includes the complete text as he wrote it, and thus from [ms. pages 20 through 33] this wording should replace the more informal version contained in the presentation in Vol. 8 from pages 134 to 143.

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