

THINKING

‘Thinking’, as Arendt says, is the *silent dialogue of me with myself*. As such, our thinking is invisible. We therefore need to make it ‘visible’, make our thinking appear in the world as Arendt would say, to relate to others. Our ‘surfaced’ thoughts are the outcome of our interior silent dialogue.

The problem we often face is that our thinking is not really ‘thinking’. Too often the goings on ‘in our heads’ are just mental chattering, daydreaming and fantasising. There is no ‘thinking’ to reveal or make manifest to the world. The reason many people engage in meditation and mindfulness is to quiet their minds - to stop *thinking* as they put it. That may be fine in so far as it goes and we cannot be ‘thinking’ all the time without being exhausted.

But avoiding ‘thinking’ always is not what we want to do at all, or certainly at least all of our life. There may be times we have to conduct the silent dialogue of me with myself. As Arendt demanded of us we have a responsibility to *think what we are doing*. If, however, we are unaccustomed to it, we are then unlikely to be ready when we are called upon to think.

Recall Arendt’s case of Albert Eichmann and what he was capable of doing on foot of being unthinking and ‘thoughtless’: his inability to see things from the standpoint of another; his inability to express himself in any terms other than clichés; and his inability to make judgements, e.g., to tell ‘right’ from ‘wrong’. This is where he operated from as a person. That is the issue we must address.

Where do we wish to be operating from?

We can look at two options briefly here.

Let us start with Brain.*

**When we separate out some aspect of the whole person, such as ‘the brain’, we do so only for the purpose of analysis to help with developing our understanding of ‘the person’. We must remember at all times that this is artificial as it is the whole person who conducts thinking. Also, there are many ways of analysing (i.e., ‘breaking apart’) the person than the way we do here. For example, Freud’s*



structure is the ‘ego’, ‘id’ and ‘super ego’. The method of analysis depends on our purpose.

The ‘Brain’ is a reactive organ (and more correctly a part of the embodied Central Nervous System). As such brain wants to economise on effort and preserve energy for survival. As a result it supports cognitive biases and other automatic and habitual modes of operating: brain does not *enjoy* ‘thinking’. Thus, to be an individual in the world, we must operate beyond brain - we do not wish to operate-as-brain only (*‘I am Brain’*) if we are to be ‘ourselves’.

We move on, therefore, to ‘Mind’*. ‘Mind’ is more than ‘Brain’.
*See note above.

Although the **evolving brain** remains fundamental, and we cannot ignore or forget that aspect of ourselves as persons, we are more than a central nervous system, even if too often we operate as such. Mind is a complex of ideas, meanings and feelings begun with the tradition into which we were born and shaped over our life experiences.

Our portfolio (*confusion?*) of ideas at any moment ranges from those we inherited and still hold, to those we acquired unconsciously, and to those we deliberately work on as part of who we want to be. These ideas include, in addition to the ones of which we are aware, those ideas of which we are unaware at any time - the ‘silent shapers of our thoughts’ - as well as our unconscious.

The **developing mind** is also embodied and this feature influences us operating-as-mind (*‘I am Mind’*). Our best activity of mind - ‘thinking’ - has to be expressed in the ‘language of body’ although the activities are about intangibles. Hence the essential role of metaphors in thinking and communication.

Adapting Barzun’s [<http://keynes.ucc.ie/blog/a-well-made-self-by-jacques-barzun/>] idea, the question now is: Are we a ‘Well-constructed Mind’? If not, are we constructing one? And, if not, why not? What is the benefit of not having a ‘well-constructed mind’ to operate from?

WEB OF IDEAS

We have previously mentioned how the Web of Ideas works as a tool for promoting your dialogues with the authors and for creating dialogues between the authors’ ideas. A very simple, but very useful, tool for leaving the mental chatter and bringing to light some of our thoughts.

Now we can see that the Web of Ideas is also a handy tool for organising your ideas.

Organisation of thought is a key for active thinking - thinking responsibly as preparation for our engagement with others and our world. “Organised thought”, as Alfred North Whitehead said, “is the basis of organised action” where, in his definition: “Organisation is the adjustment of diverse elements so that their mutual relations may exhibit some predetermined quality.”

The Web of Ideas can now be viewed as a basic model for ‘Mind’ (a complex of ideas) - as an organisation of thoughts, as a basis for organised action.

When filled up with *your* ideas, it is a simple picture of *your* mind at a moment of adjustment of some of your diverse ideas.

How is it looking to you now? What quality do you want the mutual relations of these ideas to have?