

The Blending of Things

Try the idea of “blending” as a concept for understanding interrelated systems. The object is to avoid rigid distinctions resulting in separations which may cause insolvable problems.

An example of a rigid distinction is the well-known “hard problem” in philosophy. Briefly stated, it is this: how does the firing of a nerve in an organic body result in the experience of a feeling in a consciousness? What is distinguished here is an organic function (nerve firing) and an experience, as if it were possible to have an observer who could stand outside these two operations and “objectively” witness both events. Such a thing is impossible, of course, for “experience” is not subject to observation. This makes subjectivity primary and irreducible. Acknowledging this, the “hard problem” is seen to be misstated when taken as an “objective” problem. The phenomenon must be approached subjectively and intersubjectively.

Using the concept of blending we can try to account for the events within an organism on the experiential level, also using objective information about organic processes, of course, with its capacity of measurement, but without falsely stepping outside of the parameters of subjectivity and pretending objective neutrality.

For example, perception (the activity of the senses) is blended with thinking (higher brain processing); they are not *disconnected* functions (though they are certainly distinguishable.)

How are they connected? Through feeling.

Perception is *always* accompanied by feeling; e.g., while perception “takes in” an external world it also animates the body of the perceiver. What the body *feels*, in part, is the response to the activity of perceiving. The organs in the body at every moment of existence are responding to interior processes (digestion, respiration, et. al). These same organs (heart, lungs) are also activated by exterior stimuli, e.g., accelerated heart rate from fear or anticipation, hormonal release from attractions, muscle contraction from movements of avoidance or pursuit and so forth.

In this way external stimuli, as a given perceptual moment is processed, are blended in the organism. That *blended feeling* is the response of the internal milieu (i.e., within the organism) to the perception of external phenomena.

Thinking however, in contrast to perception, *seems* ethereal, i.e. it *seems* disembodied (not to involve the internal milieu) but it is not.

The brain is an organ like any other with blood churning through it containing oxygen and nutrients for its cells.

The brain is inextricably tied to bodily systems with networks of nerves ascending and descending.

At all times, there is ceaseless interactivity among the organs of the body ruled by homeostasis: muscles flexing and un-flexing, hormones released into the blood correcting imbalances and setting moods, lungs expanding and contracting during breathing, and *all these operations are controlled by neural stimuli*. This is, strictly speaking, the body as a *physical* entity.

If all processes are physical how then can we justify a distinction of a mental part, a mind?

We begin to answer this question by offering that “mind” is not a “thing,” but a process. It is something the brain *does* like homeostasis is something the brain *does*.

Thinking grows out of the overall awareness of the O/E of its many bodily functions. It evolves from global bodily awareness to a higher order generalized awareness which we define as higher intelligence. Just as symbols allow a higher order of mental operations by furthering the ability of the O/E to manipulate particulars using more general categories, thinking raises the level of awareness to a higher order of understanding.

Once symbolic processing is achieved by a mind, which only human brains apparently can do, the realm of perception is available for representation. This capacity allows a world of ideas alongside the world of sense perception. These are *not* two worlds, however, but two aspects of one reality. Another dimension is added to the human life/world by

mind, but to see these dimensions, mind and sense perception, as two different spheres is a mistake. They are distinguishable but not separable.

In the *mind* (consciousness), we see a narrative unfolding moment by moment, a sorting out the various impressions gathered from perception and informed by memory which process “makes up” entities we turn into stories, typically using language, but not always. These stories contain meanings vital to the organism, vital because of the need to “make sense” of our world.

Meaning is the name we give to the intelligibility of processes going on in the body/mind which are strung together to give an impression of a coherent lived life.

A declarative sentence, for example, is a complete fragment of meaning which may be combined with other fragments (sentences) to create a story line.

We distinguish the cerebral and visceral activity (now we are talking about both physical and mental processes) in the body, but every single operation of an organism is *embodied* including thinking and every single operation is a *blending* of bodily responses for some kind of action or inaction of the O/E.

Perception may be the most significant function of all for an O/E, but even perception is a blending of all the senses and involves memory. There is no such thing as pure perception just as there is no “thinking thing.”

We conclude with the following:

Each and every organism (O/E) is trying to figure things out ceaselessly for itself in a world containing others like itself. Intersubjectivity is the name we give to that condition. Each and every O/E is a natural solipsist which condition cannot be escaped although it can be mitigated.

How? Through continuous dialogue and through careful self-correction of ignorance, the individual O/Es can blend their thoughts together to produce a more perfect understanding of the experiences which we are trying to account for.