

Interactive minds

**Life-span perspectives on the social
foundation of cognition**

Edited by

PAUL B. BALTES

*Max Planck Institute for Human
Development and Education*

URSULA M. STAUDINGER

*Max Planck Institute for Human
Development and Education*



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On the occasion of his eightieth year, we dedicate this book
to Ernst E. Boesch, whose work exemplifies the promise
inherent in the interface between developmental, social, and
cultural psychology.

Epilogue: reflections and future perspectives

Peter Graf, Laura L. Carstensen, Franz E. Weinert, and Richard A. Shweder

This epilogue represents a collection of voices rather than one. In our own efforts to assess the impact of this book, we, the editors, were interested in the consequences and perspectives that might arise for the fields of cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, and cognitive anthropology. We consider these areas of specialization of paramount importance in advancing the use of theory and paradigms involving interactive minds. For this reason, we asked four noted scholars from these fields, Peter Graf (cognitive psychology), Laura Carstensen (developmental psychology), Franz Weinert (educational psychology), and Richard Shweder (cognitive anthropology), to reflect on the book as a whole, comment on the chapters of particular relevance to their work, and outline, if any, the kinds of perspectives and implications they envision for their own field of specialization.

The “mind” of cultural psychology (Richard A. Shweder)

Betwixt and between the monad and the receptacle

The essays in this volume range across quite disparate areas – gender development, wisdom, artificial intelligence, narrative, sociobiology, sociohistorical psychology – yet amazingly they are unified by a common aim: to locate a suitable intellectual space in between the Leibnizean conception of the human mind as a *monad* and the Lockean conception of the human mind as a *receptacle*. That notional territory betwixt and between those two opposed ideas – mind as monad versus mind as receptacle – is staked out by the editors of the volume under the banner of “interactive minds.” What Baltes and Staudinger seek to achieve is a conception of the human mind that neither Leibniz nor Locke thought credible.

Leibniz (the rationalist) conceptualized the human mind as a self-sufficient, preformed, richly structured, asocial monad, which was fully equipped with conceptual content (ideas) and was endowed with the capacity to cognize and compute the implications of its own innate ideas. He imagined that everything inside the mind – the “conceptual contents” cognized in thought plus their

computational implications – must have been there originally and all along. He supposed (as did Kant, Descartes, and Plato) that ideas (the conceptual contents of a mind) could not have their source in experience because to have an experience is to have an experience “of something,” and for an experience to be an experience of something the mind must already know how to represent the experience as an experience of this or that or of such and so. This led Leibniz to reason that experience could not be the source of ideas because an outside experience (such as the visual or tactile perception of a chair) could have no impact on the mind unless its conceptual content (the this or that, the such and so, in this case the concept “chair”) was already available to the mind in the form of an innate idea. According to the well-known image, the monad has no windows open to the outside world, but it does have a rich enough conceptual content and sophisticated enough computational ability to derive all the knowledge it needs.

One startling implication of this Leibnizean view of the mind is that minds cannot truly interact. A closely related implication is that the apparent fact of *negotiated* or *constructed* interactions between minds is an illusion. For if the mind is a monad then a “society of minds” (including apparent instances of social coordination, social communication, and responsive interactions between minds) must be merely the (centrally planned or locally accidental) by-product of the way separate self-contained minds derive and play out the implications of their own innate ideas. Leibniz introduced the theoretical notion of “God” as the choreographer or programmer (the central planner) who was in possession of a synoptic vision of a society of minds and had the power to write the innate scripts that produced the illusion of calibrated social interaction.¹ By Leibniz’s account, the human mind is inherently active, but its conceptual content is not open to social programming; monads are animated but they run through the life course working out the necessary implications of ideas that are already there, as a matter of necessity.

In contrast, Locke (the empiricist) imagined that almost everything about the mind was a matter of contingency. He conceptualized the human mind as a dependent, unformed, minimally structured, socially dominated receptacle, relatively unendowed with conceptual content, passively responsive to the causal impact of exogenous experiences. Locke’s receptacle is neither active nor interactive. It is, however, very social, or more accurately put, it is very socialized.²

Baltes’s and Staudinger’s phrase “interactive minds” is meant to point us in the direction of a possible middle ground between Leibniz and Locke. The slogan seems well designed as an invitation to the contributors to the volume to distance themselves theoretically from monads and receptacles and to formulate a coherent conception of a human mind that is inherently social yet free, spontaneous but receptive, responsive but contributory, already structured yet not fully formed.

Interactive minds: the unsteady middle ground

That invitation is, of course, a very hazardous one. Almost every attempt I know to actually occupy the middle ground or strike the proper balance between the idea of an a priori mental autonomy (Leibniz) and the idea of a fully socialized mental passivity (Locke) ultimately loses its equipoise and surreptitiously privileges one image of the mind (the monad) or the other (the receptacle). For example, the monad gets privileged by many sociobiologists, who try to explain social formations as the by-products of the egocentric choice behavior of self-interested individuals. (In contemporary secular social theory the "invisible hand" tends to replace the synoptic mind of God, as the "mastermind" of the social scene; see Hayek, 1973.) The monad also gets privileged by (those) infancy researchers and some developmental psycholinguists who argue that a young child's knowledge of conceptual content (e.g., of causation, mathematics, faces, and language) is far more complex than the inputs of early life experience and thus is best interpreted as the activation of mental representations (conceptual contents – ideas, rules, grammars, beliefs) that are already there.

On the other side of the balance scale, the receptacle gets privileged by social constructionists, who argue that a priori mental content (Platonic "intuitions" or innate ideas) does not exist, and who dismiss the notion of autonomous "agency" and "methodological individualism" as socially conditioned ideological illusions. The receptacle also gets privileged by many anthropologists and comparativists who argue that almost everything we know is impressed on us or handed over unidirectionally from one generation to the next. The most recent and in my view the very best book ever written in cognitive anthropology (D'Andrade, 1995) begins this way: "Most of what any human ever thinks has been thought before, and most of what any human ever thinks has been learned from other humans" (p. xiv). As appealing as I find that formulation, there is something about D'Andrade's way of stating that conception of cognitive anthropology that seems to favor receptivity over spontaneity.³

It is very hard to keep one's balance in the face of both Leibniz and Locke. In a world of academic discourse where things are either inside or outside, necessary or contingent, endogenous or exogenous, semantic or pragmatic, spontaneous or caused, intrinsic or extrinsic, innate or acquired, it is a Herculean task to give proper expression to the sought after middle realm of neither or both. Even the subtitle of this volume (*Life-Span Perspectives on the Social Foundations of Cognition*) unwittingly tilts (and thus slightly distorts) the intended meaning of the title (*Interactive Minds*) in the direction of Locke. No matter how bold or intelligent the claims put forward by an author about the middle ground, one almost always feels the need for some counterpoise.

Given the inherent difficulty of defining the middle ground, I am not sur-

prised that the contributors to this volume interpret the idea of interactive minds in such diverse ways. Some authors interpret it as "cooperation." Others interpret it as "social interaction" or "joint activity." Still others interpret it as "social influence," "intersubjectivity," "collective representation," or "artifact." I take this as evidence that the quest for the promised land is still in progress and that no one is yet quite sure what it is going to look like. That only adds to the fascination of this particular collection of essays, which should be read as an exhilarating and historically significant multidirectional scouting expedition in search of the middle ground where spontaneity and receptivity can live together. (For a brilliant purely philosophical treatment of the tension between spontaneity and receptivity, see McDowell, 1994.)

In the remainder of this brief commentary I join in that exploratory spirit of things. Writing as a sympathetic and admiring fellow traveler I am going to point in one particular direction, and then just hope for the best. So here goes, a glimpse of the middle ground (interactive minds) from the perspective of cultural psychology (for more on cultural psychology, see Shweder 1991, 1993; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993).⁴

One mind, many mentalities: universalism without the uniformity

Mind is a dangerous and ambiguous word. For the sake of clarity (and safety) I want to define a few terms. I want to try to distinguish between mind, mental process, cognition, and mentality. Then I want to say something about psychic unity and two central tenets of cultural psychology, the principle of *universalism without the uniformity* and the principle of *original multiplicity*. Finally I want to briefly identify one of the ways the idea of the social might be used by cultural psychologists interested in the social foundations of human mentalities. The study of mentalities I shall suggest is not the same thing as the study of mind. Leibniz was right: Minds do not interact.

As part of this definitional exercise I will use the term *mind* in a Leibnizean sort of way to refer to the totality of the potential and actual conceptual contents of human cognitive processes. I will use the term *mental process* to refer to the capacity of human beings to sense, feel, remember, categorize, reason, deliberate, imagine, and so forth. I will use the term *cognitive* to refer to any process (including a mental process) that enables human beings to cognize (or represent) ideas (conceptual contents) and to attain knowledge by deriving (or computing) the implications of those ideas.

Please note that to cognize an idea or conceptual content is not the same as doing it slowly, deliberately, or with awareness. It is highly likely that there exist many processes (mental or otherwise) that enable human beings to cognize the conceptual contents of mind rapidly, nondeliberatively, and without awareness. It is also important for me to point out that to cognize an idea is not the same as stating that idea, although to state an idea is to cognize it.

and any conceptual content of mind that can be cognized can (in principle) be stated in language.

Finally, I will use the term *mentality* to refer to the actual cognitive functioning of a particular person or people. To describe a mentality (e.g., the mentality of an Oriya Hindu Brahman) is to get specific about the particular conceptual contents (the ideas) that have actually been cognized by that person or people. It is a basic assumption of cultural psychology that the conceptual content of mental processes is not necessarily the same for all persons or peoples (e.g., concepts such as duty, loyalty, deference, respect, and sanctity do not play identical parts in the affective and moral lives of people around the world; see Menon & Shweder, 1994; Shweder, 1993; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1990; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, in press). To describe a mentality is also to get specific about the particular mental processes (the particular senses, feelings, memories, desires, inferences, imaginings, etc.) that have been recruited by this or that person or people to make their cognizing of ideas (conceptual contents) possible. It is a basic assumption of cultural psychology that the way mental processes are used to cognize the conceptual contents of mind is not the same way everywhere (e.g., see Markus & Kitayama, 1991, and Shweder, 1994, for a discussion of cross-cultural variations in the "emotionalization" of feelings and in the organization and functioning of self-processes).

If we stay for a moment within the terms and definitional logic of the argot just proposed, then it follows that there is only one mind and it is a universal mind. There can be a Hindu mentality, but not a Hindu mind. This is because by mind I mean the heterogeneous collection of all the conceptual contents that any human being might ever cognize or represent by means of some (mental or nonmental) process. Bits and pieces and whole domains of conceptual content, indeed everything that could ever be thought (cognized) is there in that universal mind. This universal mind then is broader and more encompassing than any one person or people's mentality. It is not the kind of thing that can be located in space (as, e.g., Eastern or Western) or in time (as, e.g., modern or premodern). Plato had his points.⁵

In contrast, a mentality is that cognized and activated subset of mind that has become the property of (and is invested in by) some designated person or people (e.g., a particular moral community or culture). Mentalities do exist in time and space, and (as a matter of empirical fact) they are not universal in their characteristics or in their spatial or temporal distributions.⁶

Viewed this way, psychic unity is not a description of human mentalities. It is a description of the symbolic capacity of human beings to make use of their mental processes to cognize (and thereby gain access to) any of the conceptual contents of the universal mind. Psychic unity is what makes anthropology and cultural psychology possible, for without it people with genuinely different mentalities could not conceptualize each other's lives. This co-existence of one

mind with many mentalities is highlighted by two central tenets of cultural psychology, namely, the principle of original multiplicity and the principle of universalism without the uniformity. The basic idea is (a) that the universal mind contains diverse, heterogeneous, even contradictory conceptual content (hence, original multiplicity), and (b) only a subset of that conceptual content is cognized or brought on-line by any functioning mentality (hence, universalism without the uniformity).

Viewed this way, the cultural psychology of interactive minds is going to be a story about the way a universal mind gets transformed into many different mentalities. It is going to be the story of how an exuberant mind already rich and heterogeneous in conceptual content gets pruned and selectively brought on-line by means of some kind of process that is social, cultural, or interactive.

What is social about the "social foundations" of a mentality?

In the space of a short commentary it is not possible to catalogue the many types of social processes by which the mind is realized as a mentality. (For a discussion of the role of verbal and nonverbal social communication, see Goodnow et al., 1995; also Shweder, 1991). Like the term *mind*, the term *social* is also dangerous and ambiguous. The spectrum of senses of the social is broad. In light of the earlier definitional exercise in which mind was distinguished from mentality, I want to conclude by briefly mentioning the sense of the social that seems most relevant to the study of the social foundations of a mentality.

The sense of the social that I have in mind is often associated with the writings of Emile Durkheim (1953, 1965). That Durkheimian sense of the social is the idea of a "moral community," in which the individual members of the community act toward each other as though they were parties to an agreement to uphold a common moral order and to think, feel, and act in a special way (see Greenwood, n.d.). Durkheim's polysemous and ambiguous phrase "conscience collective" beautifully suggests the idea of a moral community in which the individual members of the community have both a conscience formed out of social interaction (a conscience collective) and a consciousness of the collectivity (a conscience collective) at the same time. Within the field of cultural psychology, the idea of culture as a reality, "lit up by a series of morally enforceable conceptual schemes that are expressed and instantiated in practice" (Shweder, Jensen, & Goldstein, 1995, pp. 26-27), incorporates this Durkheimian sense of the social. It is essential in the study of cultural psychology that one is able to identify the local moral community committed to enforcing some selective and hence restrictive conceptual scheme. In this sense, the conceptual content of any culture's practices is always a mere subset of mind.

The Durkheimian sense of the social as the moral community can be ex-

tended in various ways. It is compatible with the primary goal of cultural psychology to investigate the similarities and differences of human mentalities across groups or populations. Indeed, from this perspective, the common goal of both social and cultural psychology is to identify precisely those cognitive processes and cognized conceptual contents that are on-line in an individual's mental life by virtue of that person's membership in some particular group (i.e., moral community).

The Durkheimian sense of the social is also compatible with the recent emphasis in cultural psychology on the conceptual analysis of mundane practices (e.g., the design of a home, the arrangement of sleeping spaces, the structure of a meal, the analysis of conversation, and the social pragmatics of talk: see Shweder et al., 1995, and the essays in Goodnow et al., 1995). Social practices have conceptual content and they are the inputs for experience, which means that the social environment in which the individual development of a mentality takes place is already conceptually organized. Thus, when it comes to the question of interactive minds, the story of cultural psychology is going to be a story about precisely how the historically evolved (and hence restrictive) conceptual content of the social practices of particular moral communities selectively resonates or otherwise interacts with the unrestricted conceptual contents of a universal mind to form the particular mentality of a person or people. Question begging aside, if the story of cultural psychology is to have a happy ending, it will have to be a story about how the Leibnizean (Platonic, Cartesian, Kantian) conception of mind can be gotten to lie down with the other side. Remember, no question begging is allowed.

Notes

- 1 Leibniz's theoretical notion of "God" was a late-seventeenth- to early-eighteenth-century rationalist's way of talking about what others today might call "natural" design.
- 2 Strong echoes of the monad versus receptacle (or rationalist vs. empiricist) debate can be found in contemporary debates in the cognitive sciences between symbolists versus connectionists (see, e.g., D'Andrade, 1995; Fodor, 1983; Pinker & Mehler, 1988; Quinlan, 1991). This debate between contemporary rationalists versus empiricists (Leibnizeans vs. Lockeans) is not the same as another with which it is sometimes conflated, the debate over the domain-specificity of conceptual contents (language vs. mathematics; animals vs. inanimate objects) and over the degree of "modularity" of "cognitive" processes (e.g., memory). In my view, differences between contemporary Leibnizeans, who focus on the a priori conceptual contents of mind, and the contemporary Lockeans, who focus on experience-sensitive connectionist networks, will not be resolved by facts about the domain-specificity of the mind's conceptual contents or facts about the degree to which there is a modular or separate memory system or reasoning system for each conceptual domain. Whatever the facts, Leibnizeans and Lockeans will be able to explain them in their own terms. (For important discussions of domain-specificity and modularity, see, e.g., Chomsky, 1988; Fodor, 1983; Hirschfeld & Gelman, 1994.)
- 3 It is possible that I am reading more into D'Andrade's sentence than it is meant to imply. He may well intend to be perfectly neutral between Leibniz and Locke or to balance the two or to present a third alternative. And it is not impossible to generate a Leibnizean interpretation of his formulation as well as a Lockean one. The fact that certain ideas or conceptual contents

recur over historical time is compatible with many different assumptions about the nature and source of those ideas – for example, those ideas might recur because they are innate. A Leibnizean might conceivably interpret the word *learning* in D'Andrade's sentence as "reminiscence" or retrieval (from inside out) rather than as "acquisition" or "internalization" (from outside in). Nevertheless the point holds: It is not easy for anyone to write about the mind without appearing to lean in one direction (the monad) or the other (the receptacle), and in this case D'Andrade appears to lean in the direction of Locke.

- 4 Of course, I cannot pretend to speak for all of cultural psychology, only from my particular version of it. For other voices see the various essays in Stigler, Shweder, and Herdt (1990), Kitayama and Markus (1994), and Goodnow, Miller, and Kessel (1995).
- 5 It is my assumption that the universal mind (all potentially cognizable conceptual contents) somehow inheres or subsists or has a physical parallel in the human brain, but in the context of this discussion I am going to sidestep all the mysteries of the mind-body problem.
- 6 For this reason it is valid to think of cultural psychologists as naturalists who go searching for mentalities, carefully describing their distribution and form.

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