I will eventually have a philosophy. Preparation for my philosophy will consist in learning the philosophies of others, and observations of the life around me. Naturally, mine will absorb some ideas, and reject others. I think I can set the limit on human knowledge, and thereby answer all the questions of philosophy (Age 17, February 15, 1960).

Key Terms: awareness, conscious thought, evil, hidden mind, human condition, mental model, metaphor, microlect, self, suffering, virtuality.

Now at Age 71, I will ask you, at the end, whether I have successfully conveyed to you my “mental model” of the human condition.¹

Structure & Mathematics

Constructing a building usually entails a foundation in the ground upon which supports are erected and between which connecting beams are attached. A sequence of transformations concludes with a finished structure. In use, as people and objects come into the building, move about in it, and leave, the fixed structure endures changes in internal state as time goes on. Distinct from structural artifacts such as buildings, human beings discern natural structures in their World. Mathematics is highly structured reasoning about structure wherever it is discerned and interesting. Mathematicians discover and invent intricate, deep, and clever ideas about structure. Mathematics is the tinkertoy of metaphor,² and rigor cleans the window through which intuition shines.³ If geometry is the mathematical study of symmetry, then algebra is the geometry of notation.⁴

Mental Model & Microlect

A mental model is a structure in the mind that simulates – that is, imagines – more or less how the World works, including “how to work” the World.⁵ All animals have mental models. Mental models are malleable and mostly incommunicable. Human beings have some reportable mental models,⁶ and adult human beings have a reportable mental model of birth, the biological necessity of other lives to end for One to persist, and inevitable death. The human mental model differs from animal mental models because it situates One in the World. This mental model is the Self.⁷

Each reportable mental model is conveyed with a specialized part of natural language. I call it the natural microlect of the mental model. A microlect is
Education & Imagination

Education is the gradual increase in scope of mental models both in time and space. Education acquires, uses, and adapts mental models with widening temporal and spatial scope. The primary function of any educational institution is to further the education of its students. There are useless mental models, and there are efficacious mental models. Two mental models may conflict. There are delightful mental models, and there are inimical mental models.

Any narrative is expressed in the microlect of some mental model. Reading fictional or other narratives is a most highly efficient means of education, since it brings to mind another’s mind. Dreams and waking imaginations are operations of mental models within the mind. These operations simulate conditions beyond the mind.

Intellect & Spirituality

Alongside Materialism and Humanism is the Monotheism mental model, “God created the universe. Humanity must progress towards spirituality. Visions and scriptures energize progress. Science of finite intellects deploying experiment and theory may accelerate spirituality.” Whatever, conscious thought is a prerequisite for intellect and spirituality. Conscious-thought experiments may culminate in practices for experiencing spirituality, with the option but not the obligation to postulate some awesome, wonderful God.

Suffering & Radicalization

Evil is the unreasonable, deliberate infliction of involuntary suffering. Actions of human beings ought to be coordinated somehow to minimize the Totality of Suffering. This is the Principle of Least Suffering. Monotheism considers Adoration of God more important than relieving people from suffering. This infinitely pernicious inversion of priorities has always had execrable both intended and unintended consequences.

Science, engineering, and technology evolve gradually by toiling corporate-funded researchers and exuberant home tinkerers. Occasionally the work is
punctuated by revolutionary discoveries and inventions.\textsuperscript{16} Happily, this amplifies human capacity to ameliorate suffering, but sadly, also to inflict it. Personal, group, and community factors; social, political, economic, and ideological factors; all may contribute to spiraling human radicalization. Unless homeland security agents identify a pattern of radicalization behavior, deploy counter-radicalization strategies, and if necessary, interfere with susceptibility to catalytic events or perceptions, the radicalized individual accelerates towards support of action, including identification of opportunities, capabilities, and targets. Unless interdicted, such radicalized, mobilized individuals could inflict massive suffering upon others, and themselves. Therefore, the human condition is all the more fragile as science, engineering, and technology provide ever more capabilities for radicalization, mobilization, and infliction of suffering.\textsuperscript{17, 18}

Science & Religion

Philosophers are dumbstruck by the ineffable. Science is the eyesight of philosophy in a dark mansion.\textsuperscript{19} It seeks the simplest mental models of the widest scope based at best on repeatable and at least on reportable evidence. Evidence is expressed always in the microlect of some tentative model.\textsuperscript{20} But, religious faith is belief without evidence. As a chain is only as strong as its weakest link; as a highway is only as safe as its worst driver; so a religion is only as moral as its extremists. Government funds, extracted from widely diverse citizens, must never be used for religious prosyletizing. In fact, religious prosyletization in general, and evangelization in particular, ought to be voluntarily eschewed if not vigorously proscribed.

Hidden Mind & Conscious Thought

Consciousness\textsuperscript{21} is not experienced, but conscious thought is. Conscious thought is nothing if not focus of attention changing over objective time.\textsuperscript{22} Simple chemistry and physics experiments performed, say, on a kitchen table with materials readily available in the home, can convince children that science is fun, and extremely interesting. The “kitchen table” conscious thought experiment is quietly to count successive foci of attention, regardless of intent, or absence of intent. Anybody can perform this experiment, and with practice it can be pretty interesting, especially when it comes to indescribable, flitting thoughts. “Hidden mind” is the support system for conscious thought.\textsuperscript{23} It is throughout life a continuously running mental model – called hidden mind – that rapidly recognizes patterns and reacts accordingly. It is the invisible director of attention in conscious thought. Conscious thoughts bubble up from hidden mind.\textsuperscript{24} Hidden mind is the abode of intuition, and conscious thought is the home of rigorous deliberation.\textsuperscript{25}
Temporality & Awareness

The microlect of Edmund Husserl corresponding to his mental model of temporal awareness includes the terms (1) primal-impression for the immediate sensation – whether attended to or not, (2) retention for the memory of the primal-impression – possibly mutable as objective time runs forward, and (3) protention for anticipated but not yet having occurred primal-impressions. At one instant of objective time – that is, the time of ordinary physics measured by clocks – the mind (including both hidden mind and conscious thought) is a temporal structure of retentions and protentions.26, 27

The continuously running mental model updates and anticipates. This is awareness.

Retentions need not be ordered in conformity with the objective times at which their instigating primal-impressions occurred, nor need every primal-impression promote retentions that persist beyond some further time. Protentions need not ever “come true” in terms of actually occurring future primal-impressions. Protentions are imaginary futures, and as such are concocted by operation of mental models in hidden mind, and also maybe by deliberate conscious thought. In a diagram, this structure of temporal awareness – subjective time – is drawn at right angles to the horizontal line that is conventionally drawn to represent objective time. So, subjective time is “orthogonal” to objective time, an ever-changing structure rolling forward along the track of objective time.28

Meaning & Understanding

Meaning leads to understanding; it is both a process and a product. The process, meaning, is the production of means, and a mean is a step in the sense of “intuitive leap.” Concatenation of intuitive leaps is how a proof works in informal mathematics, and how we come to understand one another in conversation.29 In mathematics the leaps tend to be extremely tiny, so that any perseverant person can check every step of the proof. The mathematician who writes, at some point in a proof, “Obviously…” is trusting the reader’s agility to take the leap without hand-holding. The Principle of Least Thought corresponds to the idea of finding the shortest possible proof: understanding is best achieved with the minimum number of largest possible steps. People differ in “mental agility” to make these leaps, but for each person there is an optimum size, possibly increasing with training and practice.
Existence & Virtuality

Stranger. I suggest that anything has existence, that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish existence, that it is nothing but power.\(^\text{30}\)

The virtual is contingent existence. It is that which exists and persists only if something else exists and persists, and in terms of which it is eventually understood.\(^\text{31}\)

Virtuality & Reality

The mathematical study of computation, like the mathematical study of reasoning,\(^\text{32}\) finds abstract limitations. But concrete computation is limited by engineering, which is based on physics. The repeated discovery, that from simple computational rules emerge complex structures, is balanced by the existence of simple phenomena grounded ultimately in complex physical reality.\(^\text{33}\) The spectrum of medial levels between basal reality and apical virtuality is called, in my microlect, a tower of virtuality. It must be observed that “emergence” of observed phenomena is entirely governed by hidden mind, bubbling up from which is articulation by fragmentary inner speech\(^\text{34}\) in conscious thought, and then possibly verbally reported. Identifying “reality” as the basal level of a tower of virtuality is always as provisional as science itself. Science fiction literature and cinema, and computer application programs, exhibit virtual un-reality. These are manifestations of imaginary realities, worlds not consistent with the current laws of physics, nor with ordinary expectations of behavior.

Luck & Love

There are angelic humans among us. These are individuals, triggered by some experience, and with purity of motive, called to devote themselves to uplifting others.\(^\text{35}\) There is more luck – both good and bad – in life than generally acknowledged. The magnitude of any kind of luck follows a power law. That is to say, daily life is strewn with many small occasions of luck.\(^\text{36}\) Occasions of extraordinary good luck, or bad luck, are rare. Each person has their own power, which may vary over time. Life is as exquisitely tuned to the World as is possible at this time, and keeps getting better at it. Greatly varied versions of the structure of the deoxyribonucleic acid molecule all record rules for survival in confrontation with mostly impartial natural events.\(^\text{37}\) If one decides to try for a fully lived life, it is a good idea to know and treasure another’s life. Hence, usually, marriage – or any equivalent of a lifetime together – which may begin with or end with love, or both. Giving beats getting, and forgetting beats.
forgiving.

So, did I?
1The psychologist Philip N. Johnson-Laird’s focus of attention on mental models is exceptional. In [12] he credits Kenneth Craik for sketching in 1943 a theory: “If the organism carries a “small-scale model” of external reality and of its own possible actions within its head, it is able to try out various alternatives, conclude which is the best of them, react to future situations before they arise, utilize the knowledge of past events in dealing with the present and the future, and in every way to react in a much fuller, safer, and more competent manner to the emergencies which face it.” For me, mental models are the twirling nuts and bolts of mind, which at large scale are called “belief systems” or “world hypotheses” [25].

2The point of this metaphor is that there are aspects of nature, such as quantum mechanics, for which there are no adequate metaphors. Therefore, only mathematics has provided artificial structure to reflect natural structure.

3Here the point of this metaphor is that often, not always, an effort to formalize one’s thoughts does help to clarify them. But, magisterial mathematician Jacques Hadamard has been quoted, “Logic merely sanctions the conquests of the intuition” [13]. Also, gratuitous formalization, if not pretentious, is merely a hindrance to thinking clearly.

4Mathematics is nothing without its focus of attention on interplay between geometry and algebra. For example, there has existed over more than a century a global enterprise devoted to the idea that a geometric structure is determined by its group of symmetries, where a group is perhaps the quintessential algebraic structure in mathematics (Look up “Erlangen Program.”). A possibly new observation is that even the dance of symbols used by mathematicians to articulate their ideas have choreographed symmetries. For example, the so-called “adjoint” pattern $(F, a, b) \leftrightarrow (a, G, b)$ is so ubiquitous throughout geometry, algebra, and logic, that it has risen to the status of a foundational idea in mathematics [19][21][18].

5Computer scientists explore how machines might automate “formal models of a user’s knowledge about a given system,” as in [3], where the system is a semi-automatic transmission of a large vehicle, and the authors demonstrate “one possible, non-deterministic, mental model for the vehicle transmission system,” in the mathematical microlect of labelled transition systems.

6Reports are delivered with natural language.

7“Writing in the Principles of Psychology almost a century ago, William James suggested that the key to the consciousness is self-reference: ‘The universal conscious fact is not ‘feelings’ exist and ‘thoughts exist’ but ‘I think’ and ‘I feel’’. In other words, in order for ongoing experience, thought, and action to become conscious, a link must be made between its mental representation and some mental representation of the self as agent or experiencer – as well, perhaps, as some representation of the environment in which these events take place” [16].

8Currently, the most popular ground for (several alternative) foundations of mathematics is an artificial microlect consisting of symbols admitting substitution by other symbols (the “variables”), symbols that do not admit substitution by other symbols (“constants”), and symbols that represent compounded substitutions yielding new symbols (“functions” and “relations”).

9Everyday discourse swerves from topic to topic according to what the people are interested in from moment to moment. Sometimes the topic changes suddenly, for example listening to the news on the radio leads from breaking stories in disparate parts of the world, to local news, almost without hesitation. However, in a given context key terms are used consistently. Otherwise, people do not know what they are talking about. Unless they are singing songs or speaking in poetry, the grammar of the ambient natural language they speak is invariant while the set of key terms changes from context to context. Discourse analysis is the scientific study of sequences of sentences as they occur in natural settings, and goes beyond linguistics towards the social and psychological aspects of communication among human beings [32]. A number of standard terms refer to subsets of natural language distinguished by variations in grammar or vocabulary.

Synonyms: dialect, vernacular, jargon, cant, argot, lingo, patois

These nouns denote forms of language that vary from the standard. Dialect usually applies to the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation characteristic of
specific geographic localities or social classes. The **vernacular** is the informal everyday language spoken by a people. **Jargon** is specialized language understood only by a particular group, as one sharing an occupation or interest. **Cant** now usually refers to the specialized vocabulary of a group or trade and is often marked by the use of stock phrases. **Argot** applies especially to the language of the underworld. **Lingo** is often applied to language that is unfamiliar or difficult to understand. **Patois** is sometimes used as a synonym for jargon or cant, but it can also refer to a regional dialect that has no literary tradition.\(^1\)

To my ear “jargon” bears a tinge of pejoration. Therefore, I prefer to use the word “microlect” for a specialized language conforming to standard grammar but with its own set of key terms. Two microlects may share common terms – the microlect within a basketball team shares the names of its players with the microlect of the fans of the team, but the players have agents and managers and contractual language not normally known by fans. In mathematics a collision of microlects may explode in a shower of ideas. For example, a particular number might show up in two seemingly unrelated mathematical microlects. The mathematicians pounce, they want to know why *that number* shows up in those seemingly distinct areas of research. Such questions may lead to new research.

Microlects are associated with “owner’s manuals,” “user guides,” or “instruction books” for tools, appliances, instruments, or software. For example, the owner’s manual for a wet/dry vacuum appliance uses the words “filter,” “filter cage,” “rubber gasket,” “powerhead assembly,” “vacuum port,” “locking tabs,” “release button,” “wet nozzle,” and “hose.” A “visual quickstart guide” for the Macintosh personal computer *iMovie* application program uses the words “footage,” “project file,” “playback control,” “import button,” “clip,” “titles list,” “Over Black option,” and “Export Movie.” Every one of these microlects is associated with a mental model of the tool, appliance, instrument, or software. We learn the microlect and the model together.

\(^{10}\)Babies know little about the past, nor about the far away. An adult probably knows something about the history of the world, and something about unvisited remote places.

\(^{11}\)Cf. “cognitive dissonance.”

\(^{12}\)Phenomenology of reading is beautifully discussed in [28]. The phenomenology and relationships between simulation, metaphor, and imagination are detailed in [2][7] and [29].

\(^{13}\)As suggested by E. Husserl, G. I. Gurdjieff, C. Tart, and F. Varela, among others, not to mention Buddha before all.

\(^{14}\)Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt refers to suffering indirectly in Moral Foundations Theory [http://www.moralfoundations.org/]. The five statistically salient foundations are

1. care/harm,
2. fairness/cheating,
3. liberty/oppression,
4. loyalty/betrayal,
5. authority/subversion

As I see it, harm, cheating, oppression, betrayal and subversion are just possible ways to inflict suffering. Connection of suffering to mental models is suggested by Haidt’s critic, Sam Harris, who writes, “Haidt draws comfort from the fact that even biblical literalists occasionally yield to common sense and ignore their holy books. Of course they do: their holy books are not only bursting with ancient ignorance - they are actually self-contradictory. Is Haidt suggesting that there are no real religious fundamentalists out there at all, or that their numbers are negligible? According to a recent poll, thirty-six percent of British Muslims (ages 16-24) think apostates should be put to death for their unbelief. Just how much exculpatory sociology is Haidt inclined to do in this area so as to get Islam entirely off the hook? When is a belief system not only false, but so encouraging of falsity and needless suffering as to be worthy, not merely of our understanding, but of our contempt?”\(^2\)

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\(^{1}\)The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

\(^{2}\)[http://www.edge.org/discourse/moral_religion.html#haidt](http://www.edge.org/discourse/moral_religion.html#haidt)
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

This point is stimulated by the notion of “punctuated equilibrium” introduced into biology in [5].

The microlect deployed in this paragraph is from [15]. Almost always the “subject terms” or “key words” of a technical paper are listed beneath the Abstract. These are the core microlect of the work. The index of a technical book lists in detail the microlect of the work. A Glossary of Terms is especially valuable in reports of original research.

Early exposure to a captivating viral counter-narrative might tend to neutralize radicalization. Radicalizing web-sites might be hacked to cleverly insinuate a benign counter-narrative.

That being said, the greatest scientists attend closely to philosophy – Einstein already as a teenager was quite familiar with the writings of Immanuel Kant.

Physics is the scientific study of motion, which is one sort of change. In general, the infinitesimal calculus is the mathematical study of change.

Research on consciousness by top-level scientists proliferates. For example, see [4]. Philosophical theories of consciousness are advancing as well. For example, [17] summarizes many ideas. It leads off with the sentence, “Phenomenal consciousness is the property of mental states, events, and processes have when, and only when, there is something it is like for their subject to undergo them, or be in them.” This formulation or variations of it recur throughout modern philosophical literature. My infuriating problem with it is in the words “something” (what?) and “like” (what?). Fortunately, philosopher Greg Janzen calms me down [11]. In detail, he re-formulates Thomas Nagel’s mystifying “definition” in successive ways:

$WLF_1$ An organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism - something it is like for the organism.

$WLF_2$ A subject $S$ is in a conscious mental state $M$ at $t$ if and only if there is something it is like for $S$ to be in $M$ at $t$.

$WLF_3$ Necessarily, a subject $S$ is in a conscious mental state $M$ at $t$ if and only if there is something it is like for $S$ to be in $M$ at $t$.

$WLF_4$ Necessarily, a subject $S$ is in a conscious mental state at $t$ if and only if $S$ undergoes a type of psychological internality at $t$.

$WLF_5$ Necessarily, a subject $S$ is in a conscious mental state at $t$ if and only if $S$ is, in some suitable way, aware of being in $M$ at $t$.

Setting aside my bridling at the pretentious use of mathematical symbols, for me the key to these re-formulations is that the concluding equivalent $WLF_5 = WLF$ has no words “something” and “like,” and instead uses “awareness,” and not just naked awareness, but self-awareness. Please see [30].

Greater emphasis on attention is not possible. Scientific and philosophical analysis relating attention to consciousness and memory is represented by [23][6] and especially [35].

Poetry transiently springs the latch of the gate to hidden mind, and then it amplifies the unspeakable. A metaphor is a portal between universes of discourse.

Intuitions are the judgements, solutions, and ideas that pop into consciousness without our being aware of the mental processes that led to them. When you suddenly know the answer to a problem you’ve been mulling, or when you know that you like someone but can’t tell why, your knowledge is intuitive. Moral intuitions are a subclass of intuitions, in which feelings of approval or disapproval pop into awareness as we see or hear about something someone did, or as we consider choices for ourselves” [8].

Hidden mind (also known as “unconscious thought,” or “phenomenal awareness,” or “System 1”) among other things, coordinates the organism with the immediately present physical environment, but conscious thought (also known as “System 2”) among other things, integrates the human being into its social and cultural environment over wide temporal and spatial horizons. The value of conscious thought is its evolutionary adaptive contribution to survival of human beings in groups. Survival is enhanced by abilities to simulate the future based partly on counterfactual simulations of the past, and to infer and anticipate the conscious thoughts of other human beings [1].

15. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
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Psychologist Daniel Kahneman writes, “System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control. System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration. ... The automatic operations of System 1 generate surprisingly complex patterns of ideas, but only the slower System 2 can construct thoughts in an orderly series of steps” [14].

A genius marshalling a geometric “Diagram of Time” as a metaphor for subjective time, Edmund Husserl introduced the microlect centered on “primal-impression,” “retention,” and “protention” [9]. A more modern version of this geometrization of subjectivity is provided by Izchak Miller in [22]. In these diagrams a vertical line represents memory and anticipation. My elaboration of this idea expands the vertical line into an objectively time-varying structure that intertwines partially ordered sets representing relative focus of attention, relative duration, and temporal ordering. This work also responded to the philosophical analysis of temporal properties by Ian Phillips in [26].

Technically, protention will be given by a temporal mirror image, as it extends retention forwards into time. Protention is, above all, the tropism inherent to action performed by any life form. This point is at the center of our approach: we call retention and protention these particular aspects of memory and of anticipation that are specific to all life forms – a sort of present which is extended in both directions. Thus we do not limit our analysis to the phenomenological use of these words, inasmuch it limits their meaning to situations that can be examined through conscious activities. We believe that this extension to pre-conscious activities remains compatible with (and helps to understand) its classical usage, particularly such as described by Van Gelder and Varela who develop the concepts of intentionality, retention and of protention, introduced and discussed in length by Husserl in his analysis of human consciousness [20].

William James wrote, “the portion of time which we directly intuit has a breadth of several seconds, a rearward and a forward end, and may be called the specious present” [10]. The “specious present” is discussed from the Husserlian phenomenological perspective, for example, in [33] and [27].


Latin vir means a man, male person. So, we have English virtue meaning manly strength or courage, and of course, virile meaning capable of functioning as a male in copulation. But, more importantly, we have virtual meaning – according to a dictionary and not in the sense of the microlect in this paper – having the power of acting without the agency of material part.

Namely, mathematical logic.

Some are hypnotized by emergence of complexity from simplicity (Stephen Wolfram); others rejoice in the contraction of complexity to simplicity (Steve Jobs).

The fascinating paper [24] includes a Glossary of the microlect for discourse on inner speech. An important early work is [31], and, even earlier, there is [34].

The best teachers and caregivers.

Whether it involves bumping into the corner of some furniture, or jumping the curb while driving, or getting a refund just at the right time.

References


