



Mind-Body and The Social Dimension

By Stephan A. Schwartz

The SchwartzReport tracks emerging trends that will affect the world, particularly the United States. It focuses on matters of health in the broadest sense of that term, including medical issues, changes in the biosphere, technology, and policy considerations, all of which will shape our culture and our lives.

Sheila, a tough-minded New York career newspaperwoman turned magazine writer, prided herself on her cynical view on life and her ability to not be taken in. She got an assignment from her magazine to do a story on Mother Teresa and welcomed the opportunity.

“I thought she was a fraud, a genius at public relations maybe, but I disliked her conservative theology, which I thought demeaned women, and I found her constant involvement with the rich and famous very suspect. I arranged to join her and spent more than a week traveling with her and watching her at one of her hospices. My first impression never changed. I disagreed with the almost everything she had to say about religion. I found her views about God depressing, and her vision about the place of women in the church almost medieval. At the same time from the very first moment I was in her presence, I had this overpowering urge to call the magazine and tell them that I wasn’t coming back; that I wanted to give myself to Mother Teresa’s work. It left me confused and ecstatic” (private communication between Stephan A. Schwartz and Sheila, March 23, 1989).

Beingness and Social Manifestation

Beingness cannot be quantified, yet everyone who encounters it knows exactly what is meant. It is with beingness and its impact that we cross from the individuality of the mind-body relationship to the social generality. Others have written at length about the individual mind-body connection, describing such things as the psycho-physical self-regulation processes that produce placebo response and hypnosis reactions. There is a great, and growing, amount of research telling us how strongly our emotions and mental activities affect our happiness and well-being.

And gaining insight into the relationship of consciousness and our physical reality relate to one another.

I want to suggest, however, that there is a second domain of the mind-body link age: the social manifestation. And that this mind-body expression powerfully determines how the society of which we are a part thrives, and how our own personal lives are happy and fulfilling. It seems to me highly consequential that we learn how the mind-body linkages that create culture operate.

One thing is clear from the start: as at the individual level, there is both a local and nonlocal component, and at the social level this linkage exists as well. A portion lies within space-

time, but there is also a portion that exists in the nonlocal energetic information domain.

As Nobel Laureate physicist Wolfgang Pauli put it, “The only acceptable point of view appears to be the one that recognizes both sides of reality- the quantitative and the qualitative, the physical and the psychical – as compatible with each other and can embrace them simultaneously.”¹

It may surprise you how much science can contribute to understanding how this social process moves from the individual to the nonlocal to the cultural. Chemist Douglas Dean and parapsychologist Karlis Osis showed that different experimenters, carrying out the same experiment, got different results.² Psychologists Gertrude Schmeidler and Michaelen Maher³ made videos of well-known researchers conducting experiments and then played them for students with the volume turned so low as to be inaudible. The students were asked to describe the researchers, assigning them words like “friendly” or

“cold.” Estimates were then made as to how experiments conducted by these researchers would turn out. Those with “cold” type responses were estimated to have respondents who produced lower scores; the converse was true for the researchers described as “friendly.” The actual results of the experiments were then compiled. Those with “cold” type adjectives did in fact have informants who scored lower.

THERE IS A SECOND DOMAIN OF THE MIND-BODY LINK AGE: THE SOCIAL MANIFESTATION. AND THAT THIS MIND-BODY EXPRESSION POWERFULLY DETERMINES HOW THE SOCIETY OF WHICH WE ARE A PART THRIVES, AND HOW OUR OWN PERSONAL LIVES ARE HAPPY AND FULFILLING. IT SEEMS TO ME HIGHLY CONSEQUENTIAL THAT WE LEARN HOW THE MIND-BODY LINKAGES THAT CREATE CULTURE OPERATE.



Psychologists Paula Hazlrigg and Cooper Harris and colleagues examined “personality effects” and results looked at from the perspective of both researcher and the participant. They reported, “Experimenters with stronger interpersonal control orientations, more positively evaluated interpersonal interaction styles, and greater ability to encode nonverbal messages are believed to be more likely to produce expectancy bias.” They also looked at subjects with greater need for social approval and greater nonverbal decoding ability, and hypothesized that such individuals would be more susceptible to bias.⁴

They reported two “moderators” that mattered: “...the experimenter control orientation and subject need for social approval. There was also evidence for a boomerang effect. Subjects low in need for social approval gave ratings opposite to the experimenter’s outcome expectancy. Finally, effects appeared stronger when positive expectancies were communicated than when expectancies were negative.”^{4,5}

Following Orders

In 1961, in a set of rooms in Linsly-Chittenden Hall on Yale’s old campus, psychologist Stanley Milgram began an experiment that has come to haunt all scholars studying how evil arises in seemingly cultured societies, and it has much to say about the power of beingness, both locally and nonlocally, as it expresses itself socially.

Prompted by his experience of the trial, a year earlier, of Holocaust war criminal Adolph Eichmann, and the banality of the man and his explanation for what he had done- “I was following orders”- Milgram decided to explore the question of a normal person’s obedience to authority-in essence, how we react to the beingness of an individual in an authoritarian mode.

His protocol was very simple. He put in a newspaper ad, offering participant’s \$4.50 for an hours participation in what was ostensibly a learning study. Using actors who posed as “learners, “ he had a stern authoritarian “experimenter” wearing a white lab coat ask “teachers” recruited through the ad- who were the real focus of the study- to help the learners learn by giving them a shock when they made a mistake. The experimenter explained to the teachers that they were to read word lists of coupled words, which the learner was repeat back. When the learner made a mistake, it was explained they would get a shock. This was supposed to aid in memory retention. During the sessions, the teachers had before them an impressive, apparently “scientific,” shock generator that had 30 switches, each carefully marked and advancing from 14 to 450 volts. Each also had a label, going from “slight shock” to danger severe shock,” to the last two, which were simply marked “XXX.”]

To make sure the teachers understood the shocks, each was given a 45 volt jolt as a demonstration. The learner, in the presence of the teacher, was then escorted into another room and strapped into a kind of stereotypical electric chair, all done to impress the teacher with the seriousness of the experiment. The teacher then returned and sat in front of the shock generator and the session began. The actor-learner deliberately made mistakes, and with each one the increment of voltage went up 15 volts.

Before he had begun the experiment, Milgram had “sought predictions about the outcome from various kinds of people- psychiatrists, college sophomores, middle-class adults, graduate students, and faculty in the behavioral sciences. With remarkable similarity, they predicted that virtually all the subjects would refuse to obey the experimenter. The psychiatrist, specifically, predicated that most subjects would not go beyond 150 volts, when the victim makes his first explicit demand to be freed. They expected that only 4% would reach 300 volts, and that only a pathological fringe of about one in a thousand would administer the highest shock on the board.”⁶ These were, after all, honest Americans.

What actually happened was rather different. As the learner’s mistakes mounted, and the voltage increased, the learners were ostensibly (but not actually) shocked with increasing intensity. “At 75 volts, he grunts; at 120 volts, he complains loudly; at 150, he demands to be released from the experiment. As the voltage increases, his protests become more vehement and emotional. At 285 volts, his response can be describes only as an agonized scream. Soon thereafter, he makes no sound at all.”⁷ When teachers quavered and asked whether the experiment should continue, they were admonished by the experimenter to continue, and were told the experimenter accepted full responsibility for whatever happened. Did they continue? Indeed, they did. Sixty-five percent of them went all the way to the lethal end. Not one teacher stopped before 300 volts. If you stuck your finger in a light socket, you would experience 110 volts. It could kill you.

Milgram went on to try various scenarios. In one series at 150 volts, the actor learner would plead that the experiment should end. The experimenter would instruct the teacher to “go on.” And so they did, at least 62.5% of them. In another series, he moved the sessions into an ordinary office room off of the Yale campus and discovered in this less authoritarian setting that 47.5% would go all the way to 450 volts. If the experimenter was not actually in the room the teacher but gave instructions, this dropped still further-just by voice command 20.5% of the teachers were still willing to continue.

In an article he wrote for Harpers Magazine, Milgram gave his own assessment of his study: The legal and philosophic as-



pects of obedience are of enormous import, but they say very little about how most people behave in concrete situations. I set up a simple experiment at Yale University to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person simply because he was ordered to by an experimental scientist. Stark authority was pitted against the subjects' strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects' ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. The extreme willingness of adults to go almost any lengths on command of authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation.⁷

Have we changed in the four decades since Milgram carried out his research? Sadly, we have not, as Jerry M. Burger, a professor of psychology at Santa Clara University in California, discovered.⁸ In 2006, using 70 paid adult volunteers recruited from ads in a newspaper and craigslist, as well as flyers, Burger essentially replicated Milgram's work. Although, since it made people in the research community queasy, even in mime, to administer 450 volts, Burger's research capped out at 150 volts. Burger found that "70% of the participants had to be stopped from escalating shocks over 150 volts, despite hearing cries of protest and pain."⁹

Burger's view is "the conclusion is not: "Gosh isn't this a horrible commentary on human nature," or "these people were so sadistic," Instead, he felt, that his work showed "the opposite- that there are situational forces that have a much greater impact on our behavior than most people recognize." He said.

It is easy to see why Abu Graib (a prison in Iraq run by the US military) happened.

Hitler

Albert Speer, Hitler's favorite architect, and later his Minister of Armaments and Munitions, was considered a genius of organization, even by his enemies. The only member of Hitler's inner circle to plead guilty at the Nuremberg trials after the war, he was imprisoned until 1966 in Spandau Prison. Interviewed after he had been released by Gitta Sereny, he said, "I ask myself time and again how much of it was a kind of auto-suggestion....One thing is certain: everyone who worked closely with him for a long time was exceptionally dependent on him. However powerful they were in their own domain, close to him they became small and timid."¹⁰

Goring supported Speer's point. He is reported to have told Finance Minister Hjalmar Schacht: "I try so hard, but every time I stand before the Fuhrer, my heart drops into the seat of my pants."¹⁰

If we cannot measure beingness in any objective way, what can we say about it? The individuals who seem to be the seed crystal around which the zeitgeist centers have a single-mind-

ed intentionality, a form of genius, have an intensity others find irresistible. The pattern is the same for good or ill, and consistent with the patterns of more conventionally recognized genius events like symphonies or laws of physics. Once again, there is a leap into the unknown. The communist vision of Stalin and the race-based national socialism of Hitler took their countries and the world through changes that were violent breaks with the past, leaps into the unknown similar in essence, but far more powerful than any genius effect in science or the arts. Drawn to the social realm by the seductive temptation of power, dark geniuses live out the relationship between their numinous beingness and its social context, and societies tremble.

Great Leaders

Historians have debated for centuries what forces produce what they call "The Great Man" or "The Man on Horseback," leaders like Napoleon who arise from the mass, and with astonishing rapidity, achieve positions of unchallenged power. How does a misfit like Hitler become the leader of one of the great European peoples at a time of high civilization? The answer may be found in something Carl Jung said. To appreciate how Hitler came to power, it was necessary to realize that "Hitler did not lead the German people, Hitler was the German people."¹¹ He was the personification of a popular critical consensus, as Speer agreed. "It remains a mystery," he said, "but the fact is that it is impossible to explain Germany before 1933 to 1945, without Hitler. He was the center of it all and always remained the centre."¹²

At the time Jung made this statement, the full import of what he meant could not be appreciated because it was thought that most Germans did not really know about "The Final Solution." Recent research flatly contradicts that assumption and supports Jung. Historian Robert Gel-lately states:

The mass of ordinary Germans did know about the evolving terror of Hitler's Holocaust. They knew concentration camps were full of Jewish people who stigmatized as subhuman and race defilers. They knew that these, like other groups and minorities, were being killed out of hand.

They knew that Adolf Hitler had repeatedly forecast the extermination of every Jew on German soil. They knew these details because they had read about them. They knew because the camps and the measures which led up to them had been prominently and proudly reported step by step in thousands of officially-inspired German media articles and posters.¹³

As a peculiarly sensitive resonator, at that moment in history Hitler personified and gave voice to the dark pool of anger and humiliation felt by that portion of the human race self-defined as German. This is the power of dark genius, and the results that flow from the linkage, both local and nonlocal, when collective cultural beingness springs from the shadow.



It Matters that We Understand

It matters that we understand, far better than we do, how these linkages occur and how to neutralize or enhance them. And it may surprise you to learn that we have gained some insights there as well.

We have learned, for instance, that one aspect of the individual mind-body linkage is that “a happy heart just might be the healthier one.”¹⁴

Between 2002 and 2004, Andrew Steptoe, a physician at University College London, led a team that studies whether “positive affective states are associated with favorable health outcomes.”¹⁵ A population of 2,873 healthy British men and women between the ages of 50 and 74 participated. During the course of a single day, six samples of saliva were collected from each of these individuals and analyzed for their cortisol levels and the inflammatory markers C-reactive protein and interleukin-6. After each collection, the men and women were asked to record their emotional state at that time—the extent to which they felt “happy, excited, or content.”

The conclusion of the study:

Salivary cortisol averaged over the day was inversely associated with positive affect after controlling for age, gender, income, ethnicity, body mass index, waist/hip ratio, smoking, paid employment, time of walking in the morning, and depression ($p=0.003$). There was no association with cortisol responses to walking. The adjusted odds of C-reactive protein ≥ 3.00 mg/liter was 1.89 (95% confidence interval: 1.08, 3.31) in low-compared with high-positive-affect women, and plasma interleukin-6 was also inversely related to positive affect in women ($p=0.016$). Neither inflammatory marker was related to positive affect in men. These results confirm findings from smaller studies relating cortisol with positive affect while suggesting that in women, positive affect is associated with reduced levels of inflammatory markers.¹⁵

In an interview, Steptoe was asked what his findings suggested. He replied, “These findings suggest another biological process linking happiness with reduced biological vulnerability.”¹⁴ When he was asked, “But if happier people are healthier people, the more difficult question remains: How do you become happier?” he answered, “What we do know is that people’s mood states are not just a matter of heredity, but depend on our social relationships and fulfillment in life.”

“We need to help people to recognize the things that make them feel good and truly satisfied with their lives, so that they spend more time doing these things.”¹⁴

In Buddhism, there are four “immeasurables” that must be understood and integrated into one’s being for true happiness and spiritual growth to occur: Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity. To sincere Buddhists, the definition of love is wanting others to be happy.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus makes essentially the same statement: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

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These sentiments are echoed in most of the other great spiritual traditions. The ethno historical record is very clear about linking happiness, well-being, and love, and all these paths to self-awareness-enlightenment if you will—acknowledge both the local and nonlocal aspects of these processes.

So let’s take those research findings, and these great traditions and see what this looks like when it is extended to the social domain.

As Rob Stein wrote in the Washington Post, “Happiness is contagious, spreading among friends, neighbors,

siblings and spouses like the flu, according to a large study that for the first time shows how emotion can ripple through clusters of people who may not even know each other.”¹⁶

“You would think that your emotional state would depend on your choices and actions and experience,” said Harvard medical sociologist Nicholas A. Christakis, coauthor of the British Medical Journal paper presenting the research.¹⁷ It does not. Rather, as the paper concludes, “People’s happiness depends on the happiness of others with whom they are connected. This provides further justification for seeing happiness, like health, as a collective phenomenon.”¹⁷ This conclusion is based on studying 4,739 individuals for two decades, from 1983 until 2003. And its conclusions go well beyond generalities.

As reported in the study, “Longitudinal statistical models suggest that clusters of happiness result from the spread of happiness and not just a tendency for people to associate with similar individuals. A friend who lives within a mile (about 1.6km) and who becomes happy increases the probability that a person is happy by 25% (95% confidence interval 1% to 57%).



Similar effects are seen in coresident spouses (8%, 0.2% to 16%), siblings who live within a mile (14%, 1% to 28%), and next door neighbors (34%, 7% to 70%). Effects are not seen between coworkers.”

Equally as important, the authors note, “The (happiness) effect decays with time and with geographical separation.”¹⁴

A Healthy, Happy Society

Like so many things in our society, when we let data drive policy, not ideology or bias, we discover we know more than we thought we did. We know expectant mothers need sufficient nutrition, particularly during the 19th and 23rd weeks of pregnancy, so that the brain of the child they are bearing will develop properly. If it doesn't, we know that that child will be a maimed human being all his/her life. We know that early childhood development is critical if we want our children to grow to be productive, functional, socialized adults. We know that happy people are healthier, that happiness spreads, and that happy people make healthier choices that produce a healthier, happier society.

We know a lot of things about the mind-body connection, but we don't seem to know how to muster the will to put what we know in action. And we don't like to look at, and take responsibility for, what happens when we don't act on what we know, and the shadow emerges.

Stanley Milgram saw the essence of the problem clearly: “ordinary people, simply doing their job, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.”⁷

It's time to change this.

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