

## REALITY, WHERE ART THOU?

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Segall's paper, "Metaphors of Agency and Mechanism in Dissociation" is a very thoughtful and provocative contribution. It deserves more than one reading. Initially, the DID therapist may react with indignation: "Is he trying to tell us that dissociation is only a metaphor, not real, and that we are simply 'reifying' an unreality? Is mental illness *only* a metaphor, and are we therapists merely masters of therapeutic metaphors designed to counter and destroy the patient's mental illness metaphors?" As Segall points out, Sarbin's position (1995) is close to this. However, with careful and thoughtful reading of this entire paper even the most ardent champion for DID patients will cool down. And toward the end of his presentation Segall attempts a serious integration of "agentic" cause vs. "mechanistic" cause in the creation of dissociation.

Actually he has thrown us back into the philosophical "mind vs. matter" and "free will" controversies of Locke (1663), Berkeley (1710), Hume (1739) and Kant (1784). Locke maintained that only matter is real. Berkeley, on the other hand, insisted that matter became real only as it is perceived by a human mind, and "mind" is where lies true reality. Locke, on hearing of Berkeley's position, reportedly kicked a boulder while proclaiming, "I refute it thus." These two were followed by Hume who "proved" that *neither* mind nor matter were real. It remained for Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* to extricate us from the dilemma by which philosophers arrived at such nihilism.

Sutcliffe (1961) has noted that workers in the field of hypnosis tend to be either "skeptical" or "credulous." The skeptics (more commonly experimentalists) discount many hypnotic phenomena as not real, while the believers (more likely therapists) tend to believe in the productions of their patients. Believers may indeed give excessive credence to unverifiable phenomena. However, how can an extreme skeptic treat a patient who commonly elicits "memory" responses that such a therapist considers probably false?

Segall attempts to reconcile the views of Sarbin, namely that dissociation is a metaphor for "self-deception," an "intentional" and imaginative story telling, with the position

of Hermans and Kempen (1993). These latter see splitting into ego states as the absence of higher integration over lower subsystems by a superordinate control system. The conflict is between an "agentic" control system and a "mechanistic" one in which conscious intentionality is lacking.

By "agentic" Segall apparently means the "intentional" determiner as to which "state" emerges in a DID case. He proposes that dissociation (like breathing) can be both partly intentional ("I" am doing it), and partly mechanistic ("it" is happening). This position is integrative but may satisfy the proponents of neither point of view. Furthermore, the word "intentional" takes us back to a vitalistic position—so deplored by my old behavioristic professor. Is there an essence, force or process which can initiate a chain of cause and effect, but which itself is outside of being so caused?

The following statement would be anathema to an "objective" scientist: "Cause and effect operate *most* of the time." A true determinist would insist that in this universe they operate *all* of the time. Yet that same scientist may on the Sabbath dissociate his "scientific" beliefs as he attends a church or synagogue and prays to a God, whom he believes really exists, and who "Himself" is not caused, but who may "choose" to answer one's supplication by setting aside mechanistic cause and effect, and personally intervene to grant a human request. Accordingly, his religious faith denies the universality of "scientific" determinism.

Segall's "reconciliation" of Sarbin's skepticism with Hermans and Kempel's work does not solve this age-old dilemma, but in regard to dissociation it at least moves the controversy to a higher-level metaphor. We are still stuck with what is "real," and what is simply "metaphor."

That term "metaphor" needs elaboration. Segal rightly says that it "tells us that a certain phenomenon is, in some respects, similar to something else more familiar in hopes that we will obtain a better understanding of that phenomenon," and he warns against trying to "re-ify" it (make it real). He applies the term very broadly to the fragmentation theories of Janet, Freud, Jung, Federn, Perl, Tart, Hilgard, Mahrer, Kernberg and Ornstein, terming mental "fragments" as just metaphors, hence not real.

However, one person's "metaphor" may be another person's "reality." Or does each of us have the right to term an entity or process described by another as only a metaphor,

simply because we, ourselves, have not personally contacted it?

Skeptics of DID have generally not seen a real multiple, probably because alters, having been created by abuse, do not readily reveal themselves to practitioners who are unwilling to accept their reality. DID therapists perceive "alters" as quite "real," not simply metaphoric abstractions. And ego state therapists who talk with covert ego states which have spontaneously emerged, unsuggested, unanticipated, and contrary to expectations, deal with these entities as quite real "part-persons." Does reality involve only physical matter which occupies space, or can mental processes also be "real"?

Yes, a metaphor is an attempt to add meaning by making comparisons, but after looking up such terms as "intention," "agent," "conscious," "mind," "reality," and "life" in *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* I came to an inescapable conclusion, namely, that this great work is a huge collection of metaphors, since every term's meaning required reference to another's. So what and where is "reality"? Must we, like Locke, kick a stone to prove there is such a thing, or is our experiential universe filled only with metaphors? ■

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