

# Earth to Manning: A Reply

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*The heart of a fool is in his mouth, but the mouth  
of the wise man is in his heart.*  
—Benjamin Franklin

Peter K. Manning ends his spirited take-no-prisoners commentary with a great Joycean witticism: “He thought he was sick in his heart if you could be sick in that place.” Apparently Manning takes the heartless view, thinking “that place” is something only to be thought or talked about, a mental metaphor rather than a felt place. But “that place” is a good one to live practical life from, as the ancient Greeks were aware of when they described practical wisdom as *phronesis*, meaning prudence. The root of *phronesis* is *phren*, which means the heart, lungs, solar plexus area; the breathing, palpitating center of awareness. It makes good sense to make it the home of mind, when mind is considered as full-bodied awareness, engaged in its surroundings, not merely as knowledge. Research has also revealed the presence of a “heart brain” (Armour 1991), a neurological network in the heart itself that can both communicate with the cranial brain and act independently of it, and complex enough that it could be considered a “little brain.” But the modern talking head can only *think* he or she might be sick in his or her heart, out of touch with that place because of living from the neck up. Perhaps that is why Manning thinks my use of “full-bodied” in my statement “a serious consideration of the human self and its institutions requires a full-bodied understanding of semiosis, of sign-action” is simply an empty metaphor. His neck-up approach cannot conceive that human conduct involves full-bodied semiosis and that the study of human signification requires a full-bodied understanding. Hence he is reduced to saying, “Mind and body are grammatical fictions, not behaviors. There are no selves because a self cannot act.”

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Manning thinks that my assertion that modern thought can be characterized as a legacy of Cartesian dualism, exemplified in both mind-body and biology-culture dichotomies, is a misplaced “catechism,” and he cites Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* as somehow (he doesn’t tell us how) dissolving the widespread tendencies to treat nature as separate from culture. Apparently sociobiological reductionists, who treat culture as epiphenomenal, did not hear this, nor did cultural reductionists, who deny biology as an ingredient in culture. Manning is himself a cultural reductionist, who illustrates the tendency for sociologists, as I put it, “to shy away from biological aspects of mind, self, and society,” as he makes clear in numerous passages throughout his commentary. He dismisses, for example, dreaming as a fully biological activity as well as a cultural activity, saying that only the outward criteria of talking about dreams matters. Talking matters, but dreaming, as I pointed out, is also a physiological ecstatic experience, what I elsewhere have termed *recombinant mimetics*, which throws light on the emergence of inner imaginative and nonverbal life. Why exclude the phenomenon itself because of a talking head prejudice?

It is disheartening to see how far Manning’s Peirce is from my discussion of Peirce. Manning links Peirce with Charles Morris, despite, as I stated, Morris’s fundamental misrepresentation of Peirce, and claims that Peirce is a behaviorist and individualist (and that I am an individualist who begins with a “social consensus of like-minded individuals”). He blames Peirce for being a logician and not a sociologist. He thinks that Peirce’s three kinds of signs are simply a “code” rather than a way to delineate different modalities of being that can enter into signification. It’s not only that Manning does not comprehend Peirce, but also that he bypasses the major points in my discussion of Peirce, which repeatedly show the thoroughly social nature of Peirce’s thinking, of how even a sign is a triadic social process. How could holding that meaning—whether of a sign, self, or even interaction order—consists of conceivable consequences, whether or not they actually occur, as Peirce does, be construed as behaviorism? Or conduct genuinely manifesting spontaneous intelligence not reducible to prior habits of conduct (Halton 2004)?

Manning cites Umberto Eco as someone who knows Peirce’s semiotic, yet Eco’s writings on Peirce are fatally flawed by Eco’s attachment to Saussure’s structuralist dichotomy between structure and experience. In my view Manning’s citing of Eco reveals the source of his misreading of Peirce and perhaps of me: he brings what he already thinks of Peirce and semiotics to his analysis rather than criticize what is written in my essay. I do not say, for example, that mind is in a self but that the human self is a manifestation of mind, and that a Peircean semiotic perspective can bridge the gulf between nature and culture, mind and matter, and thereby open a broader view of the self and social life. I choose to concentrate on the self as a vehicle of mind, but I could have chosen other focal points. Manning takes the concept of the self as poisoned, as dictating that I begin “with individuals who assert themselves against the other to maintain the integrity of collective meaning.” That rugged individualism is not at all my view of social life or of the self. Why would I try to distinguish levels of extra-individual self? Or argue for objectified signs of the self as real elements of the generalized other? Or argue for a transactional model inclusive of the situation?

Manning thinks that “signs cannot ‘live,’ and such a metaphor drags the point into the mud.” But Wittgenstein ([1933–34] 1958:4), whose *Philosophical Investigations* Manning cites approvingly, said elsewhere: “If we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*.” So much for Manning’s mudslinging.

Late Wittgenstein’s turn to “meaning as use” was likely influenced by Peirce through Wittgenstein’s colleague Frank Ramsey (Nubiola 1996). Wittgenstein may have escaped from his own false Procrustean picture theory of meaning in his early *Tractatus*, but his “meaning as use” still ignored how meaning involves conceivable consequences through which conduct finds its pragmatic meaning, how self-determination is possible as more than simply a “language game,” how human conduct could involve self-corrective experience, genuine learning. When Peirce defines a sign as representing an object to an interpretant, he is describing a social process occurring in time. That process is where the signs lives, and the life of the sign is no metaphor. As I mentioned repeatedly in my essay, semiosis, sign-action, is conceived by Peirce as a processual theory, just as all the pragmatists view meaning processually, as living habits of conduct.

Even still, one can use Wittgenstein’s remark to illustrate how the human genome enters into conduct, not as absolute determinant but in use. But Manning would block that consideration (“I do not understand what the social reality that is ‘indelibly and ineradicably rooted in the human genome’ can possibly reference. Where is a genome found in social behavior?”). Manning must avoid the facts of human development, that, for example, there are genetic sources for stages of development in early childhood. But, as I made clear in my essay, the genome only finds expression through use, that is, for example, in relations such as the bonding with and separation from the mother between the ages of one and one-half and three.

Empathy, as I argued in my essay, is a biodevelopmental capacity learned in the crucial mother-infant bonding and separation phase. It is genuinely biological and genuinely social, a bodily-based feel for another, which recent research has also associated with “mirror neurons.” Empathy (or its lack) is a key element in social interaction. This is exciting stuff for me, to consider how the strange human trajectory evolved to project our big undeveloped brain into the world earlier than other primates, so that socializing transaction with mother and caretakers was necessary to complete the brain development other primates undergo in utero. Earliest socialization gets into our biological development, into our brains, into our body-minds, and hence early experience is both formative and potentially precarious. Why wish it away, as Manning does, as though it closes interpretive doors, instead of seeing it as an invitation to open the sociological imagination to broader and deeper understandings of the social, and to full-bodied understandings of sign-action?

Manning: “The interaction order is what Halton is searching for. All the necessary is there. Bodies, minds, signs, and the rest only emerge as relevant in situated interactions.” Apparently the interaction order is the panacea I have been missing. But Goffman himself did not limit the study of social life to his conception of the interaction order; why should we? Contra Manning, Goffman (1983:9) stated: “In sum, to speak of the relatively autonomous forms of life in the interaction order . . . is not to put

forward these forms as somehow prior, fundamental, or constitutive of the shape of macroscopic phenomena. To do so is akin to the self-centering game of playwrights, clinical psychologists, and good informants." If one were to wear the interaction order idea as blinders, as Manning would have me do, one could not deal with the array of conduct that does not fit neatly into the interaction order, such as biosemiotic considerations. I would rather take Goffman's idea of interaction order as a useful idea for focusing on face-to-face interaction when that is a relevant concern.

Despite saying elsewhere that "there is no such abstract thing as 'truth,'" Manning thinks my reading of Durkheim is "primitive," "misleading," and "wrong." He uses Durkheim's paraphrase of the ethnography of Spencer and Gillen to claim that Durkheim "dramatically and poignantly" captures what I claimed his theory of religion was missing, namely, that the original source of religion is "a living effort to participate in the all-surrounding life of ongoing creation." Manning also thinks my definition is "pure mysticism," despite, I suppose, Durkheim dramatically and poignantly capturing it. My definition is no mysticism, but simply an acknowledgment of the religious outlook of hunter-gatherer peoples as one of felt participation in an ongoing drama of creation. As Alfonso Ortiz, a Pueblo Native American and an anthropologist of the Pueblo, once put it to me at a corn dance that we were attending, "The white man thinks we dance to make it rain. But the sun does its part, the rain does its part, and we must do ours." In other words, the dance reflects participation consciousness, not causal reasoning.

Manning remains blind to the significance of the living habitat as a real element in the mind of the Australian and other hunter-gatherers, and as a source of "ongoing creation." But so was Durkheim, who conceived social life conceptually and anthropomorphically. Durkheim (1915:75) unpoignantly noted that for many Australian aboriginal peoples, "the child is not physiologically the offspring of its parents. This intellectual laziness is necessarily at its maximum among the primitive peoples. These weak beings, who have so much trouble maintaining life against all the forces which assail it, have no means for supporting any luxury in the way of speculation. They do not reflect except when they are driven to it. Now it is difficult to see what could have led them to make dreams the theme of their meditations. What does the dream amount to in our lives? How little is the place it holds, especially because of the very vague impressions it leaves in the memory, and of the rapidity with which it is effaced from remembrance, and consequently, how surprising it is that a man of so rudimentary an intelligence should have expended such efforts to find its explanation!"

The significance of *the dreaming* or *dreamtime* for Australian aboriginals, as a mythic way of dramatically picturing the living landscape, escaped Durkheim because of his rationalism. He could only see it as "the social," as collective representations mirroring society. But the dreaming, or what the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner (1968) called "the everywhen," is far more: a story of creation as ever ongoing, ever emerging into awareness, involving ancestors who shaped and became the landscape and remain living presences in imagination and in practice.

The "songlines" they left in their walkings hold embryonic beings who get into a pregnant woman at the time of the fetus's first kick, endowing the child with the

spirit of that place. Elders examine the earth at that spot to determine which songlines will be the child's. Thus every aboriginal is born as a part of the songline, indelibly identified with landscape and its creatures: his or her self involves a wild generalized other not only sacred but eminently practical as well. For the songlines carry practical survival truths: they are real maps and positioning devices, shelter indicators, water and potential game and other edible food and repository locators, not to mention ways to "walk in beauty" in what seems to outsiders to be a harsh landscape. As "dreaming tracks," they express as well the art and science of tracking for which Australian aboriginals are well-known masters, a practice of inference capable of revealing more about a creature than an MRI (Brown 1998). In short, the ongoing creation that is the dreaming, the everywhen, holds the vast wealth of ecological mind: truths and beauties expressing the ongoing life of the habitat, internalized through song as personal identity. It manifests the *personal self* of the individual's own songline section; the *social self* of the people he or she is part of, including the represented Ancestors; and the *cosmic self* of the person-people-collective memory and habitat-information transaction. It is a powerful living social technology that has helped Australian aboriginals to thrive and sustain a way of life and its habitat for fifty thousand years. Animate mind, as I tried to state in my essay, is thus genuinely participant in its habitat and its profusion of living intelligible signs.

Durkheim is a classic example of the body-versus-mind false dichotomy I began my essay describing, but which Manning denies. How can one read Durkheim's essay "The Dualism of Human Nature and Its Social Conditions" as anything but an explicit rending of body from mind? There Durkheim states that sensations and sensory tendencies are individual and opposed to conceptual thought and moral activity, that the body is individual, the soul, or mind-stuff, is social. He thought psychology was a science of individual phenomena and, as Harold Orbach (2007b; see also Orbach 2007a) put it to me recently, had a "total inability to understand social psychology." Durkheim remained bound to what I, in my own spirited argumentative way, termed a "bubble boy" theory of meaning, unable to touch the world in bodily social signification, able only to conceptualize it.

The intense attunement to and reverence for animals and plants in hunter-gatherer peoples is more than some collective representations system or interaction order or psychological belief system, explainable by Durkheim or Goffman, or Jung's universal structure of the "collective unconscious," or by neural net theory. It exemplifies how those peoples are in real learning relationships to the instinctive intelligence of their habitats, deep learning expressed not only in trial-and-error experience but also in the sense of wonder, communicated in ritual life. These sources of instinctive intelligence manifest the ecological mind; in learning from them, they imbibe the spirit of ecological mind, "spoken" in a conversation of gestures, "heard" as significant symbols: gestural signs of animals and tracks, signs given by plants and habitat, signs also comprehended through ecstatic visions, dance, song, and ritualized practices rather than in rational words.

Modern science, though built on a false foundation of materialism, of the split of the ghost in the machine, nevertheless remains a kind of methodologically refined

variation of this process of attunement to nature, though to a contracted view of nature as machine. "Inner voice" is something that, after German Romanticism, was excluded from Western science, just as the qualitative has been largely excluded or marginalized by the quantitative. Yet the exclusion of "innards" from nature may have been the result of a mythic worship of the machine in the West, a delusional culture of the clock that grew out of the fourteenth century and that has wrought great precision while losing those aspects of nature, without and within, that do not format to the requirements of a machine. It is time for science to grow beyond that clock-prison, and Peirce's semiotic philosophy shows how.

Manning calls my essay a cry of the heart, insinuating a misplaced sentimentalism. From my perspective he has expressed the narrowed concerns of the talking head, the academic rationalist disallowing fully embodied mind and its passionate expressions. Things seem to be going well in Manning's anthropocentric interaction order. But on my planet, the earth, the ghost in the machine that is the great social construction of our time seems bent on colonizing, neutralizing, and eradicating humanity and the biosphere, the broader ecological mind from which humans emerged and on which humans still depend. So I wonder, and ruminate, and inquire into the conditions that have spawned the unsustainable global destructiveness, and transformed humanity from children of the earth dreaming into being in the flow of the everywhen, into machine-like talking heads in a tick-tock universe.

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