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Essay Review

Where is my mind?

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Soul Machine: The Invention of the Modern Mind, George Makari. WW Norton & Co, New York and London (2015). pp. xvi + 511, Price $39.95 £24.99 hardback, ISBN: 97803-930-59656

Localization and its Discontents: A Genealogy of Psychoanalysis and the Neuro Disciplines, Katja Guenther. University of Chicago Press, Chicago (2015). pp. 191 Price $35.00 £24.50 hardback, ISBN: 97802-262-88208

'The mind, its said, is free

But not your minds. They, rusted stiff, admit

Only what will accuse or horrify,

Like slot-machines only bent pennies fit.'

Philip Larkin, *Neurotics* (1949).

As George Makari points out in the introduction to *Soul Machine*, 'The concept of mind is everywhere, and yet at the same time, it is strangely nowhere' (p. xi). The prospect, then, of analysing something which cannot be located – something which seems so intimate to ourselves but of whose capabilities we are only dimly aware, which we struggle to understand in other people, which seems both a part of nature and yet wholly distinct from it, which may or may not exist in the mode that we commonly understand it – is a daunting task. Or else, it is a terrifying freedom to decide what aspects of ourselves are considered the most human. Such is with any science of mind; a problem only exacerbated when historians come to write its past. A choice must be made what part of everywhere counts as a reflection of the mind, and which parts are scattered into the strange nowhere. This choice is political, too, regardless of whether we unthinkingly inherit it from previous works or take a bolder stand, relating the past to current scientific, social or political issues. Of course, these issues themselves are old news, problems which affect any historical study, but the history of psychology and psychiatry are perhaps more affected than others: the anti-psychiatry movement in the 1960s and the Freud Wars of the 1990s to take but two examples. But as the life of the mind itself has come under repeated attack, both from within our ivory tower – such as it is – and without (Collini, 2012), it is pleasing to see two works which update or expand our current understanding of the human sciences. For they show us, either implicitly or explicitly, what we should strive and fight for in the future.

Despite being everywhere and nowhere, it seems that the modern mind has a beginning and, if not an end, at least a decline. For Makari, what would become the mind began in the seventeenth-century Republic of letters – some in religious orders, some with a religious education but since fallen – with the Minim friar Marin Mersenne at its centre, if not as its leader then certainly as its consul (p. 10). The world these writers rejected was that of scholasticism; Aristotle, Galen and Ptolemy replaced with Vesalius, Harvey and Copernicus. Mechanism was to be placed above mysticism. But to Mersenne's dismay, many of his fellow mechanists did not see the world-machine as proof of a Creator and immortal soul, but instead, began to construct new visions of human nature. In Paris, Pierre Gassendi posited two souls – one brutal, one divine, a transparent convenience according to Makari (p. 33). In the Dutch Republic, Rene Descartes gained certainty with his 'thing that thinks' but was completely unsure about the world (p. 27). They did not make good dinner guests (p. 30). But the most revolutionary would have been the Englishman Thomas Hobbes: his worldview permitted no soul, no immortality, and no guarantee that our faculties of reason would bring us truth or happiness. Not that there was much to be found in the seventeenth century: with ecumenical war, witches, religious fanatics, and the plague, the greatest wonder was that not everyone became a melancholic, as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* described in 1621 (p. 72). Yet, it is here that Makari places the birth of secular ethics: that only an absolute monarch could stop the body politic from tearing itself apart (p. 37).

But ethics is not the mind – at least, not yet. The real hero of Makari's tale, moving from the mind's European pre-history to focus on specific countries, is the English philosopher John Locke. By refusing to speculate on the soul as a thing unseen and

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unknowable, Locke instead turned the religious fanatics' 'inner light of God' into a new entity – mind, from the Old English for memory (p. 115) – as the 'theatre of subjective experience,' a concept still near-impossible to translate into French and German (p. 121). Conscience became consciousness; consciousness became the self. The psyche became an object of anthropology, or better known in English as the 'Science of Man,' rather than theology; religious enthusiasm become madness, and the religious mad now filled the cloistered prison of Bedlam and the private asylums. From Locke spawned the moral philosophers of the eighteenth century – Anthony Ashley Cooper, George Mandeville (p. 143), Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith (p. 168) – who believed that fellow-feeling was a sense prior to rational thought. From Locke also came George Cheyne, Robert Whytt, William Beattie, David Hartley and William Cullen, who would place the Association of Ideas, the foundation of Locke's mind, into the nervous system (pp. 169–71). These medical men would see sympathy, and therefore morality, written across the body: masturbation and suicide as crimes against the self as well as against God (p. 160). Then, at the end of the eighteenth century, the madness of George III tested all theories of ancient medicine, modern mind and madness, all quelled under the penetrating gaze of the Lincolnshire clergyman Francis Willis' eye (p. 200). Such external scrutiny would lead, it was hoped, to an internal scrutiny, a system of surveillance worthy of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (p. 206).

In France, where absolutism still reigned, Locke's doctrines were translated by Pierre Coste, promulgated in print by Voltaire and in the salons by Émilie du Châtelet, all under the benevolent eye of chief censor Guillaume-Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes (pp. 212–15). But just as diamonds are only made under pressure, authority breeds discontent. Here sensationalism dictated not only that the mind is a blank slate, to be filled with the endless marks of experience, but that experience creates the slate to be written on. Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, wrote that while the soul was universal and reflected the divine, the nature of man was shaped purely by the environment (p. 219). Claude-Adrien Helvétius, who had cautioned Montesquieu against publishing *The Spirit of the Laws*, wrote an even more inflammatory work, denying the human will: there was no freedom, only pleasure and pain (p. 228). Liberty became a human right, a dyad that made no sense before the eighteenth century. Étienne Bonnot de Condillac conjured up a statue that was granted one sense at a time, ultimately attaining the rich mental world that every person experiences, a language of attention, perception, consciousness, memory, imagination and reflection (p. 225). Further south, in the medical school of Montpellier, the likes of François Boissier de Sauvages, Théophile de Bordeu and Paul Joseph Barthez constructed a vitalist body as a republic, healthy when its members worked in unison, sensibility the foundation of one's character (p. 245). And then, rather than a mad king, France found itself with two people far more damaging: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Anton Mesmer. Rousseau, whose fictitious Émile became a model for how to raise Nature's citizens, drew up a social contract that dictated that power derived from an absolute monarch or even from the populace but from the people's 'general will.' A cult formed around his *Confessions*, showing readers how to feel and to think of oneself as a literary object (pp. 267–97). Mesmer's concept of animal magnetism disposed of soul and mind, his own personal magnetism destroyed the reputation of Queen Marie Antoinette (pp. 298–328). In the Revolution that followed, alienists such as Philippe Pinel marked the difficulty discerning whether mania afflicted mere individuals or the world in total (p. 358). The Wild Boy of Aveyron – emerging from the woods in 1800, he could not be taught to speak, and longed to escape civilization – became proof that humanity was incapable of infinite progress (p. 391). The secular project of the Enlightenment destroyed seemingly by its own success.

In the German Lands, where Germaine de Staël had fled Napoleon's wrath, the mind took a more personal touch. Immanuel Kant turned the nature and attributes of God into a question of the limits of human thought: there could be no rational religion, this was as much wishful thinking as the belief in miracles and atheism (p. 402). The *Sturm und Drang* movement, along with Goethe's Werther, pondered the inner parade of consciousness, and active soul which was the hidden source of freedom and morality (p. 418). But as with all artists, Kant and Goethe were to be disappointed that their fans were not as sophisticated as they would hope. Karl Philip Moritz would found the *Magazine for Empirical Psychology*, hoping that first-person accounts of mental life would help understand ourselves and others, despite Kant's protest that psychology could never be a science (p. 415). Johann Gottlieb Fichte denied that experience could ever be raw and unmediated, instead casting Reason as merely representing representations, consciousness creating the world (p. 420). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel took an opposing view: consciousness as alienation from the world (p. 421). In his *Naturphilosophie*, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling tried to encompass divisions between subject and object, science and soul, man and nature, matter and freedom (p. 436). In varying degrees, said the Romantics, we are all mad. To heal the mentally unwell meant re-uniting these divided selves. For the Halle physician Johann Christian Reil, the mind comprised of three underlying psychic structures – attention, reflection and self-consciousness – upon which the self was created, but always at risk of fragmentation (p. 444).

Not that Romanticism was doing much better itself. In the German Lands and Britain, phrenologists such as Franz Joseph Gall would have the mind as a product of myriad organs of the brain, discernible through bumps on the head (p. 451). In France, Victor Cousin's eclectic philosophy combined Descartes, Locke and Catholicism, the self became the face of the soul, an inclusiveness and indecision matching the tenor of citizen-king Louis-Phillipe (p. 478–79). By 1815, according to Makari, all positions regarding the mind had been established: either as an ethereal soul passing from the body to Heaven, or perhaps a mind tied, somehow, to brain and body, as well as those who denied the mind entirely (p. 503). While these ideas would resurface – mentalism in the twentieth century, materialism and religious tradition in the twenty-first – they had become the unquestioned alternatives for the modern world.

The sheer scale of *Soul Machine* – and at over 600 pages, also its size – is an achievement in itself. Makari's cast is huge, and set against diverse backgrounds, more than can be adequately described in a review: Baruch Spinoza, Julien Offray La Mettrie, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, the York Retreat, the Royal Society, the 1791 Haitian Revolution, German laboratories, and many others, are amongst the company of philosophers, physicians and institutions who thought intensely about the nature of mind and madness. Makari's skill lies in weaving all these elements together, combining the stories of their lives with an analysis of their thought, and all with a lightness of touch, the narrative never creaking under the weight of antiquarian detail. Above all, it is a work designed to introduce an incredibly difficult and nuanced topic to a wider audience. One example will suffice to illustrate. Describing the Revolutionary pamphleteer Jacques Hébert, better known for his newspaper and pseudonym Le Père Duchesne, Makari writes:

A Royalist until the king's flight to Varennes, Le Père Duchesne now turned his rage on the "fat pig" who was France's monarch. His trademark was a linguistic trick that signalled his disgust with the reigning moral order: he used the word "fuck" insistently, at times almost as a point of punctuation. For example, he wrote, "I confess,