

A CONVERSATION WITH RAY LORANGER

by Eileen Sorrentino

Ray Loranger, philosophical psychologist, offered a study group titled--The Philosophy of Mind: A General Survey of Thinking. The Second Half was interested in learning about Ray's ideas on this subject and how he came to develop the course.

TSH: Good morning, Ray. You offered a course on The Philosophy of the Mind. What do you mean by philosophy of the mind?

RL: This is a difficult thing to answer because *mind*, as a term, as a concept, is abstract. It's a mental construct. We've developed this term to explain a location for thinking that some say is nothing more than brain functions, and others that mind is a separate entity.

TSH: So how do you get at mind? Does thinking build mind? Or is mind something that is and then thinking adds to it.

RL: I think the better way to think about it is the development of the mind from two aspects-- how the mind developed in evolution, and how the mind develops in an individual. How did we come to awareness, how did we come to consciousness? How does an individual develop into you and me, into an individual mentality? How did we come to self-awareness?

Over millions of years, some living organism developed the ability to be aware of something that's outside itself. The senses began to work and evolve. So these new sentient beings began to have a relationship with the outside world, and everything they did through adaptation to the environment and cellular mutation was to make survival easier for succeeding generations.

At some time, after millions of years, the human brain reached maximum size. Now in the case of humans who supposedly came out of the trees and became a biped animal who stood up, walked, and carried things, all of this is adaptation for survival. This has nothing to do with thinking as such. It has to do with basic survival. The standing up and looking out is theorized as a reason for the growth of a larger brain adapting to its new position of looking out. And in that period, human beings' consciousness is developing. That consciousness has to do with a repetition of things that are happening. They discover a tool, they discover fire, all this begins to make an impression on humans' consciousness. They are becoming more aware of things they can do. More aware of things that can be seen, used, all, initially, for the purpose of survival.

And somewhere along the line, in that large brain, a concept developed, meaning, "I can remember something I've done, and I'm going to do it again," or "I can remember an object and I don't have to be looking at it. I have a concept of that something." Eventually concepts were expressed. In prehistory one of the first things we find are implements for hunting, paintings on cave walls, and carved trinkets. That expression is really important, because now we're getting

to something outside of that individual. Consciousness has developed, a consciousness that is awake and aware and becoming expressive. The key to consciousness is awareness. This is not yet the self-awareness that we experience now. That comes much later.

Now I'm going to jump way forward. Another important step in the development of consciousness is relationships. The relationships I'm talking about have to do with becoming a member of a group for survival—the tribe. This is the beginning of societies for mutual production and protection and communal survival. And that still exists today in more sophisticated forms. College fraternities, political parties, clubs, associations, etc. Another large discovery is the beginning of regular planting for food. Agriculture is also very important because with agriculture survival is somewhat taken care of. Food can be stored and animals are domesticated. People know they're going to have food.

TSH: They don't have to think about survival every minute.

RL: Yes, all of a sudden they have more time to think and express themselves. Let's say 50,000 or 30,000 years ago, something very important happens in this consciousness. Somebody utters a sound that represents something, and words are developed into simple language. Humans begin to express themselves, not only in paintings or trinkets. They begin to express themselves in words. Now they can put a word to a concept. That's huge because a word is a verbal sound that signifies a concept. Today we don't think anything of it. That wasn't always the case. And then humans begin to become self-aware. How big is that? They are able to think about their thinking. Homo sapiens, sapiens. Thinking humanity is on its way.

Consciousness is a state of awareness, and just as your personal consciousness increases because your knowledge increases, so does a general state of awareness increase with a collective accumulation of knowledge and experience. This is individual and collective knowledge about life and thinking. That's what we're really about--how people live their lives. Nothing has changed in the fact that we still have to survive, but our survival is a bit more sophisticated. We live with more time on our hands. Our basic needs, food and shelter, for the most part, are satisfied. Not necessarily in all parts of the world, but most. We survive in another historical context.

It breaks down to consciousness, evolution, and awareness. We're jumping really fast here. I'm trying to give you somewhat of a flow of what is happening from the aspect of philosophical psychology. We're talking about how you think and how you behave. I'm trying to show development from evolution—evolutionary consciousness, evolutionary development in thinking. But it also applies to your individual consciousness, how your thinking developed in your life until now. I think there is a parallel to be found with evolution.

Around five thousand years ago, I guess, writing takes off, and humanity is really expressing itself. Awareness is critical. The more time you have that is not strictly dedicated to survival, the more time you have to learn, the more time you have to express yourself. When writing comes into being, humans are recording their thinking. Others have the benefit of that thinking and can expand on it. Look where we are today, we have gone from making a sharpened tool for hunting to fabricating machines that can think faster than we can. That is all because of the progress of thinking, accumulation of knowledge, advanced consciousness in humans. That knowledge is so vast it is now mostly stored in computers, and they talk back to us when asked for information.

When we talk about thinking, we're talking about human nature. What is human nature? What does it mean to be human? How is that defined, and what does the past have to do in that definition? Has all this accumulated knowledge changed that definition in any way?

And what is critically important in all this development is emotions. That was a key to survival from the very beginning.

TSH: Starting with fear?

RL: Absolutely. It's still with us. And we have learned to transform fear for the purpose of survival into anxiety and stress, often based on wants and not needs. That is probably why we have so many who suffer anxiety because of their thinking. The 20th century has often been called the age of anxiety. I think that it is applicable to the 21st century as well.

Of course, anxiety is created through bad experiences also, and there are a lot of those. I was watching a news story on television that brought me to tears. It had to do with children in Syria, and there was this picture of this little boy . . .

TSH: sitting there, and then he wipes the blood off.

RL: Yes. And the remarkable and terrible thing about that little boy, there were no tears. He is traumatized beyond tears. What is happening? His small little brain was not able to function enough to understand this horror. It's heart wrenching. And in some fashion he will experience the horror forever. So emotions are in the mix: *mad, sad, glad, afraid*. The four basic emotions that we all live with. Others come off that—like guilt, shame, contentment—but *mad, sad, glad, afraid* are the keys to our emotional existence.

And then we get into the brain. What part does the brain have to do with this? Everything is coming down to neuroscience and what neuroscience is coming up with in neuro-circuitry and plasticity. There's a gene for altruism now. Everything is pre-coded for those who believe that everything is from the brain. That may be too extreme a statement, but there's a large push for explaining everything through neuroscience.

What's the difference between mind and brain? There are dualists who believe they are separate and monists who believe they're all part of the same thing. The brain does everything. And that brings about a lot of discussion.

TSH: Yes, I think so. My brain is spinning around with all this that I am trying to understand.

RL: Yes. This is too fast. It has to come in bits and pieces so that you can absorb. That's part of the issue we have in life today. Our brains cannot absorb the amount of knowledge and information that we've accumulated.

I am a philosophical psychologist. We're generalists. We try to look at everything. We can't go too deeply into anything. Otherwise we'll get lost, but we try to put it together. The general practitioner of thinking is the philosophical psychologist. And by the way, philosophy is not just about thinking. It's not just an academic discipline. It's about living. All philosophers will give you a way of thinking, why they think that way, and why that should be applied to your life. Socrates is the philosopher who is really strong about this: "Know Thyself." And the reason for "Know Thyself" is that he wants you to question your behavior, and he also says that every time you think you have the final answer, you've got to look at the question again.

Philosophical Psychology used to be a topic that I studied in college—in Catholic college—that was supposed to be the study of the soul. That's what they called it. The soul is that non-material entity that informs the body.

TSH: So you can substitute mind for that?

RL: Yes, some do. And in the 18th century they really began questioning the concept of the soul. *Mind* became the new word. They were getting away from the theological. They wanted to get more to the scientific where you have this distinction from the theological—religion and science or faith and science.

And then, having some understanding how the brain developed historically, we try to understand how the mind develops in an individual—you and me in our lifetimes. That's called *mind mapping*. In mind mapping we draw a circle and put *My Thinking* in the middle. And then we work off four basic elements surrounding the circle to try to decide what runs your thinking: *Knowledge, Experience, Belief, and Self-identity*. So I am going to say to you, you have a philosophy of mind, you have a way of thinking, and that has progressed and changed. Can you explain any of that?

TSH: Oh yes.

RL: And I can say the same thing. And I can give examples of that. So what in my knowledge has influenced me? Certainly the education I had, but what in that education--grammar school, high school, college, graduate school--and what within that. For me the key in this education is

certainly religion. That was key--being brought up in a strict Catholic environment from the time I was 5 years old, all the way to 21. There was a certain indoctrination and conditioning of a child's mind, and I recognize that. It's changed, but it's still there, and it will always be there. But the key to being at ease with yourself is to integrate the things that you don't like. You recognize them, you accept them, and they become part of you. They will always be part of you, but the key is—they no longer control you. *Control* is the issue. When I was counseling and doing therapy, the idea was that you have to recognize the things that are controlling you. Even if it's trauma. Even if it's severe trauma. And your job in life is to try to lessen that control. When you start feeling at ease with yourself, when you start feeling you have moments of peace because you've integrated the negative in your life, then you've made a lot of progress.

I'll give you one example. I had the army experience, between the Korean and Vietnam wars. That was a big experience for me. I had a very isolated, insulated mind based on my early education. And when I went into the army for three years, that was a whole new education.

You have to think the way they want you to. And you are conditioned for sixteen weeks of boot camp and then infantry training. But when I got out of there, I realized it was just another form of indoctrination. The whole experience was very broadening.

TSH: In this example you're mapping out why you think the way you do.

RL: Yes. I'm mapping out a piece of my own thinking and in the process my self-identity as well. How does that change? Well, I could put extremely inferior in the beginning, but in time because of increased learning and experience more self-confidence. Of course, I have the benefit of having studied psychology and doing self-evaluations and talking to other people as well. And knowledge, well, that's exploded, so now I'm getting to a point where at my age I have to be selective in my learning. I'd love to research everything, but I can't. So, I decided to stay in the philosophical psychology field—to be a generalist—to study thinking and behavior as it applies to the 21st century, if that's possible.

TSH: I have this feeling that the rigidity of Catholicism gives you a background, a solid thing against which you can bounce off.

RL: Well, at the time it was dogmatic, absolutist, and extremely patriarchal. There have been changes, but that's a topic for discussion at another time. I was brought up in the French-Canadian community around St. Anthony of Padua. From ages 0 to 14, everything was centered around the church. As a little boy in kindergarten I remember going into St. Anthony's Church and being overwhelmed. What does a five-year-old mind make of all of that? It can't process it sufficiently, only experience it. Now when you're mapping your own mind, if you have trouble locating things, you do it in increments of seven years. Zero to 7, 7 to 14, 14 to 21, 21 to 28, and so on. Mind mapping can be very threatening, but it's important to do it if you

feel that you are not free in your thinking and something is controlling you. I think it informs you, and at least for me it brought peace to understand my mind because the purpose of philosophy is the pursuit of truth, and how can you really know yourself or anything for that matter unless you're truthful.

TSH: Thank you Ray, this has been very interesting.

RL: You are most welcome.