

GUEST INTRODUCTION

Rupert Read

This issue of *Ethnographic Studies* is focused around a particular theme: *The mind and society*, or to be rather more precise: the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Harold Garfinkel upon our conceptualisation of the-human-mind-in-action -in-human-society. Or, to be more precise still: the papers given at the 4th Annual *Mind and Society Seminar* held at Manchester University in December 1996 on that topic. These Seminars, organized by Dave Francis, Wes Sharrock, and myself, are becoming increasingly recognized as a truly major international forum for the discussion and advancement of ideas in the Wittgensteinian tradition in philosophy and in the Ethnomethodological tradition in sociology.

There were five speakers at *Mind and Society 4* in December 1996. One, Stephen Mulhall, has already published his contribution to the Seminar elsewhere¹. The other four have contributed original or revised versions of their papers, below. We are also delighted to be able to publish here edited transcripts of some of the discussions which resulted from these papers, in which you will hear the voices of the various speakers (including Mulhall) intermingling with a panoply of experts, researchers and practitioners, in practically minded philosophy and theoretically oriented sociology. The discussions were usually amiable, sometimes heated, invariably stimulating and provocative, and often deeply illuminating. But do not take my word for it - judge for yourself.

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the work of those whose papers we are privileged to print here, let me very briefly situate each of the four, and briefly outline what they are up to in their papers:

Jeff Coulter

Coulter's training is in sociology, and he teaches the same at Boston University in the U.S. . However, his work in recent years has been more and more philosophical, and the paper we publish below is no exception. It is an examination of the 'grammar' of contemporary neurophysiology, a critique of the hidden metaphysics that Coulter is worried unfortunately lies implicit in the writings of many of those who are purporting to tell us the empirical facts about the structure of the human brain. If Coulter is right, then there is a real danger that the increasing time and effort invested in neurological study has brought us no closer at all to a genuinely sophisticated or reliable understanding of the workings of the mind and brain. (It is this that he is endeavouring to show in his forthcoming book, 'Neural metaphysics'.)

Coulter focuses in his short paper on the question of whether one can truly be said to see something which is not actually before one, as perhaps in the case of hallucinations. Not surprisingly perhaps, this paper prompted an extremely vigorous discussion, with several in the audience dissecting closely Coulter's claims to have positively identified instances of nonsense in the neurophysiological texts which were looked at as examples with respect to this question. Was it not possible to give a more charitable reading of what the texts in question were about, of what their authors were up to? Coulter, as always, in turn defended his claims vigorously and impressively.

¹ S. Mulhall, 'Can there be an epistemology of moods?', in A. O'Hear (ed.), *Verstehen and Human Understanding*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Nigel Pleasants

Pleasant was a graduate student at Cambridge when he gave his paper at 'Mind and Society 4'; since then, however, he has taken up a position in Sociology at the University of Exeter. His work is mostly in borderlands between sociology and philosophy. His paper is a highly-controversial effort to draw an analogy between Harold Garfinkel's '*experiments in trust*' (which were so important in the 'founding' of the respecification of sociology which came to be named 'ethnomethodology') and Stanley Milgram's infamous '*obedience experiments*'. Garfinkel looked to see what would happen in practice when various societal norms were radically disrupted, while Milgram looked to see what would happen when participants in controlled psychological 'experiments' were hoodwinked into thinking that they were torturing someone. Pleasant concludes that Garfinkel was in fact putting forward a contestable social theory just as much as Milgram did - or for that matter, as Giddens, Bhaskar, Harre or Habermas have done.

To say that the discussion of Pleasant's presentation was deep and heated would be an understatement. Pleasant's attempt to equate the founder of Ethnomethodology with a social psychologist who many consider to have been both theoretically misguided and ethically appalling was the subject of much ire - and some defence. The upshot was a near-unique confrontation.

Kelley Dean Jolley

Jolley teaches Philosophy at Auburn University, Alabama. His work is mostly in Wittgenstein and Ordinary Language Philosophy. His paper - the reception of which was in the main very favourable - deals with the topic, both ordinary-as-can-be and strangely esoteric, of 'common sense'. Jolley aims to determine what 'common sense' is. Is it a body of beliefs? Are these 'beliefs' just like other beliefs, and if not how not? Or is it something rather different? Is it for example *the way we* (rather than *what we*) *think*? Or is it even an ideological illusion? In the best traditions of Moore and Wittgenstein, Jolley offers precise and thoughtful answers to these questions and more, and moreover he writes in a style that most would agree to be as pretty and playful as it is precise.

The discussion that followed Jolley's paper was one of the highlights of the two days, ranging as it did over issues such as the taken-for-granted, 'hinge propositions', personal identity, the role of standards in measurement and the nature of childhood.

Anne Jacobson

Jacobson is Director of the Cognitive Science Initiative at the University of Houston in Texas, USA. She is very unusual in being something of a 'sceptic' of Cognitive Science who is nevertheless at the heart of one of its better-financed University-based home-bases. In an important series of papers over some years now, Jacobson has sought to put into question much of the received wisdom in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind concerning how we are to account for the nature of human action. Her paper herein is perhaps a culmination of this series. It is an attempt to bring Wittgensteinian philosophy, especially the work of G.E.M. Anscombe, directly to bear on the question of whether we can account for human action intelligibly *at all*, if we do not accept that most human actions are understandable only by means of thinking the actual reasons for them. Jacobson thinks we cannot; and thus she opposes the mainstream view, especially as exemplified in the work of Daniel Dennett and Donald Davidson. She substitutes instead an emphasis on the evaluative element in any explanation of a human action, not excluding our everyday explanations of our own actions.

These then are the papers which make up this issue of 'Ethnographic Studies'. We hope in future to feature further papers presented at future Mind and Society Seminars in the pages of this journal. In the meantime, we hope that these papers and the discussions following them give you the reader a good sense not only of the intelligence and importance of the four authors but also of the acuity of their audiences. Stanley Cavell once mused in an influential way upon the vexed question of what could be 'an audience for philosophy'. Perhaps an answer to his question might be: the participants in the MIND AND SOCIETY Seminars - and the readership of 'Ethnographic Studies'.