

Expanding the Mind

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Abstract:

The cognitive sciences can be regarded as an opportunity for us to expand our thinking about the mind. In particular, they tend to loosen any rigid assumptions about a necessary correspondence between one mind and one brain. Here are some examples:

- 1 A mind can be realized by computer hardware - one mind corresponding to no ('wetware') brain;
 - 2 A mind can be interpreted in terms of behaviour (ie behaviourism) - one mind corresponding, in a certain sense, to one body;
 - 3 A mind can be physically distributed - one mind corresponding to one brain plus inanimate objects; and
 - 4 A mind can be socially distributed - one mind corresponding to two or more brains.
- The bulk of my talk will focus on the last example.

Speaking very broadly, there are two perspectives on the mind: the internalist and the externalist.

- An internalist perspective on the mind stresses those aspects that are inner, introspective, private, solitary, individual, psychological, mysterious, and detached.
- An externalist perspective on the mind stresses those aspects that are outer, active, public, social, behavioural, evident, embodied, and engaged.

Many of the concepts that are used to analyse the workings of fictional minds fit easily within this dichotomy:

Internalist perspective

private minds
intramental (or private) thought
personal identity
first person attribution
subjectivity of self
unreadable minds
focalization
introspection
stream of consciousness
interior monologue

Externalist perspective

social minds
intermental (or joint, group, shared or collective) thought
situated identity
third person attribution
subjectivity of others
readable minds
aspectuality
theory of mind
continuing consciousness
Bakhtinian dialogicality

Much of the significance of the thought that occurs in novels is lost if only the internalist perspective is employed. Both perspectives are required, because it is this balance between public and private thought, intermental and intramental functioning, social and individual minds, with which novels are chiefly preoccupied.

I suggest the following typology for intermental thought in the novel:

1 *Intermental encounters*. At the minimal level, this consists of the group thought that is necessary for conversations between individuals to take place. A basic level of minimal mind reading is required for characters to understand each other in order to make everyday life possible.

2 *Small intermental units.* Characters tend to form intermental pairs and small groups of various sorts such as marriages, close friendships, and nuclear families.

3 *Medium-sized intermental units.* The relationships within the individuals in medium-sized units such as work colleagues, networks of friendships, and neighborhoods are rather different from those that apply for random encounters and small units. Here the emphasis is less on individuals knowing what another person is thinking, and more on people thinking the same way.

4 *Large intermental units.* Individuals are also likely to belong to larger groups (such as the town of Middlemarch) that will have a tendency to think together on certain issues and so have a collective opinion or consensus view on a particular topic.

5 *Intermental minds.* These are intermental units, large, medium, or small, that are so well defined and long lasting, and where so much successful intermental thought takes place, that they can plausibly be considered as group minds. Couples who know each other's minds well, and who can undertake such joint activities as decision making and problem solving, are the best examples.

However, larger groups can also be regarded as intermental minds.
