

**THE BACKGROUND:
AN EMBODIED REASON OF COPING IN THE WORLD***

**EL TRASFONDO:
UNA RAZÓN ENCARNADA PARA HABÉRSELAS CON EL MUNDO**

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Abstract: This paper is motivated by the general idea that philosophical ambition to understand and define the human mind exclusively in terms of conscious, propositional, and deliberative behaviour cannot be adequate, for it leaves out great part of our mentality, which resides in the background. On a more specific plane it focuses on the background as a means of providing the cognitive organism with most plausible scenarios of reality, and prepares it for what appears most likely to be the case in the world, in an instant way and without engaging in contemplation. The background proves to be a powerful instrument of initiating guesswork and does it in automatic and effortless manner. In such a way this backgrounded "reason" acts ahead of actuality and drives our behaviour and modes of our coping in the natural, social, and cultural world in an implicit way, not available in the conscious foreground.

Key Words: Background, Reason, Coping in the World.

Resumen: Este artículo viene motivado por la idea general de que la ambición filosófica de definir y entender la mente humana exclusivamente en términos de comportamiento consciente, proposicional y deliberativo no puede ser adecuada, pues deja inexplicada gran parte de nuestra mentalidad, la cual reside en el trasfondo. Más específicamente, el artículo se centra en el trasfondo como medio para proporcionar al organismo cognitivo los escenarios más plausibles de la realidad, y prepararlo para lo que más probablemente sea el caso en el mundo, de forma instantánea y sin entrar en la contemplación. El trasfondo demuestra ser un instrumento poderoso a la hora de hacer conjeturas de una manera automática y espontánea. De esta forma, esta "razón" de trasfondo se anticipa en la práctica y conduce nuestro comportamiento y modos de habérselas con el mundo natural, social y cultural de forma implícita, no disponible en el primer plano consciente.

Palabras clave: Trasfondo, razón, habérselas con el mundo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to provide a better understanding of the nature, forms of functioning, and import of the background (knowledge) as a sort of implicit reasoning that governs our actions without recourse to consciousness and contemplation, conceptual thought and deliberation. There are two basic premises on which it is founded:

First, it relies on the conception of the mind understood as a *form of active participation directed toward the environment and the world*. If it is so then we need to explain what facilitates this activity and what sort of mental mechanism this engagement requires. Here I want to flesh out the idea that the background has a profound role to play in this process. On a general level, this paper represents an attempt to locate the background in the world of human mentality; more specifically, it seeks to affirm the background as a sort of knowing that is instantly available and automatically operative without recourse to conscious deliberation. I want to suggest that the background is a massive and robust body of capacities which occupies most of what constitutes the mind but is never available in an explicit form. As Hubert Dreyfus rightly points out, it is essential that it remains hidden or “withdrawn”:

Heidegger calls this ultimate background *the phenomenon of world*. He points out that the world *must withdraw* like the light in a room to make it possible for things to show themselves. *Objects* can be imagined, remembered and perceived *on the background of a withdrawn world* –a whole that functions only when one is *not* paying attention to it. On this view it follows that the background qua background cannot be implicit because it cannot be made explicit and still be identified with what it was when it was doing its job as background. In short, the background is present by way of withdrawing, and it is only when it is present in this way that it can serve as the ground for anything. (Dreyfus, 2012: 4).

By putting the background to the foreground, that is by placing it in the focus of interest, I aim to emphasize the fact that much of what the cognitive organism knows, and is capable of achieving in its interactive exchange with the world, is *available without awareness*; that acting does not require a propositional plan; that doing can do without concepts. In whatever the cognitive organism does it relies on activation of the backgrounded suppositions that provide a form of implicit reasoning that guide our actions, mental and motor.

Second, there is nowadays enough support for the, by no means trivial, claim that *there is a severe underdetermination of mental processes by sensory data*. This implies that what matters for the organism as information is not given in sensory input, and also that meanings are not encoded in incoming stimuli. After all, "events don't come labelled 'stimulus' or 'response'" (Kirk, 1994: 107) Very much in the similar vein C. I. Lewis observes: "Objects do not classify themselves and come into experience with their tickets on them" (1929: 88). Taking this into account adds to the conviction that the "given" is a questionable notion and that if there is any justified way to talk about the "labelling" and "ticketing" then it is to understand it as a sort of intervention coming from the inside rather than outside. Contrary to our common-sense understanding, very little is determined by the external stimulation alone; in other words, there is no (external) information in input. Input grows to become a bearer of meaning (or information) only within the cognitive system and according to what it makes out of it. Any idea of mirroring or faithful imitation is thus out of place here since our sensory and cognitive apparatus is not equipped for the passive pick up. More than deciphering what is actually the case, living organism, by making use of his or her background competence, figures out *what might be the case in the world*. This takes the form of a guesswork; rather than merely stating what is actually and literally going on in the senses the organism spontaneously creates scenarios of *possible behavior*. Because these scenarios are as a rule not products of "intellectualist" endeavors, I claim that the key for understanding the nature of human coping in the world is to be sought in the background capacities as a "tool of potentiality"¹ that is instantly and effortlessly available even when non conscious thinking is at stake. Let us consider it as a "reason" that is powerful enough even if "hidden" or "withdrawn", and even if unconscious, nonpropositional, and nondeliberative.

2. GUESSWORK IN PERCEPTION AND ACTION

In order to illustrate that the (visually) "given" is no bottom-rock of cognition and that appearances, no matter how supposedly immediate, may deceive us, let us consider the following example:

¹ See Radman (2012).

If you see a stick in the water, it looks curved, but if you *know* it is a stick, you *know* that you can grasp it the same way you would grasp a straight object. Stick in the water and out of the water look different, but they afford the same actions. (Prinz, 2009: 429)²

The author makes here no reference to the background, but in my reading it is just the background *knowing* that enables one not to be deceived by the eye and conduct the appropriate action contrary to what the sight suggests. It seems, in this case, as if the hand knows its way around better than the eye. If it is so then the manual proves to act independently of what the sight conveys, and that might prove why the hand is not deceived by the eye.

What follows from the underdetermination hypothesis is that the “given” appears to be a poor guide in deciphering the “real”, that inputs are not instructive unless there are means that can assist us in reading what they can possibly mean. So there must be competences more profound than those based on the sensory record; there must be a “knowing” or “reason” of some sort that enables an organism to act in the world independently of sensory images and appearances.

Our theories of cognition are pronouncedly vision-centred³ and visual perception dominates our philosophical accounts of knowledge of the world. However, vision, though important, is not an exclusive guide to action. There are ways of knowing the world, and coping with it, other than the ocular one, and the manual is one of them.

We realize that what we see is influenced more by the function and possible use of objects than by their appearance and physical features alone. Having this sort of practical experience or knowledge of the immediate surroundings is what influences our attitude toward it and how to handle it. For instance, a plate may look elliptic to you, but you handle it as a round object. The car that is sighted as a tiny object on the horizon is experienced as distant, and not as miniature (as it approaches in your perception it does not grow in size, but is experienced as getting closer). You also see the moon as larger than the objects of the same optical size on the retina (for instance, a penny) because you

² Emphases added.

³ See, for instance, Prinz (2013).

know it is a celestial body of certain dimensions, though you don't have to compute the sort of knowing consciously but rather implicitly or in "backgrounded" mode.

We conclude that our dealing with the world is not decided according to what is presently going on in the photo-receptors, but rather according to the capacity of the organism to decipher the incoming stimuli in terms of their possible meaning, based on the embodied experiential record. It is this potentiality that shapes the contents of perception. In other words, what "is" is read in terms of what it might be. The contents of perception are created according to what seems *most plausible to be the case*. And plausibility might not even be judged on the actual sensory evidence (as in the case of the "bent" stick or "elliptic" plate), but on the appropriate guesswork. The latter, again, is not computed in consciousness but is provided by the massive body of background.

The neuroscientist Walter Freeman (1999a) points out that perception is about *expectations*. In a similar vein Alva Noë remarks that "(p)eople hear what they expect to hear" (2009: 109). And we may further add, people see mostly what they *believe* is the case; they move around in the space oriented by what seems to be the *most probable* configuration of a surrounding; they enter social exchange through dialogues that are taken from the storage of *expected* stereotyped rhetoric samples. Chris Frith says that perception is based on *beliefs* (2007: 126) and John Searle, along similar lines, talks about "readiness" (1995: Ch. 6).⁴

Expectations are not provided by external stimulation but are generated from the repertoire of backgrounded possibilities. The process is a selective one; leaving out is as important as taking into account. Most of what is afforded in the world has to be ignored. In other words not everything that is going on in the external or internal world can matter for the conscious mind. Inhibition processes are thus important because they protect the organism from the irrelevant. The type of the process is not conscious and is rather a sort of skill. As an illustration, consider Hubert Dreyfus' example of the experience of a familiar type of room. He says: "We are skilled at *not coping* with the dust, unless we are janitors, and *not paying attention* to whether the windows are open or

⁴ That is also how Freeman sees action, namely, as an act that "requires a *prior state of readiness* that expresses the existence of a goal, a preparation for motor action to position the sense organ [...]" (1999b: 146, emphases added).

closed, unless it is hot, in which case we know how to do what is appropriate" (1993: *xxviii*)⁵. Appropriateness seems thus to be entirely contextual. What is habitual in one situation need not be so in another. For instance, the dressing "code" appropriate in the bathroom is entirely out of place at a cocktail party; to behave the same way at the basketball game and at the (classical) concert would be utterly inappropriate; to read aloud from the brochure during the theatre performance would be inappropriate, but reading it aloud back home to those who were not in the theatre would be appreciated; it is natural to dance at a party, but quite unnatural to do so at a meeting, etc.

Many of these "norms" of behaviour are acquired by the background and need nor be attended or processed in (conscious) thought. We switch from one situation or life-circumstance to another with ease and routine that require no effort, and we do that all the time. We also switch our social roles (being daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, neighbours, colleagues, patients, pedestrians, drivers, travellers, etc.) with effortlessness of unreflected routine. We normally do that successfully but if we do not tune in on time or mess up the roles we will soon get to learn about our inappropriate behaviour from the reaction of other people.

Interesting enough, if one is to consult more recent empirical research, the lesson one can learn is that ever more scientific findings speak in favour of the view that what the neural system does is to prepare the organism for the "next step" in agent's acting in the world. It does so by self-generating options that instruct the organism what to expect in the world and how to proceed in dealing with possible situations. As the neuroscientist Walter Freeman puts it: "All that brains can know has been synthesized within themselves in the form of *hypotheses about the world* and the outcomes of their own tests of the hypotheses, success or failure, and the manner of failure" (1999a: 121)⁶. It seems that it is much more important for the organism to be prepared to what it can expect in the world rather than being attentive to what is actually and accurately the case in the surrounding world.

This motivates us to re-examine the very notion of environment as a form of the actually given in sensation. Such a depersonalized environment is a myth

⁵ Emphases added.

⁶ Emphasis added. See also Roth (1996: Ch. 6).

for what surrounds us is shaped and reshaped according to agent's interests, needs, demands, desires, etc., none of which are provided in external stimulation. Nothing is simply there unless there is a "reason" for an organism to allow it to matter to it in some way. Environment is thus no neutral or static scenery but rather a medium that accommodates to life situations. Environment is a "matter of choice", says Erich Harth in a succinct way (1993: 118). Even when the "choice" is not volitional or conscious (what is most often the case), it presupposes an engagement of a complex mechanism of guesswork that entails inhibition of the irrelevant, selection from memory, and projection of the possible. Guesswork helps us to make corrections and improve steps in adaptations and so better tune to the given* situations. Again, the sort of know-how is not processed in the "higher cognitive centres" but is rather a result of a backgrounded capacity available instantly and effortlessly, that is without engaging conscious thought or contemplation.

From what has been said thus far it follows that environment, far from being offered up for passive uptake or faithful representation, is something to be figured out in terms of *backgrounded bets* about the most likely version of what there "is". What is at stake here is, basically, *guesswork* – an estimate or inference about the most probable states and situations of the natural and social environment. But this, as already pointed out, is mostly not computed in conscious thought; the vast majority of this type of mental activity resides outside the margins of conscious awareness. The "reason" that drives our behaviour is implicit and generally not available in the foreground. I particularly want to emphasize that the first step in the process is always a guess. In a way we can say that it is first the future, and then what of it applies to the present. In such a way we are prepared for experience that is to come. The organism guesses the possible and then checks what of it matters as the actual.

Now we might ask ourselves, how the biological organism, including its neural structure, copes with the sort of demand; that is with the hypothesis that securing the future is for the sake of adaptability to the actual. In other words, we want to know whether this type of mental mission has any support in empirical studies. Surprisingly (or not) more recent neurophysiological sources offer data that speak in favour of such a model. For instance, if we have come to the conclusion that the gist of mentality is *anticipation without reflection*, we learn from those studies that this is precisely what the neural apparatus does:

"The brain and body *anticipate* inputs, perceive, and make movements without need for reflection" (Freeman, 1999a: 23)⁷. We further see that "our experience of the visual world in rich detail is an experience of what is *potentially available* to us rather than what is already represented in our brain" (Frith, 2007: 44)⁸. What the neural system does, then, is provide "a map of signs about *future possibilities*" (ibid: 98). For Erich Harth, "[t]he future is, in fact, already present in our mind, and hence in the nervous system, *before* it happens in the world of objects" (1993: 95)⁹. Indeed, "[i]t may even be said that *future* events affect present neural activity, because the brain – joyfully or fearfully – anticipates, projects into, the future" (ibid: 61). Richard L. Gregory already recognized this as he said: "[O]bjects have pasts and futures; when we know its past and can guess its future, an object transcends experience and becomes an embodiment of knowledge and expectation without which life of even the simplest kind is impossible" (Gregory, 1966: 8).

Proclaiming "future first" brings us away from the naïve conception of the given and of immediacy. Presenting the "given" in terms of the possible, actual in terms of the future, not only makes us aware that passive uptake cannot do the cognitive job but also that in order to be able to design the possible there must be an organ or capacity potent enough to provide such future actuality of which sensory apparatus is not (yet) informed. However, scientists and theorists stop short of posing the question: What is the source of competence that provides information "beyond the (presently) given"? In other words, how is the "future" in this sense possible at all? I believe that, based on what has been said thus far, we are in the position to respond pretty unambiguously in the following way: the capacity for devising possible scenarios of the "real" is due to the massive background knowledge that provides a horizon of possibilities for reading stimuli and reacting to them in terms of what they *most likely* represent. If it is the background that provides the cognitive organism with the relevant knowledge of the possible then contrary to what the term denotes, it (back-ground) is not oriented towards the past but is entirely in the service of *anticipation*. The literal meaning of the term deceives us, insofar as it suggests recall of what happened in the past, when in fact it is better to think of it as a

⁷ Emphasis added.

⁸ Emphasis added.

⁹ Emphasis added.

type of mental vehicle that is fully engaged in the organism's preparation with respect to what is going to come.

3. FROM THE BACKGROUND TO BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

I believe that these novel findings capacitate us to reencounter Martin Heidegger's philosophy from a contemporary perspective and provide us with a matrix of reading which may reveal profundity of his phenomenological insights. Fortunately, phenomenology proves today to be inspirational also for fields, such as cognitive science, that practice empirical research and seemingly are distant to the spirit and methodologies of phenomenology. I want to make use of such a productive interdisciplinary opening and probe a mode of interpretation that, in my view, can relate the sort of discussion above to some specific aspects of Heidegger's difficult text. For instance, in *Being and Time* Heidegger repeatedly stresses that *Dasein* is always "beyond itself" (1962: 236) or that Being is, or acts, "ahead of itself" (Ibid.). I believe there is a way to understand this being "ahead" or "beyond" in the present context of backgrounded anticipatory aiming in the world. Though Heidegger's reference is clearly to *Dasein* it is less clear what instances of it could be meant to perform this ahead-ness; that in turn leaves the space of interpretation open also to options such as advocated in this paper.

Also, the very definition of the background as a tool of potentiality finds resonance in Heidegger's systematic insistence on *potentiality* as a feature of *Dasein*. He for instance says:

This potentiality is that for the sake of which any *Dasein* is as it is. In each case *Dasein* has already compared itself, in its Being, and therewith for the possibility of authenticity and inauthenticity, is shown, with a primordial, elemental concreteness, in anxiety. But ontologically, being toward one's own most potentiality-for-Being means that in each case *Dasein* is already *ahead* of itself [*ihm selbst ... hinweg*] in its Being. *Dasein* is always 'beyond itself' [*über sich hinaus*], not as a way of behaving towards other entities which it is *not*, but as Being towards the Potentiality-for-Being which it is itself. This structure of Being [...] we shall denote as *Dasein's 'Being-ahead-of-itself'* (Ibid.).

In such a way potentiality and "being-ahead-of-itself" are conceptualized as complementary aspects of Dasein. As if in need of further clarification he adds: "Being-ahead-of-itself" means, if we grasp it more fully, '*ahead of itself-in-already-being-in-a-world*'" (ibid.) I believe that if we don't want to leave this "already being in the world" to mysticism a way of understanding it is by recourse to mechanisms of mind – which we find in backgrounded reason – that creates the horizon of possible behaviour to which the self need not to consciously attend and is in that sense already provided for the mind. That this happens apart from volition can be deciphered from his saying: "Dasein can comport itself towards its possibilities, even unwillingly ..." (1962: 237). Heidegger also characterizes the Self ontologically as "Being *ahead* of itself" (Ibid.)¹⁰.

The motive re-emerges in the elaboration of the notion of wishing and willing:

In the wish Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities which not only have been taken hold of in concern, but whose fulfilment has not even been pondered over and expected. On the contrary, in the mode of mere wishing, the ascendancy of Being-ahead-of-oneself brings with it a lack of understanding for the factual possibilities. (1962: 238)

... to any willing there belongs something willed, which has already made itself definite in terms of a 'for-the-sake-of-which' in general (Being-ahead-of-itself); (2) the disclosedness of something with which one can concern oneself (the world as the 'wherein' of Being-already); (3) Dasein's projection of itself understandingly upon a potentiality-for-being toward a possibility of entity 'willed'. In the phenomenon of willing, the underlying totality of care shows through. (1962: 239)

In short, the lesson from the background and the excursion into the existential phenomenology seem to converge in the idea of potentiality of being as manifested in anticipatory capacity of the background that provides the horizon within which one is "always already" geared into the world.

¹⁰ Emphasis added

4. ON AUTOMATICITY OF "JUST DOING"

Unlike memory, which presupposes the recall or reconstruction of particular past episodes, the background presupposes an instantaneous and effortless activation of potentiality that provides options for motor and mental coping with life situations, and most often without conscious engagement. To say that something operates in an easy and effortless manner means that it is exercised *automatically*; and thus implies that it is performed without conscious awareness and independent of control or deliberation. This, I think, can be best understood in terms of Ludwig Wittgenstein's reference to skills. Echoing Wittgenstein (1953), Searle also says that we know many things *simply by doing*.¹¹

I use the phrase "just doing" to refer in general to such reactions without reflection. But whilst many authors affiliate this sort of action primarily with motor habits, I am prone to extend the term far beyond bodily behaviour to include complex mental processes such as perception, memory, action, learning and thought but also to see it as a capacity responsible for our coping in the world in an easy-going and effortless way. "Just seeing" and "just thinking" would then mean that even complex cognitive operations such as visual perception and "reasoning" are not spared of skilled routines by which they are brought about. The ease of the doing is not only that of walking and typing, swimming and cycling, but also that of seeing, talking, remembering, imagining, deciding, aiming, etc. Effortlessness is not only to be affiliated with a physical skill but also with a mental habit; and the same can even be said of complex cognitive processes and scientific enterprises, such as mathematics. As George Lakoff and Raphael Núñez put it: "Most cognition happens backstage. That includes mathematical cognition" (2000: 27). Analogously, we can say that just as we drink or drive, we also "just calculate" or "just infer" – or "just diagnose". On this point, Michael Polanyi insightfully remarks: "The medical diagnostician's skill is as much an art of doing as it is an art of knowing. The skill of testing and tasting is continuous with the more actively muscular skills, like swimming or riding a bicycle" (1958: 54).

We can further extend this "just doing" by including something like "just judging" and it can also include aesthetic preferences. Why chamber music

¹¹ Searle, for instance, says: "[...] we don't need the walking rules in the first place; we just walk" (1983: 153).

“means” to me more than opera? Why Bach excites me more than Brahms? Why Picasso’s creativity appears more powerful than that of Pissarro? All of these questions may be responded in “intellectualist terms”, yet the thing is, what we formulate in words is a late outcome of preferences already formulated on a more basic level. That is, even when I think I can provide *reasons* for such judgments we have to realize that they are “just” had as background suppositions, which, however, remain silent in narratives and in such a way invisible to observer.

The “just doing” in its various versions, understood as a form of automaticity, is by no means trivial¹². Automaticity frees mental spaces for more complex operations. If it were not the case we would have to permanently process the sensory data in consciousness, check them in memory, or question them in thought. Not only would this be too time and energy consuming, but it would also be like a computing machine processing data. Human mentality simply does not function that way. If it did, we would not only be running behind in whatever action we undertake but we would not be able to *adapt* to environmental, social and cultural circumstances in an adequate way.

Unlike authors who identify the background primarily with physical skills, I view it as a capacity for routine practices in figuring out what is going on in the environment, for making guesses about what is relevant for us, and for (re)acting in an adequate way. Motor skilled behaviour can then, at best, be taken as a useful analogy –a metaphorical illustration of what it should primarily denote: an automatic, that is, instant and effortless, coping with the world that includes cognition as much as motion.

We can say, in that sense, that we talk with ease when we walk; that we understand sentences as we grasp things; that greeting neighbours is like chewing food; that posing questions is somewhat like kicking the ball; that saying ‘Hi’ and ‘Bye’ is as effortless as switching the light on and off; that ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ is no different than nodding with the head; that watching weather forecasts on TV is like drinking a soft drink; that interacting with people that annoy you is like eating food which you do not like; that listening to someone in small talk is like licking ice-cream; that recognition of a familiar face is like hearing a familiar melody; that calculating small amounts of time or money is as easy as fastening buttons; that conversing on the

¹² Extensive research on this topic has been done by J. A. Bargh and his collaborators. See, for instance, Bargh (1994), Bargh and Chartrand (1999), and Bargh and Ferguson (2000).

phone is like driving the car. Our words 'roll' in conversation as pedals turn in cycling; our perceptions wander through space spontaneously as our bodies balance in it; memories come in just as we inhale fresh air; we understand humour with ease when we smile. Basically these illustrations show us that we know how to behave and what to do in particular situations that represent challenges for the cognitive person, and that we make use of available solutions from the repertoire of backgrounded possibilities with the same ease as routines which are typical of motor skills. This is not just to say that we do the former in a way analogical to the latter, but that there must be the same basic mechanism that brings them about. (Radman, 2012: 235-236)

It seems that Alva Noë is even more radical on this point (or maybe just more consequent). He for instance claims that, in some sense, "just talking" can be viewed as barking, and remarks:

[M]uch talking is more like barking than it is anything like what the linguists have in mind. Moreover, a good part of what enables me to understand what you say is that I already know what you are going to say before you say it! I never even encounter the problem of needing to assign a meaning to your utterance on the basis of prior knowledge of the words and the rules for their combination. That problem just does not arise" (2009: 108).

Furthermore, he says:

One of the very many false ideas about language is that its primary function is to express information or communicate thoughts. Speech has many functions, but surely a large part of it is more like the grooming behaviour of chimpanzees or the shepherding behaviour of dogs than it is like reasoned discourse among parliamentarians. [...] The bulk of what we say and do each day is more like grunts and signals baseball players use to indicate who'll catch the pop fly than it is like a genuine conversation (2009: 107).

I am convinced that not even thinking is exempt from this. We think the way we breathe and we imagine with effortlessness we digest.

What we basically understand under the automatism of behaviour is that our coping in the world mostly bypasses consciousness and thought. Can we then not next to the "language of *contemplation*" also talk about the "language of *coping*"? Should we not also introduce the notion of the "language of *talk*" (the one that would accompany "barking" with gesture) rather than the some-

what elusive “language of *thought*”? Is it not equally legitimate to talk about the “language of *emotion*” that has its “word” in everything we do? Can we not conceive of the routines of navigating familiar spaces and the rituals of ordinary conversations as a *language of habituation* that is perfectly operative without conscious thought? I believe that when philosophers relate something as complex as speaking to something as biologically simple as barking, and affiliate remembering and dining, seeing and reaching, greeting and grasping, and so on, they do not equate the former with the latter, or reduce one to the other. Instead, they propose the idea that our most authentic mental processes – those that are taken as distinctive marks of our humanity, such as language usage or memory– are processed away from thought and conscious control, and are ruled by automaticity rather than deliberation. This all amounts to the conviction that concepts, thoughts and reflection are late products in the chain of mental processing. When they get shaped within experience, and when they become objects of awareness, much has already been cognitively carried out (and pre-pared) in the backstage of the mind. Rather than being preconceived plans for action, thoughts appear to be conscious protocols of the processes accomplished within the background. The once implicitly guessed is then legitimized in awareness as real.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Neuroscientists are prone to see an “observer” in the brain (Singer, 2002), an internal “interpreter” (Gazzaniga, 1998), multiple “selves” (Ramachandran and Blakeslee, 1998: Ch. 12), and invent other smart instances in the head in order to find explanation for the human instant and efficacious adaptation to the natural, social, and cultural world, whereby they should be paying attention to the background that turns out to be our major cognitive organ that does the “observing”, “interpreting” and “monitoring”, prompt and easy, that is, without having to process them in consciousness and thought. For we nowadays know that only a very small portion of the mind is realized in consciousness; by far the greatest part remains salient in its backstage; the latter is where we are to seek for the 'reason' of our mostly successful coping in the world. This subsequently means that the philosophical ambition to understand and define the mind exclusively in terms of conscious, propositional and deliberative mental

behaviour cannot be adequate any more. "If we are to understand how the mind, through the brain, makes us who we are, we need to consider *the whole mind*, not just the parts that subserve thinking" says Joseph LeDoux (2002: 24)¹³. This echoes in a way William James' credo "the whole man counts!" (Bergson, 1946: 212; also James, 1956: 92). Both sayings plea for integration of processes beyond the threshold of consciousness and thoughtfulness. Such a holistic approach, as understood from the current perspective, should thus focus on the background that constitutes most of our mentality. We are therefore urged to study it in the way that we nowadays study perception, memory, and emotion. For the background is that massive and potent mental means that informs the organism about the states of the world and provides the agent with possible modes of coping with it before they emerge in the conscious mind as articulated plans for action.

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¹³ Emphasis added

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