

## Welcome

**H**<sup>ELLO.</sup>

A simple communication offered from me to you.  
But who is it that knows I greeted you with 'hello'?

And how do you know?

And what does knowing really mean?

In this book we'll explore the nature of the who, how, what, why, where, and when of the mind, of your mind, of your self, the experience you have that knows I am welcoming you with *hello*.

Some use the term *mind* to mean intellect and logic, thought and reasoning, contrasting mind to heart, or mind to emotion. This is not how I use the broad term mind here, or in other writings. By *mind*, I mean all that relates to our subjective felt experience of being alive, from feelings to thoughts, from intellectual ideas to inner sensory immersions before and beneath words, to our felt connections to other people and our planet. And mind also refers to our consciousness, the experience we have of being aware of this felt sense of life, the experience of knowing within awareness.

Mind is the essence of our fundamental nature, our deepest sense of being alive, here, right now, in this moment.

Yet beyond consciousness and its knowing within awareness of our subjective felt sense of being alive, mind may also involve a larger process, one that connects us to each other and our world. This important process is a facet of mind that may be hard to measure, but is nevertheless a crucial aspect of our lives we'll explore in great depth in the journey ahead.

Though we may not be able to quantify in numerical terms these facets of our mind at the heart of the experience of being here in this

life, this internally felt subjective phenomenon of living, and the ways we can feel our connections to one another and the world, are subjective phenomena that are real. These non-measurable facets of the reality of life have many names. Some call this our essence. Some call this our core, soul, spirit, or true nature.

I simply call this *mind*.

Is *mind* just some synonym for subjectivity—the feeling of our emotions and thoughts, memories and dreams, inner awareness and interconnectedness? If *mind* also includes our way of being aware of this inner sense of moment-to-moment living, then *mind* would additionally involve the experience called consciousness, our way of being aware, of knowing what these aspects of our subjective life are as they unfold. So at a minimum, *mind* is a term that includes consciousness and the way we are aware of our felt experience, our subjective lives.

But something also happens beneath awareness that involves what we usually refer to as *mind* as well. These are our non-conscious mental processes, such as thoughts, memories, emotions, beliefs, hopes, dreams, longings, attitudes, and intentions. Sometimes we are aware of these, and sometimes not. Though we are not aware of these at times, perhaps even the majority of the time, these mental activities happening without consciousness are real and influence our behaviors. These activities can be seen as a part of our thinking and reasoning, as some process that enables “information” to flow and transform. And without awareness, it may be that these flows of information do not evoke subjective feelings, as they are not a part of conscious experience. So we can see that beyond consciousness and its awareness of subjective experience, the term *mind* also includes the fundamental process of information processing that does not depend upon awareness.

But what does mind-as-information-processor really mean? What is information? If information drives how we make decisions and initiate behavior, how does mind, conscious or not, enable us to make willful choices on what to do? Do we have free will? If the term *mind* includes aspects of subjectivity, consciousness, and information processing, including its problem-solving and behavioral control, what makes up the essence of what *mind* is? What is this “mind stuff” that is a part of this spectrum of mental processes from felt sense to executive control?

With these common descriptions of the mind involving consciousness, subjective experience, and information processing, and how

these are manifested in ways that you may be familiar with, including memory and perception, thought and emotion, reasoning and belief, decision-making and behavior, what can we say ties each of these well-known mental activities together? If *mind* is the source of everything from felt sensations and feelings to thought and the initiation of action, why are these all subsumed under the word *mind*? What can we say the *mind* is?

*Mind* as a term, and *mind* as an entity or process, can be seen as a noun or verb. As a noun, *mind* has the sense of being an object, something stable, of something you ought to be able to hold in your hands, something you can possess. You have a mind, and it's yours. But what is that noun-like stuff of *mind* actually made of? As a verb, *mind* is a dynamic, ever-emerging process. *Mind* is full of activity, unfolding with ceaseless change. And if the verb-like *mind* is indeed a process, what is this “dynamic stuff,” this activity of our mental lives? What, really, is this *mind*, verb or noun, all about?

Sometimes we hear a description of the *mind* as an “information processor.” (Gazzaniga, 2004). This generally indicates how we have representations of ideas or things and then transform them, remember events by encoding, storing, and retrieving memory, and move from perception to reasoning to enacting behavior. Each of these forms of *mind* activity is part of the information processing of the *mind*. What has intrigued me, as a scientist, educator, and physician working with the *mind* for more than thirty-five years now, is how common these descriptions of the *mind* are, yet how a definition of what the *mind* actually is, a clear view of the *mind*'s essence beyond lists of its functions, is missing from a wide range of fields that deal with the *mind*, from clinical practice and education to scientific research and philosophy.

As a mental health professional (psychiatrist and psychotherapist), I've also wondered how this lack of at least a working definition of what the *mind* might actually be could be limiting our effectiveness as clinicians. A *working* definition would mean we could work with it and change it as needed to fit the data and our personal experience. A *definition* would mean we could clearly state what the essence of *mind* means. We so often hear the word *mind* yet rarely do we notice it lacks a clear definition. Without even a working definition of *mind* in scientific, educational, and clinical professional worlds, and without one in our personal and family lives, something seems missing, at least in my own *mind*, from our understanding and conversations about the *mind*.

With only descriptions and no attempt at even a working definition of what mind is, could we even define what a healthy mind is? If we stay at the level of description, of mind as being made of thoughts, feelings, and memories, of consciousness and subjective experience, let's see where it takes us. For example, if you reflect for a moment on your thoughts, what is your thinking truly made of? What is a thought? You might say, "Well, Dan, I know I am thinking when I sense words in my head." And I could then ask you, what does it mean to say "I know" and to "sense words?" If these are processes, a dynamic, verb-like aspect of information processing, what is being processed? You may say, "Well, we know that it is simply brain activity." And you may be surprised to find that no one knows, if this brain-view is indeed true, how the subjective sense of your own thinking somehow arises from neurons in your head. Processes as familiar and basic as thought or thinking are still without clear understanding by our, well, our minds.

When we consider the mind as a verb-like, unfolding, emerging process, not being, or at least not only being, a noun-like thing, a static, fixed entity, we perhaps get closer to understanding what your thoughts may be, and in fact, what mind itself might be. This is what we mean by the description of the mind as an information processor, a verb-like process. But in either case, mind-as-noun indicating the processor or mind-as-verb indicating the processing, we are still in the dark about what this information transformation involves. If we could offer a definition of the mind beyond these commonly used, important, and accurate descriptive elements, perhaps we'd be in a better position to clarify not just what the mind is, but also what mental well-being might be.

These have been the questions that have occupied my mind over these past four decades. I've felt them, they've filled my consciousness, they've influenced my non-conscious information processing in dreams and drawings, and they've even shaped how I relate to others. My friends and family, teachers and students, colleagues and patients, all know firsthand how obsessed I've been with these basic questions regarding the mind and mental health. And now you do too. But like them, perhaps you'll also come to see how attempting to answer these questions is not only a fascinating process in itself, but also results in useful perspectives that can offer us new ways of living well and creating a stronger, more resilient mind.

This book is all about a journey to define the mind beyond its common descriptions. And once we can do that, we can be in a more empowered position to see the scientific basis for how we might cultivate healthy minds more effectively.

### The Mind's Curiosity About Itself

This interest in the mind has been with human beings for as long as we have recorded history of our thoughts. If you, too, are curious about what the mind might be, you are not alone. For thousands of years, philosophers and religious leaders, poets and storytellers, have wrestled with descriptions of our mental lives. The mind seems to be quite curious about itself. Perhaps this is why we've even named our own species, *homo sapiens sapiens*: the ones who know, and know we know.

But what do we know? And how do we know it? We can explore our subjective mental lives with reflection and contemplative practices, and we can set up scientific studies to explore the nature of the mind itself. But what can we truly know about the mind using our minds?

In the last few centuries to present day, the empirical study of the nature of reality, our human mental activity called science, has attempted to systematically study the characteristics of mind (Mesquita, Barrett, & Smith, 2010; Erneling & Johnson, 2005). But as we'll see, even the various scientific disciplines interested in the nature of the mind have not established a common definition of what the mind is. There are many descriptions of mental activities, including emotion, memory, and perception, but no definitions. Odd, you may think, but true. You may wonder why the term, *mind*, is even used if it is not defined. As an important academic "placeholder for the unknown," the word *mind* is a reference term without a definition. And some say that the mind *should not* even be defined, as I've been personally told by several philosophy and psychology colleagues, as it will "limit our understanding" once we use words to delineate a definition. So in academia, amazingly, the mind is studied and discussed in wonderful detail, but not defined.

In practical fields that focus on helping the mind develop, such as education and mental health, the mind is rarely defined. In workshops over the last 15 years, I have repeatedly asked mental health professionals or educators if they have ever been offered a definition of

the mind. The results are quite startling, and surprisingly consistent. Of over 100,000 psychotherapists of all persuasions from around the globe, only 2 to 5 percent have ever been offered even one lecture that defined the mind. Not only are over 95 percent of mental health professionals without a definition of the *mental*, but they are also without a definition of the *health*. The same small percentage of over 19,000 educators I've asked, teachers of kindergarten through twelfth grade, have been offered a definition of the mind.

So why attempt to define something that seems to be so elusive in so many fields? Why try to put words to something that may simply be beyond words, beyond definition? Why not stick with a placeholder for the unknown, embracing the mystery? Why limit our understanding with words?

Here is my suggestion to you about why it may be important to try to define the mind.

If we could offer a specific answer to the question of what the essence of mind is, provide a definition of mind that takes us beyond descriptions of its features and characteristics, such as consciousness, thought, and emotion, we might be able to more productively support the development of a healthy mind in our personal lives as much as we might cultivate mental health in families, schools, places of work, and society at large. If we could find a useful working definition of mind, we'd then become empowered to illuminate the core elements of a healthy mind. And if we could do that, perhaps we might be better able to support the way we conduct our human activities, not only in our personal lives, but with one another, and with our ways of living on this planet we share with all other living beings.

Other animals have minds too, with feelings and information processing such as perception and memory. But our human mind has come to a place of shaping the planet so much now that we—yes, we with language who can name things—have come to call this epoch the “Human Age” (Ackerman, 2014). Coming to define the mind in this new planetary Human Age might just enable us to find a more constructive and collaborative way of living together, with other people and all living beings, on this precarious and precious planet.

And so from the personal to the planetary, defining the mind might be an important thing to do.

The mind is the source of our capacity for choice and change. If we are to change the course of our planet's global status, we can propose

that we'll need to transform our human mind. On a more personal level, if we have acquired compromises to our brain's functioning, through experiences or genes, knowing what the mind is could enable us to more effectively change the brain, as many studies now reveal that the mind can change the brain in a positive way. That's right: your mind can transform your brain. And so mind can influence our basic physiology and our broadest ecology. How can your mind do that? This is what we'll explore in this book.

Finding an accurate definition of mind is more than just an academic exercise; defining the mind may empower each of us to create more health in our individual lives as well as our collective life so we hopefully might create more well-being in our world. To approach these pressing issues, this book, *Mind*, will attempt to address the simple but challenging question, what is the mind?

### A Common View: The Mind Is What the Brain Does

A view commonly stated by many contemporary scientists from a range of academic disciplines such as biology, psychology, and medicine, is that the mind is solely an outcome of the activity of the neurons in the brain. This frequently stated belief is actually not new, as it has been held for hundreds and even thousands of years. This perspective, so often stated in academic circles, is concretely expressed this way: “The mind is what the brain does.”

If so many esteemed and thoughtful academicians hold this view, and hold it with energized conviction, it would be natural to think that perhaps this idea is the simple and complete truth. If this is indeed the case, then your inner, subjective, mental experience of my hello to you is simply the brain's neural firing. How that might happen—to move from neural firing to subjective experience within knowing—no one on the planet understands. But the assumption within academic discussions is that one day we will figure out how matter becomes mind. We just don't know right now.

So much in science and in medicine, as I learned in medical school and in my research training, points to the brain's central role in shaping our experience of thoughts, feelings, and memories, what are often referred to as the contents—or activities—of mind. The state of being aware, the experience of consciousness itself, is considered by many scientists a byproduct of neural processing. Therefore, if *mind=brain*

activity turns out to be the simple and complete equation for the origin of mind, then the scientific search for the neural basis of mind, for how the brain gives rise to our feelings and thoughts, and what are called the “neural correlates of consciousness,” may be long and arduous pursuits, but ones that are on the right track.

William James, a physician whom many consider to be the father of modern psychology, in his textbook, *The Principles of Psychology*, published in 1890, stated, “The fact that the brain is the one immediate bodily condition of the mental operations is indeed so universally admitted nowadays that I need spend no more time in illustrating it, but will simply postulate it and pass on. The whole remainder of the book will be more or less of a proof that the postulate was correct” (p. 2). Clearly, James considered the brain central to understanding the mind.

James stated, too, that introspection was a “difficult and fallible” source of information about the mind (p. 131). This view, along with the difficulty researchers faced in quantifying subjective mental experience, an important measuring process many scientists engage in to apply crucial statistical analyses, made studying neural processes and externally visible behaviors more appealing and useful as the academic fields of psychology and psychiatry evolved.

But is the stuff in your head, the brain, truly the *sole* source of mind? What about the body as a whole? James stated, “Bodily experiences, therefore, and more particularly brain-experiences, must take place amongst those conditions of mental life of which Psychology need take account” (p. 9). James, along with physiologists of his day, knew that the brain lives in a body. To emphasize that, I sometimes use the term, “embodied brain,” which my adolescent daughter emphatically reminds me is ridiculous to say. Why? Her response to me: “Dad, have you ever seen a brain not living in a body?” My daughter has a wonderful way of making me think about all sorts of things I might otherwise not consider. While she’s right, of course, in modern times we often forget that the brain in the head is a part of not just the nervous system, but also part of a whole bodily system. James said, “Mental states occasion also changes in the calibre (sic) of blood-vessels, or alteration in the heartbeats, or processes more subtle still, in glands and viscera. If these are taken into account, as well as acts which follow at some remote period because the mental state was once there, it will be safe

to lay down the general law that no mental modification ever occurs which is not accompanied or followed by a bodily change” (p. 3).

Here we can see that James knew that the mind wasn’t merely enskulled, it was fully embodied. Nevertheless, his emphasis was on bodily states being associated with mind, or even following mental states, but not causing or creating mental activities. Brain was seen, from long ago, to be the source of mental life. Mind in academic circles is a synonym for *brain activity*—events in the head and not the full body. As one illustrative but commonly stated example, a modern psychological text offers this view as the full glossary definition of mind: “The brain and its activities, including thoughts, emotion and behavior” (Cacioppo & Freberg, 2013).

These views of mind coming from brain are at least 2500 years old. As the neuroscientist Michael Graziano states: “The first known scientific account relating consciousness to the brain dates back to Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C....He realized that mind is something created by the brain and that it dies piece by piece as the brain dies.” He then goes on to quote Hippocrates’ *On the Sacred Disease*: “Men ought to know that from the brain, and from the brain alone, arise our pleasures, joys, laughter and jests, as well as our sorrows, pains, griefs and tears... The importance of Hippocrates’ insight that the brain is the source of the mind cannot be overstated.” (Graziano, 2014, p. 4).

Focusing on the brain in the head as a source of mind has been profoundly important in our lives for understanding challenges to mental health. For example, viewing those individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, as well those with other serious psychiatric conditions, such as autism, as experiencing some innate atypical functioning emanating from a brain with structural differences, rather than from something caused by what parents have done, or some weakness in a person’s character, has been a crucial shift in the field of mental health to look for more effective means of helping people and families in need.

Turning to the brain has enabled us to diminish the shaming and blaming of individuals and their families, a sad and unfortunately all-too-common aspect of past encounters with clinicians, in years not so long ago. Many individuals, too, have been helped with psychiatric medications, molecules considered to act at the level of brain activity. I say “considered” because of the finding that the mental

believe a person holds may be an equally powerful factor in some cases, known as a placebo effect, for a percentage of individuals with certain conditions where their beliefs have led to measurable improvements in external behavior and also in brain functioning. And when we remember that the mind can sometimes change the brain, even this view should be coupled with an understanding that training the mind might be of help even in the face of brain differences for some individuals.

Further support for this brain-centric view of mind comes from studies of individuals with lesions in specific areas of the brain. Neurology for centuries has known that specific lesions in specific areas lead to predictable changes in mental processes, such as thought, emotion, memory, language, and behavior. Seeing mind as related to brain has been extremely helpful, even life saving, for many people over this last century. Focusing on the brain and its impact on the mind has been an important part of advancing our understanding and interventions.

Yet these findings do not logically or scientifically mean that only the brain creates the mind, as is often stated. Brain and mind may in fact not be the same. Each may mutually influence the other as science is beginning to quantitatively reveal, for example, in studies of the impact of mental training on brain function and structure (Davidson & Begley, 2012). In other words, just because brain shapes mind, it doesn't mean mind cannot shape brain. To understand this, it is actually helpful to take a step back from the predominant view that "mind is brain activity" and open our minds to a bigger picture.

While understanding the brain is important for understanding mind, why would whatever creates, or causes, or constitutes, the mind be limited to what goes on above our shoulders? This dominant *brain-activity=mind* perspective, what philosopher Andy Clark calls a "brainbound" model (2011, page xxv), can also be called a "single skull" or "enskulled" view of mind, a view that, while common, does not take several elements of our mental life into account. One is that our mental activities, such as emotions, thoughts, and memories, are directly shaped by, if not outright created by, our body's whole state. So the mind can be seen as embodied, not just enskulled. Another fundamental issue is that our relationships with others, the social environment in which we live, directly influence our mental life. And here, too, perhaps our relationships create our mental life, not only

influencing it, but also being one of the sources of its very origins, not just what shapes it, but what gives rise to it. And so the mind in this way may also be seen as relational, as well as embodied.

Linguistics professor Christina Erneling (Erneling & Johnson, 2005) offers this perspective:

To learn to utter something meaningful—that is, to acquire semantically communicative skills—is not just to acquire the specific configuration of specific brain processes. It also involves having other people consider what one says as a piece of linguistic communication. If I promise you something verbally, it does not matter what the state of my brain is. The important thing, rather, is that my promise is taken as such by other people. This depends not just on my and your behavior and brain processes, but also on a social network of meaning and rules. To explain typically human mental phenomena only in terms of the brain is like trying to explain tennis as a competitive game by referring to the physics of ballistic trajectories...[I]n addition to analyzing mental capacities in terms of individual performances or brain structure, or computational architecture, one also has to take account of the social network that makes them possible. (p. 250)

So at a minimum we can see that beyond the head, the body and our relational world may be more than contextual factors influencing the mind—they perhaps may be fundamental to what the mind is. In other words, whatever mind is may be originating in our whole body and relationships, and not limited to what goes on between our ears. Wouldn't it be scientifically sound, then, to consider the possibility that mind is more than only brain activity? Couldn't we include the brain as part of something more, part of some larger process that involves the body as a whole as well as our relationships from which the mind emerges? Might this be a more complete, fuller view than simply stating mind is limited to activity in the head?

While the mind is certainly related in fundamental ways to brain activity, our mental life may not be limited to, or solely originating from, what goes on inside our skulls alone. Could the mind be something more than simply an outcome of the firing of neurons in the brain? And if this larger picture turns out to be true, what would that *something more* actually be?

## Our Identity and the Internal and Relational Origin of Mind

If who we are—both in our personal identity and felt experience of life—emerges as a mental process, a mental product, a function of mind, then who we are is who our mind is. In the journey ahead, we'll explore everything about the mind—not only the who, but also the what, where, when, why, and how of you, of your mind, of the mind.

We begin with this shared position as a starting place: The mind is shaped by, and perhaps even fully dependent upon, the brain in the head's function and structure. There is no argument against this as a point for us to begin. And so we fully embrace what the majority of mind/brain researchers state—and then propose that we extend the notion of mind further than the skull. The brain in the head concept is just the beginning and may not be the end point of our journey of exploration. We may ultimately choose to abandon this attempt at a larger view as we move forward, and perhaps we will eventually come to the commonly stated conclusion that “mind is only what brain does,” but for now let's accept the brain's importance in mental life and open our minds to the possibility that the mind may be something more than simply what goes on in the head. What I am suggesting to you is that we consider that the brain is an important component of a yet fuller story, a broader and more intricate story worth exploring for the benefit of all. That fuller story is what we are going to immerse ourselves in as we move along this exploration. Finding a fuller definition of mind is what our journey is all about.

Some academicians view mind independently of the brain. Philosophers, educators, and anthropologists have long described the mind as a socially constructed process. Written before much of our modern understanding of the brain was known as it is today, these socially-oriented academics see our identity, from our internal sense of self to the language we use, as being made from the fabric of social interactions embedded in the families and culture in which we live. Language, thought, feelings, and our sense of identity are woven from the interactions we have with other people. For example, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky considered thought to be internalized dialogue we've had with others (Vygotsky, 1986). The anthropologist Gregory Bateson saw mind as an emergent process of society (Bateson, 1972). And my own teacher of narrative, the cognitive psychologist Jerry

Bruner, considered stories as arising within relationships people have with each other (Bruner, 2003). Who we are, in these views, is the outcome of our social lives.

And so we have two ways of viewing mind that rarely find common ground: mind as a social function and mind as a neural function (Erneling & Johnson, 2005). Each perspective offers an important window into the nature of mind. But keeping them separate, while perhaps useful for carrying out research studies, and perhaps an understandable and often unavoidable outcome of the nature of a scientist's particular interests or proclivities for ways of perceiving reality, may not be useful for seeing the true nature of mind, one that is both embodied and relational.

But how can mind be both embodied and relational? How might one thing be in two seemingly distinct places at once?

How can we reconcile these two descriptive stances of the mind that come from thoughtful reflection and study by dedicated academicians over so many years, that the mind in one view is a social product, and the mind from another distinct view is a neural product? What is going on here? These two views represent what are usually seen as separate views of mental life. Could they actually be part of one essence? Is there a way to identify one system from which the mind might emerge, one system that could be embodied and relational, a view that embraces the internally neural and interpersonally social?

### Why this Book About the Mind?

In sum, something does not quite feel right about the notion that the statement “mind is what brain does” is the complete truth. We need to keep an open, well, mind about what the mind is in all its rich complexity. Subjectivity is not synonymous with brain activity. Consciousness is not synonymous with brain activity. Our profoundly relational mental lives are not synonymous with brain activity. The reality of consciousness and its inner subjective texture and the interpersonally social nature of mind, at a minimum, invite us to think beyond the buzzing of neural activity within the skull as the totality of the story of what the mind is.

I understand that this approach to mind may be different from the prevailing views expressed by a majority of modern academics



in psychology, psychiatry, and neuroscience, and held by many contemporary clinicians in fields of medicine and mental health. My own doubting mind makes me concerned about these proposals.

My scientific training, however, obligates me to keep an open mind about these questions, to not shut down options prematurely. My training as a physician and psychiatrist, and experience as a psychotherapist for over 30 years, has shown me the minds of those I work with seem to extend beyond the skull, beyond the skin. The mind is within us—within the whole body—and between us. It is within our connections to one another, and even to our larger environment, our planet. The question of what the essence of our mental lives truly may be is open for exploration. The nature of mind remains, from a scientific point of view, still a very open issue.

The purpose of this book, *Mind*, is to address this larger story of what the mind is in a direct and immersive way.

My invitation to you is to try to keep an open mind about these questions as we move along. This journey into the nature of mind may require that we re-examine our own beliefs about the mind as we dive deeper into these ideas. Will we come up with new views that have merit in your own life? I hope so, but you'll see what emerges as we move into the journey ahead. As we travel on this exploratory trip together, we may end up with more questions than answers. But hopefully the experience of inquiry into the nature of mind will be illuminating, even if we don't agree upon or even come to final answers.

For these and many other reasons we'll explore, we may wish to keep an open mind—whatever and wherever that mind is ultimately revealed to be—about this question of what the mind is. This sense that there may be something more to the mind than simply enskulled brain activity is not instead of brain, but rather in addition to it. We are not discarding the achievements of modern science; we are exploring them deeply, respecting them fully, and potentially expanding them to reveal a larger truth of what the mind is. We are opening the dialogue in a scientific way, inviting inquiry into mind for all, including academicians, clinicians, educators, students, parents, and anyone with an interest in the mind and mental health. The purpose of this journey is to hopefully broaden discussions, deepen insights, and widen understanding.

Opening the discussion about mind and mental health will hopefully enable us to more effectively pursue research, conceptualize and

conduct clinical work, organize educational programs, inform family life, deepen how we understand and live our individual life paths, and even shape society. This exploration holds the potential to deeply empower our personal lives, illuminating the nature of our minds and how we might cultivate more well-being in our day-to-day world.

Our modern life is often flooding us with information, digitally bombarding us yet also linking us across the globe; while at the same time we as a modern human species are more and more isolated and despairing, overwhelmed and alone. Who are we? And what are we to become if we don't conscientiously consider the consequences of how energy and information are flooding our lives? Now, more than ever, it is crucial that we clearly identify what the core of human life is, what the mind is, and learn how to cultivate the essence of mental health—to know what is essential to create a healthy mind.

One possible strategy would be to simply create a new word instead of *mind*, and then use that new term to clarify from where and how our interpersonal connections and embodied lives, subjective experience, inner essence, sense of purpose and meaning, and consciousness each arise. What would you call these essential features of our lives if you were not going to use the term *mind*?

Finding a different term that symbolizes a process that is distinct from “mind is equivalent to brain activity” is one approach. And maybe that's a fair solution. But this exploration is more than just a semantic discussion about terms, definitions, and interpretations. If the mind is a term for the centrality of our essence, for the heart of who we are, let's see if we can preserve those meanings of the term “mind” and see what this mind, this heart of being human, is truly all about. How about this suggestion: We use the term, “brain activity” for referencing neural firings. In this way, we are stating what it is, neuronal activations taking place within the skull, within the brain inside the head. Then we can freely explore the reality of mind in its fullness without evoking the common arguments I've heard, among them that this attempt at exploring a wider view “reverses science,” as some have said to me, since it says mind is more than brain activity. Even if mind fully depends on brain activity, it does not make mind the same as brain activity.

For now, for this beginning of our journey, let's stick with *mind* as our term and see how it goes. We can come back to new linguistic representations later if we choose. In our everyday language, between



you and me along this path we are about to embark upon, let's simply agree, for the moment, that *mind* will have the broad meaning of something that at times has an awareness with a subjective quality, and that is filled with information flow, with and without awareness.

For now, we don't need another term, but let's keep an open mind about it. And let's explore how we can clarify the nature of mind so we can know it deeply and support its function and development toward health fully.

### An Invitation

After an extensive review of a range of published academic, clinical, and popular texts, it has become clear that this combined *inner* and *inter* nature of mind is something rarely discussed in scientific, professional, or public circles. Sometimes inner is the focus, sometimes inter, but rarely both. But couldn't mind be both inner and inter? If we can define the essence of mind clearly we could more robustly help one another individually, in families, schools, and our larger human communities and societies. For these reasons, the time seems ripe to offer something that may help move the conversation forward about a broader view of mind.

Though I've written extensively about the mind academically (in *The Developing Mind*, *The Mindful Brain*, and *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*), discussed its applications in clinical practice (*Mindsight* and *The Mindful Therapist*), and explored everyday applications in various books for the general public including for adolescents and parents (*Brainstorm*, *Parenting from the Inside Out* [with Mary Hartzell], *The Whole-Brain Child* and *No-Drama Discipline* [both with Tina Payne Bryson]), a book that focuses deeply on this specific proposal of what the mind may in fact be seems needed, one that does so in a more direct and integrated manner.

By integrated what I mean is this: As the mind, at the very least, includes our inner subjective experience of being alive, our felt, embodied sense within conscious awareness, then a book focusing on the question of what the mind actually is may perhaps best be structured by inviting the reader and writer, you and me, to be present fully, feeling and reflecting on our own subjective mental experiences, as we move along in discussing the fundamental concepts. We need to become aware of our inner experiences beyond merely discussing facts, concepts, and ideas, devoid of inner felt awareness and subjective

textures. This is a way to invite your conscious mind to explore your personal experience as we move along. Ideas are able to have their greatest impact when they are combined with a fully felt experience. This is a choice I can offer to you as the author in the form of an invitation, one you can participate in, if you choose, as a reader. In this way, this book can be a conversation between you and me. I'll offer ideas, science, and experiences, and you can empower your own mind to receive and respond to these communications. As the pages and chapters of this journey unfold, your own mind will become a fundamental part of the exploration of what the mind is.

If the mind is truly relational, then this book needs to be as relational as possible as well as encouraging of your reflections on your inner felt experience. You may be reading the words these fingers of my body have typed, but the intention is for this to be a collaborative journey of discovery, one that invites your mind and my mind to be as present as possible.

In other words, the process of reading *Mind* ought to reflect the content of the book itself, the journey to explore what the mind may be.

If we leave out either the embodied or relational side of our mental lives, the inner and inter, we may miss the heart of what the mind truly is during our explorations. How can we do this? Here's an idea. If I, as the writer, can be present both personally and intellectually, perhaps you, as the reader, can too. This is how we can blend the scientific and personal as they become deeply interwoven in seeing the mind clearly.

Being scientific about the mind requires that we not only respect empirical findings, but also honor the subjective and interpersonal. Not a typical approach, perhaps, but it seems necessary to truly explore what the mind is.

That's my hope for this book, that this be a journey, for you and me, to openly explore the nature of our human mind.

### The Approach of Our Journey

We live our lives in each moment. Whether we are feeling our bodily sensations now, reflecting on the present with a filter of our experiences in the past, or becoming lost in memory, these all happen now. We anticipate and plan for the future in this moment as well.