

WHAT IS A MIND?

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



WEEK 1 UNDERSTANDING THE MIND

STEP 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO WHAT IS A MIND?

00:00:00

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Welcome, my name is Mark Solms. I'm professor in neuropsychology, and I'm also a psychoanalyst. And what my research and clinical work are about is the interface between neuropsychology and the neurosciences, on the one hand, and psychoanalysis on the other. We call this combination, *neuropsychanalysis*.

I want to tell you a story about how I come to be in this field, which is a true story, which I hope will give you some understanding also as to why I think it's important-- why what I want to tell you about in this course is important. When I was about six years old, one Sunday morning, my father came into my brother and my bedroom that we shared and woke us up for Sunday school, which is what we normally did on Sunday mornings. But on this Sunday morning he said, "boys, I know your mum wants you to go to Sunday school because she believes in that stuff. But I want you to know, I don't believe in that stuff, so if you don't want to go to Sunday school, you don't have to."

I thought: great, I'll sleep in. Don't have to go to Sunday school anymore. Until the full weight of the implications of what he said dawned on me, which was: well, then what happens about this business of being good and going to heaven when you die?

Maybe you don't go to heaven when you die. Maybe you're just gone when you die; and that caused me literal panic attacks. The panics then led to a sort of a despair because the further thought was: well, if that is the case, that I'm just going to be snuffed out for eternity, then what's the point of doing anything while I'm here? It's all going to come to nothing. And I'm not going to be here to experience any reward or pleasure from what I've achieved, so why achieve anything?

So some years later, I guess it must have been during my adolescence, I came up with some sort of-- the beginnings of a plan, which ended up being the course that I followed in my life, which was: the one thing that does seem worth doing in the circumstances I describe is to try to understand what is it then to be, to exist, to experience, to be a mind? What are minds? That seemed like possibly some sort of escape out of this solipsistic nightmare. Some external point of view on what

existence and experience really is might be one thing worth doing with your life, and that's what I then went on to do.

I trained in neuropsychology. I trained in psychoanalysis. And then I did decades of research on what a mind is, what makes it tick, how is it put together, what's it for? Studying, initially, brain mechanisms of dreaming, then brain mechanisms of emotion, then brain mechanisms of consciousness, and also trying to apply some of this basic knowledge to various mental disorders I studied, especially depression, but also the mental disorders that arise from brain disease.

What I want to do in this course is distill from those years of research and clinical experience some of the essential things that I believe I've learned about what the mind is and why we have one. And why I think it's important for you to listen to what I have to say is because, as I've told you, don't forget, you are your mind. It's all you are. That's all you have. Something certainly worth studying.



Mark Solms 2015

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