

REVIEW: B&P 10-17-2017 “Intersubjective Mental Behaviorism”

Brief Review

I dislike this manuscript intensely and I excoriate it page by page below. When I know the identity of an author I always look for already-published items as a context, but in this case, I had other reviews to do and so just started in on it. After finding how much I detested it, I wondered how on earth he had published in the *Review of General Psychology*, for whom I have reviewed and which in 2003 was a classy journal – since Doug Candland left it may have lost some class, but when Henriques published it was highly respected. I downloaded Henriques (2003) and his 2008 paper in *Theory and Psychology*, a journal I do not follow.

What a pleasant surprise in both cases! Both present the same “Tree of Knowledge” framework, but in a sophisticated, scholarly way and I am sure I would have accepted either of them, despite criticisms that a skimming shows that I would have. The 2003 paper includes 161 references and passages that I read are really excellent. I plan to read both and you need only have a look at any page in either article (I attach both) and you too will wonder how the same author could write those and then produce this miserable product! If he meant to write for a preteen audience he submitted to the wrong journal, but he is clearly capable of much, much better.

Long Review

I feel like I have just read a little book for a teenager (or even a preteen child) who asked, “What is epistemology?” To answer that question we refer the child to very, very low-level (age-appropriate) treatments of general science, philosophy, and psychology that might be found in a middle school library or a dentist’s waiting room. No wonder, since it is modeled on the Big History “media-rich” online program aimed at 9th and 10th graders, making history “about us” and fun, rather than high-brow actual history book stuff. This manuscript could be titled, “Big Psychology: The Story of Us.”

The main problems that have plagued us for thousands of years turn out to be easily solved if you accept “complicated genetic (or neuro or symbolic) information processing systems” as explanations for life, mind, and intersubjectivity! Why not?

- P2 The abstract claims that the use of lists of vague terms and illustrations modeled after commercial high school education programs (Big History) will “weave” together the objective, subjective, and intersubjective “angles/positions” and thus be “holistic.” I look up at my bookshelf and see my Freud Reader and Plato’s Dialogues and wonder how they, among countless others, dealt with those three categories? How did they manage without “complicated genetic/neuro/symbolic information processing system nonsense words to do the magic? At least the Abstract does warn the reader (not of *this* journal) that there will be low-level reading coming up.
- P3 The author takes for granted throughout that readers accept a truly simple epistemological dualism, featuring objective reality and perceivers who/that know that world, shown pages later to be a little theater in our head! Descartes did not believe that the only certain knowledge is sense experience (last lines), in fact, “the fluctuating testimony of

- the senses” is real/certain only for the fool. See Meditation I and his replies to Hobbes. There is no certainty in that little theater!
- P4 Your reference to the “supposed dichotomy” of knower and known gave me hope that the presentation would raise its level, but that hope faded quickly...
- P5 The periodic table shows that elements order neatly by weight, rather than by other characteristics, but in itself is not decisive evidence for objective reality. Can you call Wilber (2000) a “philosophical system” worth considering? Imagine how the publisher, Shambhala, ranks among scholars (Buddhists exempted)? Would Donald Davidson have used their services? Why not cite the Bible or Koran or Scientology as comparable systems? You absolutely cannot submit a manuscript (to anyone) with typos, like “mny.”
- P7 You cannot submit careless missing-article expressions, like “...such is big picture...!” The Tree of Knowledge to which you refer is not the one in Genesis, I suppose. The notion that some set of words will “solve the problem of psychology” (last few lines) is completely meaningless, since “complicated genetic/neuro/symbolic processing” will be doing all the work.
- P8 Your definitions of both behaviorism and cognitive psychology are absolutely wrong or, at best, simplifications straight out of the lowest-level high school textbook. At that level, Buddhism is reduced to “meditation” and yoga is “breath control.” There is no salvaging such trivializing of complicated views, but let me waste a few words anyway. First, behaviorists do not treat mind as “...a kind of behavior that is in need of explanation by natural, mechanistic causes.” NO! Mind is a nonentity and behavior does not require ‘natural mechanistic’ causes. Look at past issues of this journal and get an idea of what behaviorism is. Second, cognitive psychology is many things, but only the most trivial introductory book would define it as the study of the mind’s causing of behavior. All cognitive theories are representational, and the older theories liked information processing, but I know of none who would accept your little theater playing out scenes in the awesomely complex and rich neuro/psycho/symbolic processing magic of the wonderful brain! In the last paragraph you argue that intersubjectivity exists and can be explained by language and “advanced self-consciousness.” Why didn’t Berkeley and Hume notice that? Perhaps we should write to them and explain that we can indeed know the subjective experience of other people. Might the word “qualia” be used – I think not.
- P9 The use of “being-in-the-world” in the first paragraph is a kind of cheap name-dropping without mentioning Heidegger and then going on to show that your definition of “feeling” is simple folk psychology, unrelated to his definition. Here we see that intersubjectivity is merely communicating via word and movement – not really intersubjective. The separating of feeling and action is a really bad idea, especially when feeling is wholly passive and action can mean only muscles! This is a juvenile simplification, not some great achievement. Even Descartes would not agree to such a crass distinction. It has long been clear that the ordinary feeling of emotion must include body accompaniments, including muscular. Hawking is a poor example – if he were 100% paralyzed he would not be communicating at all. Does he feel normal emotion – of course not, “normal” includes muscular effects, though I am certain he would report that he certainly feels what he would call emotion.

And to write that he has largely “lost his ability to acting” (sic) means you are in LaLa land. How can anyone claim that Hawking has just been “feeling” these past years? Check his CV.

- P10 When I encountered “F ACT T S” it was clear that this must be the end of the gobbledygook and the narrative would become serious and scholarly, but no...
- P11 The bizarre language continued and intensified, so that the nerves affect muscles through “informational interfaces,” “Feeling emerges when the flow of neuronal information “ignites” the global neuronal workspace and gives rise to experiential consciousness...,” and since the Big Bang there has been “a wave of behavioral complexity that has emerged...,” appearing as the Matter, Life, Mind, and Culture cones. My goodness. The vocabulary may have exceeded the limits of the teen audience it addresses.
- P12 The Big Words continued as the level remained low, low, low, through a brush with emergent evolution (probably effects of the complicated wave of informational ignition) and led to a mention of Big History, the high school gimmick to make history fun and “about us,” the poor model for the ToK and Intersubjective Mental Behaviorism. This is becoming ever more distasteful as the reader feel more and more immersed in middle school material. I explain in the following paragraph as an aside.
[[There is a reference on page seven to E. O. Wilson’s (1998) *Consilience*, a term he borrowed from a mid-19th Century writer that hasn’t been overused, as “coherence” has. If readers pick any page or paragraph in that book, they will not find any of the pretentious nonsense about “complicated genetic or neuro or symbolic or cultural processing” or levels and stages subdivided into endless and pointless divisions that derive from the kind of folk wisdom that one hears in barrooms and on street corners from shabby people carrying large signs.]]
- P14 Again the reference to and stress upon “informational causes” in addition to mechanical causes. What, specifically, are they? Merely saying “energy, genes, neuro, culture” tells us nothing except that Life, Mind, Feeling, and so on appear magically. “Different, nested information processing systems” refer to the magic of energy/matter, matter/life, and so on? How does that inform anyone of anything? This vacuous chatter is getting repetitive and increasingly annoying.
- P15 Who needs a dippy “periodic table of behavior?” The classic periodic table tells us something new about matter – for example, the halogens are related in a coherent series of reactive gasses. What does anyone who has graduated from sixth grade learn from the arbitrary table on this page?
“Joint Points?” The Big Bang, Natural Selection, How many ways can you list? Soon “linkages” will be coming up? I have lost track of the number of lists that have already been announced.
- P16 Ditto
- P17 “Five Key Linkages” on top of the Joint Points, Domains, Complexity Levels, and so on. Does it require a whole page to say that scientists study behavior (of small things, big things)? Half a page to say that we assume an objective universe?
The objective, subjective, and intersubjective are not three key domains and I haven’t the patience to explain why.
- P19 This is an entire page that *explains* the standard dictionary definition of “behavior!” I know that the point it addresses, is banal, but does this remark deserve a reference?
“...in a course titled *Particle Physics for Nonphysicists*, the professor...”

- Sentence appearing in fifth line from the bottom has an extra verb (“is”).
- P20 We skip the “ultimate nature of the singularity?”
Our current understanding of the basics of physics, objects “...(i.e., particles and waves), fields, and the force interactions that take place between them...”, are the same terms you will find in Descartes’s physics!
- P21 The review of physics for the non-scholarly continues through this page.
When I see “information processing” as it is used in this paper, I read “magic.” Is there a better definition? (I know what IP is in normal usage, but not here.)
If everything is not just “energy and matter” (sic) then what is it? What’s “more?” Is it just magic information processing?
- P22 Indeed, just how Life originated is a “bit of a mystery!” Schrödinger didn’t know and as-yet-undiscovered laws of physics” is no answer at all.
- P23 The silly babble about Wikipedia definitions of RNA and Bray’s wetware add nothing sensible to the issue. You are stuck with “information processing” as magic somehow creating Life and so your ToK remains vacuous. Comparing a cell to an electrical circuit says nothing about the origins of Life and Bray is irrelevant.
Self-replicating entities have been built and do not require living bases.
You really should proofread: “...that there a fundamental distinction...” and
- P24 “...concept that allows biologist to understand...” First you need a verb, then an ‘s’.
Think about just what the statement, “emerges from genetic and epigenetic information processing” actually tells us. Is it simply, “Isn’t Nature Wonderful?” Look at all the information processing it does! Is life/mentality going to come from Intel soon?
Proofreading again: “Sentience or fully subjectivity emerges in...” Grammar be damned?
- P25 These colored diagrams do aim at the (early) high school audience who won’t ask about the “information exchanged in neural networks.”
The DNA:cell as is brain:animal lends an air of reasonableness, but that is squashed by “information processing control center,” which applies to both and is just a nonsense expression applied to both and to Matter and Life.
Why does “the mind” have to be “information instantiated and processed by the nervous system” and not simply the nervous system’s functioning, as Aristotle’s *de Anima*?
- P26 Separating function from structure was not anyone’s “central insight,” surely not the cognitive revolution’s work!
Your overt/covert mental behaviors are John B. Watson’s terms w/o the “mental.”
Gasp! Now we have old-fashioned drive theory – Cannon’s homeostasis – dolled up as Behavioral Investment Theory (BIT) and another list, this time of six commonplaces!
- P27 Wouldn’t you know – consciousness turns out to be the result of some kind of hokum IP, emerging due to the “evolution of layers of neuro-information processing.”
Lists, lists, lists: now three primary domains, three components.
BIT’s motivational theory is essentially hedonistic and the author sees that as Skinnerian.
- P28 Social behavior, language, a sort of intersubjectivity, and another reference to Christian (2005), the promoter (TED talks and all) of the Big History method for teaching teens.
- P29 Another colorful figure to show that language is related to culture – surprise!
The Justification Hypothesis gives another list – three items – the last of which gives us another list of three!

- This list of three kinds of consciousness – experiential, private self-consciousness, and public self-consciousness seem awfully familiar and one might think that they relate to psychotic states, brain damage, or at least to something mentioned by Freud, Janet, Ribot, James, or even Ellen Langer, but no hint here. A “Freudian Filter” shows up on the next page, so maybe there will be something. Otherwise, we continue with a load of off-the-top-of-the-head proposals heretofore unknown to science (or to psychology).
- P30 Was attribution theory never invented? This whole section is proposed as if psychology just began this morning, yet it includes bits and pieces of proposals over the past century or two, presented at middle-school level.
- P31 As an example, Goffman’s public/private persona argument was news to some in 1959, certainly that theme is shopworn by now.
The “Freudian filter” and “Rogerian filter” reflect a lack of real familiarity with either Freud or Rogers. Freud ignored the “here and now?”
- P32 I think that “conscious filtering” was well known to John Locke, not to mention Plato and Aristotle (and Descartes, and.....so on).
To whom would the concept of “self justification” be news? Again – attribution theory is old.
Why, oh why would anyone want to separate culture from technology, ecology, and the rest? Just so you can make a chart for high school kids – and make them less intelligent! What a load of meaningless, pretentious hooey this is.
- P33 I am now reading a fifth-grade account of the rapid development of civilization over the past few centuries and wonder what the ToK adds. Of course biological evolution is not the whole explanation!
Shaffer (1998) “articulated a conceptualization” or did he merely suggest something about recipes? Is a detailed example really necessary?
- P34 Sherif was not the only one or the first to show the effect of group norms on perception. It is nice to see at least this little reference to actual data.
Goldman (2007) is not the best reference, but he goes along with other broad histories.
- P35 This whole page could be condensed to a sentence and still communicate only common knowledge.
- P36 Are there really Intersubjective Mental Behaviorists around?
Figure 7 is really fourth-grade level folk psychology with a few modern terms inserted.
- P37 Cells, genes, nervous system as computational control system – is this a 5th-grade text?
He has conscious access “...because he is reporting on it?” My goodness!
- P38 On and on.....all is behavior, including mental behavior and behavior of atoms, and...
- P39 Since Culture>Mind>Life>Matter, all nested, Figure 8 is really pointless.
Calling the mind “the flow of information in the nervous system” is really lame!
“Feeling” as a subjective theater, action as solely muscular, claiming that language wholly accounts for intersubjectivity, and thought as essentially justification systems all amounts to a truly low-level folk psychology account, suitable only for children who are told that they will understand reality better when they grow up.
- P40 Given the previous figures, which are not complicated, I fail to see the point of what must be Figure 10.
The conclusion is old news and capable people like Richard Rorty and many others have dealt with it. The answer to objectivism versus subjectivism is not to diagram and sort and arrange the items that comprise folk psychology.

The arguments here tie together the objective, subjective, and intersubjective only by manipulation of concepts that belong in fifth grade science classes.