

Review of: "On the Meaning of Psychological Concepts: Is There Still a Need for Psychological Concepts in the Empirical Sciences?"

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On the Meaning of Psychological Concepts SD Comments

The author raises an important question in this paper and makes some interesting points and observations, but I had trouble following and unpacking the argument.

This paper would benefit from editing, proofreading and streamlining. Many of the points are made over and over again and the reader is left with the impression that the argument is not only repetitious, but at times circular.

While I do not feel that I can provide an overall critique I have a few observations that may be useful or of interest to the author.

There is an imprecision of language, for example, when.... The author asserts that introspection is unreliable, and then says that it is reliable without specifying the different senses of "reliability."

There is also an imprecision in the thinking at times. For example, at one point the author writes, "If one feels happy, one's description of the happy feeling must be correct." Why is this so? One could use the wrong language in describing one's happiness. Perhaps the author means "If one feels happy, one's assertion of feeling happy must be correct," but this would be a tautology that says nothing of interest. As a psychologist, I am not certain that even if one *sincerely asserts that one feels happy that one must be correct*. I am a clinical psychologist and just yesterday I saw a client who denied that he was depressed, but whose behavior and narrative belied a severe depression and who provided classically depressive responses to the Rorschach. In such cases, I am inclined to say that the individual has limited awareness or insight into his psychological states.

The "meaning" of a psychological concept may be different from the phenomenon itself. The meaning of a psychological concept could involve a range of things that could include typical behavior, a certain type of experience, and a social context. This would be what Weber called an ideal type. But there may be variants in which only one or two of these are present. I may, for example, experience feelings, without outwardly, showing them in my behavior, I may behave angrily (or depressively) without feeling angry or depressed, and my "feelings" and behavior may not be comprehensible within the social or interpersonal context in which they occur. Such cases may be imperfect approximations to the full ideal type of anger or depression.

The author is of the view that it is obvious that a purely behavioral or physicalist understanding of psychological states is impossible. When an individual, for example, in a courtroom setting testifies about their own memory, feelings, thoughts, etc. they are clearly not making observations about their own behavior in context. Agreed. Yet, this does not mean that the *meaning* of their mental state is not in *some ways* intrinsically connected to their (and others') behavior in a social context. I would ask, how would an individual learn to name and describe their inner states unless they were taught to do so on the basis of observations of their behavior by others and their own observations of others' behavior? No parent directly peers into it a child's expectations, intentions, joy, depression, hopes, etc., but rather they observe their expecting, intentional, depressive behavior, etc., and on this basis teach their child to label their inner states associated with such behavior.

The author makes an excellent point that when researchers who deny the significance of introspection make observations in psychological experiments, they must rely on their own inner mental states, i.e., their perceptions, memory, thoughts, etc. This the author refers to as a contradiction and reports to resolve this contradiction in the course of the paper. But it is unclear what this resolution consists of.

At various points in the article, the author points out the contradiction between behavioral and introspective accounts of mental states but, in my view, without clearly explicating this, attempts to eliminate and deny that there is such a contradiction.

I think that there is a very complex, relationship and interaction between inner states and behavior, and that this interaction informs both the experience and meaning of psychological concepts, but I don't think that this paper fully does justice to this interactive complexity. An alternative point of view is that there is a *coincidentia oppositorum* between these apparently contradictory points of view, that, in fact, both introspective and behavioral/Wittgenstein accounts of our mental life are true, and that the truth of each of these opposed accounts is actually dependent upon its opposite. Such Buddhist, or dialetheistic logic may be necessary in order to account for the phenomenon in question. The behaviorist view of mental states is necessary in order to account for our learning to label and understand the meaning of our inner states, but in turn such inner states are required in order to make the observations that result in the behaviorist view. The author hints around the interdependence without articulating it

(My own view is that it is precisely this kind of interdependence that is uncovered in many presumed philosophical contradictions)

I do like the idea of calling the philosophical behaviorist on the contradiction that derives from their inevitable reliance on their own respective states. A similar contradiction is present in the physicalist/determinist who holds rational thinking is reducible to a brain process and that free-will does not exist. If these claims were true, the physicalist would have no rational basis for believing the validity of the ideas produced by their own brain and would not be able to freely and rationally, choose to manipulate the experimental variables that result in the purported evidence for determinism.

It is unclear what the author's intent is with respect to an emoji symbol. Yes, it means "joy" for the physicalist like it does for everybody else, but this is only a translation between two modes of symbolism, and doesn't touch the essence of the

phenomenon.