

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

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I must admit that I really had a hard time in trying to follow Mika Suojanen's line of reasoning, and I am not sure inasmuch I succeeded. Therefore, some of the following remarks may be based on my misunderstanding.

Suojanen argues that "empirical psychologists and cognitive scientists" exclusively rely on the study of physiological processes and external behaviour as reliable sources of evidence for explaining psychological processes. This, however, deprives these empirical sciences of "psychological concepts" which according to his view can only be based on introspection. As introspection is considered as an unreliable method by these disciplines, this results in a dilemma of psychological concepts being void of meaning. Furthermore, the assumption that introspection is unreliable presupposes its existence, which may also be considered as a contradiction in terms.

I agree with Suojanen's claim that it is hard to imagine a meaningful psychological science in which introspection does not play any role, and in my view, this does not characterize the state of the field. However, what is widely accepted in empirical psychology is that the role of introspection should be limited to the 'context of discovery', whereas introspection should be excluded from the 'context of justification' because of the unreliability of the introspective method. Nevertheless, I agree that a psychological science that restricts itself to the study of physiological processes and external behaviour is indeed an anemic endeavour. But the reason for this is not a dismissal of introspection but a neglect of the functions of psychological processes and overt behaviour. Fortunately, such considerations prevail in contemporary psychology and cognitive science. Because of this, Suojanen's characterizations of these fields seems to construe some straw man.

It is widely acknowledged that the function of cognition and behaviour is to control organismic states and the environment ("To behave is to control perception", cf. Powers, 1973). Psychological states, and the processes that produce them, are not "about themselves" (as Suojanen seems to suggest by his "concept of identity") but about future states. Cognition is essentially predictive (cf. Friston, 2010) and ultimately aims for the maintenance of organismic integrity. Even introspection has always a 'distal reference' (referring to internal or environmental events) – we do not 'perceive our brain states' (Prinz, 1992). There is no 'perception of the general concept of perception', and Suojanen's critique of Gibson's notion of 'direct perception' seems to be based on a misunderstanding as Gibson claimed that we perceive our environment in terms of affordances, i.e., possible actions. Therefore, if we aim for an understanding of psychological concepts, we should direct out attention more to the structure of our environment instead of directing it inwards.

To understand that a mouse is anxious about a cat, it suffices to know that a cat is a predator loving rats and to observe that the mouse engages in activities (like freezing or fleeing) that increase its chance to preserve its organismic integrity. Knowing that we also would engage in activities that maintain or increase the physical distance to a potential threat would assist our understanding of the likely emotional state of the mouse and its function. However, having a grasp on how it feels like when we are anxious ourselves is not necessarily helpful in this respect (not least because our behavioural options differ vastly from the mouse's ones).

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