
Rooting the Tree of Knowledge: A Response to Henriques' "Psychology Defined"

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Neither science nor culture could exist without a participant–observer and a conceiving human mind. Being-in-the-world, or "Dasein," as Heidegger termed it, is fundamental to any conceptual understanding we have of how things work in the universe. There is no view from nowhere. Psychology is the primordial ground in which the tree of knowledge has its roots. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. *J Clin Psychol* 60: 1255–1258, 2004.

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Attempting to identify the wellspring of knowledge, Martin Heidegger (1956) took issue with Descartes and wrote, "Thus the whole of philosophy is like a tree: the roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches that issue from the trunk are all the other sciences" (p. 107). Ignoring its philosophical roots, physics has gone on to declare itself the "mother of all sciences" and the basis of universal knowledge. But Heidegger stated that if physics, and metaphysics, are the fundament of the tree of knowledge, they must be rooted in some nourishing ground. "In what soil do the roots of the tree of philosophy have their hold?" he asked, "Out of what ground do the roots—and through them the whole tree—receive their nourishing juices and strength?" (p. 207). Heidegger's answer to his own rhetorical questions was that "Being" is concealed in Descartes' characterization of the sciences. Heidegger asserted that Being (with a capital "B") or "Dasein" (Being-in-the-world) was the subjective basis of human experiencing. He stated that "being" (lower case "b") is the mere object that exists. Physics, and the scientific branches that issue from it, study the "being" and behavior of objects without claiming any necessity for "Being." As Leahey (2000) put it, "Science searches for purely objective knowledge, for a description of the world in which people play no part at all: knowledge that has no point of view" (pp. 22–23). Nagel (1986) called this "the view from

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nowhere" (p. 14). Intuition would instruct us that such a situation is impossible: if there is an observation, there must be an observer. Such an observation may take place within the domain of physics, but the observation itself belongs to psychology.

Early in the 20th century, psychology attempted to put itself on the same footing as physics. Behaviorists gave up experiencing altogether. This movement was famously taunted by its detractors as "physics envy." Behaviorists thought that if psychology was to have any credibility in the world of science, it needed a view from nowhere. Paradoxically, after giving up subjectivity, psychologists began to refer to the objectified beings they were observing as "subjects." Rollo May (1979) pointed out that our "human dilemma" is that we can be both subject and object at the same time, but to gain a place in the scientific pantheon, psychology joined with the other sciences in the study of subject-less objects. By doing so, psychology gave up its primordial position as the study of (and from) the "ground of Being," and attempted to climb the tree of knowledge to be a credible science. Perhaps this was because in the beginning God (or the Big Bang) first created the heavens and the earth and it was only later that a human as an experiencing Being appeared on the scene. This would seem to place physics as the precursor to psychology. The rift between clinicians and experimentalists in the field of psychology has persisted because many practitioners have clung to the notion that people have experiences in addition to behaviors. Henriques observes that this situation has created a heterogeneous federation of subdisciplines within psychology (this issue, p. 1207), causing us to wonder whether we can exist as a unified discipline. He calls this the "to be or not to be" question of the field (this issue, p. 1207). I consider the main issue to be whether psychology will allow the observer back into the observation, and take its rightful place as the nourishing ground of all the sciences. This is the "to Be or not to Be" question.

Fritjof Capra (1975), who wrote an influential book entitled *The Tao of Physics*, suggested that, while there may be only one general reality, it has multiple aspects. At different levels of analysis, there exist different levels of reality. These multiple aspects of reality might be considered as levels of complexity.

[If you are dealing] . . . with a few atoms, you do quantum mechanics. If you take many atoms, you can still do it, because we have various techniques of approximation, which allow us to deal with many atoms. But if there are too many, it gets too complex. However, with many, many more atoms it becomes easy again. You do chemistry. See? Then you let the atoms or molecules become larger and interact and the chemistry becomes exceedingly complex until, at a certain level, you realize, my God, they're forming cells. Then you do cellular biology. Then the cells become very complex, impossible to handle, until suddenly you realize that it's a tissue. And then the tissues become complex and you realize that's an organ, and then the organ becomes very complex; let's say you are dealing with a brain, the most complex organ, and then suddenly you can switch to a totally different level and you do psychology instead of neurophysiology. (p. 235)

This portrayal of reality as scientific disciplines stacked in a hierarchy, their position determined by their level of complexity, is the idea I believe Henriques is attempting to convey in his Tree of Knowledge (ToK) model (this issue, p. 1209). This physics-to-psychology continuum represents a single reality, but at each transition point (or "joint") two disciplines become hybrids. Henriques is attempting to resolve the dispute between those who would have psychology be a "psychological formalism" engaging in the study of behavior and those who wish it to be a "human psychology" of the mind. Just as neuroscience becomes part of a hybrid when brain and behavior are considered, so too does psychological formalism bond with human psychology at the transition joint between these two views. One does not oppose the other. What you are studying is determined by where you are looking. No scientist doubts that psychology is somehow based on brain

events, which are, in turn, based in biology, which is based on matter and energy, and so it would seem that physics is truly the mother of us all. But each level is a whole and cannot be understood by reducing it to the level beneath it. Without its substrate, the more complex level could not exist, but the substrate cannot explain the emergence of the level above. Such attempts at “nothing buttery” (Davies, 1983) have fallen short because reductionist analysis always fails to encapsulate the whole. It is like trying to explain the significance of a painting by Seurat by pointing to the dabs and dots of paint on the canvas.

I believe that Henriques’ attempt at a unifying model is a step in the right direction, but I have two problems with the ToK model as it currently exists. First, despite Henriques’ use of the definition of mind found in Webster’s dictionary, I think it is more useful to see brain and mind as representing a transition point that exists within psychological formalism. Brain is the hardware and mind is the software and read-out from the brain, which could include the sentience possessed by animals. It is beyond this level that *human* psychology comes into play. There is a missing transition joint here. From mind will emerge human consciousness, self-awareness, and free will. This level appears to be absent from the ToK model, or is perhaps caught in the transition between mind and culture. I don’t understand Henriques’ “justification hypothesis” (JH) well enough to state whether I believe it is sufficient to create both consciousness and culture (this issue, p. 1216). My intuition cries for other processes besides justification.

Since he refers to his model as a tree, I would also like to see some branching toward the top. I may be pushing his metaphor too far, but it seems to me that culture is an aggregate of multiple individuals behaving, thinking, feeling, and reflecting together to create a mutual set of traditions and beliefs. Culture is probably a combination of memes (Dawkins, 1989), swarms (Johnson, 2001), habitual behavior patterns, negotiated practices, statutory law, and myth. The origins of culture seem to reside in both psychological formalism and human psychology, and growing, in part, out of our biological inheritance. The ToK model resembles a stack of cones, one on top of the other, forming a hierarchy from matter at its base to culture at its top. Mind appears higher up than either life or matter on the model. Of course, we would assume this to be the natural order of things, but it is not the psychological order of things. Because science is culture, and because it would not exist at all without there first existing an experiencing human Being, psychology is everywhere on the model of science and social science.

Models are always problematic when it comes to accurately portraying anything. I believe the ToK model is as useful as any. However, if it is to be a tree, I would prefer one on which the branches of mind and culture bend downward toward the nourishing ground, more a willow than an oak. The Big Bang and the dinosaurs may have been here long before we humans were, but if we hadn’t come along, they might as well have not existed, because nobody would know about it. The basic epistemological issue is that nothing could be known if we humans did not have the capacity to know. Everything is psychology. It is psychology—not physics—that is the mother of all sciences.

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