

Human Development

Letters to the Editor

Does Emotion Rule Cognition?

At the outset of the behaviorist revolution, R.S. Woodworth [1918] wrote that psychology had first lost its soul, then its mind, and consciousness, too (and he did it in verse). Psychology began to get its mind back with the cognitive revolution, which promoted the idea that learning constituted a change in knowledge, not in behavior, that knowledge and expectations mediated between stimulus and response, and that how the person perceived the situation determined his or her behavior in that situation. The cognitive revolution was a good thing for psychology, but it set the stage for two other developments that were maybe not so good.

One, which Turiel [2010] discussed at length, has been the emergence of what I have come to think of as a 'People Are Stupid' school in psychology, which holds that people are fundamentally irrational: we don't think very hard about anything, and we let our emotions and motives get in the way of their cognition. We usually operate on 'automatic pilot': meaning that we don't pay too much attention to what is going on, or what we are doing, so that we are swayed by first impressions and other immediate responses. Our behavior is mostly unconscious, and our 'reasons' little more than post hoc rationalizations for our behavior. We don't know what we like or what we want, and we can't predict how we will feel about future events. And, just to put the cherry on the sundae, we're so stupid we don't realize how stupid we are. As Turiel noted, this point of view now seems to have captured the attention of a number of behavioral economists.

Although its sources are many and varied, stupidism seems to have arisen mostly out of social psychological work on errors and biases in social judgment – and, somewhat later, on the popularity of the concept of automaticity. But that cannot be the complete explanation. As Turiel [2010] noted, developmental psychologists have long based their theories on an analysis of children's errors, without ever arguing that children were stupid. Actually, some tinge of stupidism can be found in certain maturationist approaches to development. For example, the calculation of

IQ based on mental age does seem to imply that children are short, stupid adults. But ever since Piaget, the catchphrase for developmental psychology has been 'Babies are a lot smarter than we think'. Similarly, Kahneman and Tversky relied on evidence of errors to overthrow received ideas about rational choice, without ever slipping into stupidism – though, as Turiel correctly noted, some who followed them were not so careful. And cognitive psychologists, who were responsible for the concept of automaticity in the first place, never hopped on the automaticity juggernaut: instead, they assumed that experience, thought, and action were mediated by automatic and controlled processes acting in concert, and developed techniques for evaluating their separate effects [e.g., Jacoby, 1991].

In his editorial, Turiel [2010] pointed to another interesting turn of events, which is that the cognitive revolution seems to have spawned a kind of *affective counterrevolution*. While some cognitive psychologists define *cognition* broadly, to include all aspects of mental life, one unintended result of the cognitive revolution was to establish a kind of hegemony of cognition within psychology, in which the rest of mental life was virtually ignored. How else to explain the fact that every department of psychology in the world offers a vast panoply of separate courses covering sensation and perception, learning, memory, thinking, language, cognitive development, cognitive neuroscience, and even comparative cognition, but nothing even remotely comparable for emotion or motivation? Back in the 18th century, before there was a scientific psychology, Kant [1790/1928] had argued that knowledge, feeling, and desire were the three irreducible faculties of the mind. But following the lead of Schachter and Singer, many psychologists embraced cognitive evaluation accounts of emotion, which seemed to reduce affect to cognition: we don't actually *feel* happy or sad, we just *believe* we do. Frankly, psychology was due for a corrective, and I for one welcomed it.

But it is one thing to inject some warmth into an admittedly cold vision of human information processing, or to argue that some aspects of emotion are independent of cognition, perhaps even reflexive in nature, or to expand the curriculum to give due props to emotion and motivation. It is another thing entirely to replace the hegemony of the cognitive with a hegemony of the emotional – which is what sometimes seems to be happening today. Just as we didn't have a cognitive revolution only to find out that Skinner got it right the first time, we didn't evolve a neocortex so we could discover that it's not really necessary, it might even be harmful, and that the paleocortex of the limbic system [MacLean, 1990] will do us just fine.

In his editorial, Turiel [2010] rightly bemoaned these developments within psychology, as well as the proliferation of these ideas in the popular press – where, if we are not careful, they will get the same grip on the culture that Freudian psychoanalysis had for much of the 20th century (and to the same woeful effect). But he's not arguing a revanchist position, seeking to reclaim cognitivist territory lost to some intuitivist-affectivist coalition. Rather, as I read him, he's arguing for

a balanced view of mind and behavior, in which cognition and emotion, conscious and unconscious processes, deliberation and intuition, all get their rightful place. It's probably the only way that psychology can get its soul back.

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Reasoning: It's Not All in the Head

The trends in psychology that Elliot Turiel [2010] criticized in his editorial, 'Snap judgments', have also made their mark in moral and political philosophy. The projects of understanding, analyzing, and trying to improve our reasoning about moral and political matters are criticized as naively ignoring new scientific evidence about how the human brain works, evidence that purports to show that the phenomenology of reasoning is all just a smoke screen hiding from view a set of more or less determined practices rooted in our emotional or instinctual response mechanisms. The aversion to scientific evidence, whether in the form of traditional psychological experiments or fMRI scans, has tended to enter the philosophical discussion only on one side, however. It might seem as if skeptics about reasoning have the unanimous backing of psychology and cognitive science. And so Turiel's defense of cognitivism in psychology comes as a particularly welcome reminder that philosophers who still find thinking about practical reasoning useful have allies in the behavioral sciences.