

Book Review

SMITH, NOEL W. *Current Systems in Psychology: History, Theory, Research, and Applications*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001. Pp. xiv + 430. ISBN 0-8304-1484-8.

In much the same way as introductory textbooks in psychology can be described as homogenous, most history and systems textbooks tend to follow similar approaches in their treatment of common material. In general, they take a "dates and personalities" approach and cover the classical systems in psychology. This approach can be doubly limiting if you are interested in knowing a lot about behavior analysis. Most students come away with a general feeling that behaviorism was an interesting offshoot that is no longer relevant. There is no delineation between methodological and radical behaviorism and Hull, Tolman, Watson, and Skinner usually fall under one umbrella. Although cognitive psychology is indeed the dominant system, very few cognitive psychologists would assert that it is the only system operating or even agree on a common approach to their science. J. R. Kantor published for over 60 years and very little is ever said in modern history textbooks about interbehaviorism. One exception is Lundin's (1996) text that devotes eight pages to Kantor's work. Tellingly, interbehaviorism is subsumed under the general section on behaviorism that includes Guthrie, Hull, Skinner, and Bandura. Noel Smith's *Current Systems in Psychology* takes an entirely different approach. Instead of mechanically categorizing people and dates, Smith takes a unique approach in that it is more systematic and coherent. Psychological systems are grouped according to their epistemologies and sources of causation. The result is a textbook written for upper-division undergraduates and graduate students that does not get mired in the minutia. Students will be able to grasp the overarching themes in psychology and gain a broad understanding of psychological systems.

Smith's stated goal is to provide an extended treatment of 16 current systems in psychology. The emphasis on *current* systems is profound. Unlike other history textbooks that cover the classical systems (e.g., structuralism, functionalism, Gestalt, associationism, methodological behaviorism, and psychoanalysis) and then inexplicably end around 1950, this text covers 16 different psychological systems and is completely current. That is, it includes systems that developed in the last decade or so (i.e., direct realism or evolutionary psychology). Also unlike most history books, Smith acknowledges his biases right up front, identifying himself as a "contextual interactionist." Another overarching goal is to provide an informed choice to readers. In this regard, Smith covers all of the classical systems plus several "interactional" systems that rarely, if ever, find equal treatment in history texts.

In addition to history and systems courses, this book would be useful in psychological philosophy courses or philosophy of science courses. The approach to history is different from those you will find elsewhere. Instead of focusing on personalities and dates the focus is on philosophical systems. There are no photographs of Wundt or Watson, only text and the occasional diagram to

illustrate a point. Smith begins by dividing psychological systems into four broad categories based upon their epistemology or causation; organocentric, envirocentric, sociocentric, and noncentric. Organocentrism comes first and includes humanism, cognitive psychology, and psychoanalysis. Following this are the envirocentric systems such as behavior analysis and eco-behavioral science. The single sociocentric system is postmodernism or social constructionism. Noncentric systems like dialectical psychology, interbehavioral psychology, operant subjectivity, and phenomenological psychology make up the fourth major grouping. A final chapter details the six remaining systems and includes community psychology, direct realism, ecological psychology, environmental psychology, evolutionary psychology, and probabilistic epigenetic psychology.

The text begins in Chapter 2 with a survey of the historical background of the field and the chapter concludes with a short primer on the logic of science. This is a noteworthy chapter for its thoroughness and detail. A large portion of the chapter is devoted to history and can be seen as a brief summary of J. R. Kantor's 2-volume *Scientific Evolution of Psychology* (1963, 1969). It shares the same kind of perspective and scope of history that is included in the over 800 pages in the Kantor volumes and does so in about 50 pages. The remainder of the chapter serves as a brief introduction to the logic of science that any student would benefit from greatly. The author covers the differences between constructs and events, mind-body dualism, reductionism, privacy, and knowability.

The emphasis on informed choice among psychological systems is evident in the unique structure of the rest of the book. Each chapter begins with an explication of the particular system (i.e., cognitive psychology). After a thorough overview, Smith includes a section on the postulates that each system is based upon. In most cases, the postulates are "implied." Unfortunately, it is quite rare to find the postulates of a system systematically outlined. Therefore, postulates come in three flavors; implicit, semiexplicit, and explicit. Interbehavioral psychology is the only system with explicit postulates, the rest are either implied (e.g., behavior analysis) or semiexplicit (e.g., psychoanalysis). The postulate systems are divided into protopostulates (general guiding assumptions about science), metapostulates (supportive assumptions for a particular science), and postulates (subject matter assumptions). This degree of organization is very useful to students and teachers alike. The postulate system provides a nice summation of the particular system and allows considerable class discussion of a higher than average intellectual caliber. For example, a postulate like *Humans are part body and part mind, and mind is different from behavior* and its corollary *Mind is self-causative* say a lot about the system and generate class discussion quite readily. In fact, it would be possible for students to study the postulate systems alone and glean a great deal about the specific system under discussion.

The next major feature of each chapter is a description of the psychotherapeutic approach of each psychological system. This was very useful to my graduate students who were training to become clinicians. They approached such a class with some apprehension but found the description of various therapies of particular interest. I don't think they had realized how truly behavioral their approach to treatment was. They had assumed that they do cognitive therapy or cognitive-behavioral therapy. The text makes the relationship between behavior analysis, methodological behaviorism, and cognitive psychology very clear and generated a lot of discussion about each. For example, the differences between cognitive therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy become crystal clear after reading and discussing the aforementioned material.

Each chapter closes by comparing the present system to many of the others

in the book and then offers a substantive critique. For example, cognitive psychology is compared and contrasted with behavior analysis, humanism, interbehaviorism, operant subjectivity, phenomenological and existential psychology, and psychoanalysis. Much perspective is gained by relating systems in this way and explaining how they differ and what they agree upon. Of particular value was the discussion of cognitive psychology and its direct relation to methodological behaviorism, as opposed to radical behaviorism. In the critique, Smith offers a substantial discussion of each system that tends to run several pages and remains objective throughout. He is able to find something of note in each of the systems, although some systems lend themselves to criticism more readily than others. The analysis is from a system construction viewpoint and the reader will learn that some systems have built upon fairly fragile philosophical foundations.

Overall, there were several features of this text that make it quite remarkable. First, the analysis of cognitive psychology is very well done. Smith clearly explains the relation of cognitive psychology to methodological behaviorism. He also describes the immense diversity within cognitive psychology. That is, there seem to be many different "versions" and Smith describes each well. Second, the description of psychoanalysis includes Freud only briefly, spending most of the chapter on the various additions and mutations from which the neo-Freudians have appeared. The class was surprised to learn that psychoanalysis is still very much alive and remains interesting. Third, and finally, the entire book has a comprehensiveness that readers will appreciate. Smith includes the contributions of Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, and Chinese philosophies, as well as those of the traditional Western philosophies.

I used this book in a course for upper-division undergraduates and graduate students without any particular problems. In fact, one student has already remarked that it gave her a whole new understanding of some of the things she is learning in subsequent psychology courses. She is enrolled in a sex roles course and has found that the treatments of humanism and postmodernism have given her the upper hand in the material she is now learning. That, to me, is reason enough to expend the time and effort to summarize and without reservation recommend this textbook to interested readers.

References

- Kantor, J. R. (1963-1969). *The scientific evolution of psychology* (2 vols.). Chicago, IL: Principia.
- Lundin, R. W. (1996). *Theories and systems of psychology* (5th ed.). Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Co.

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