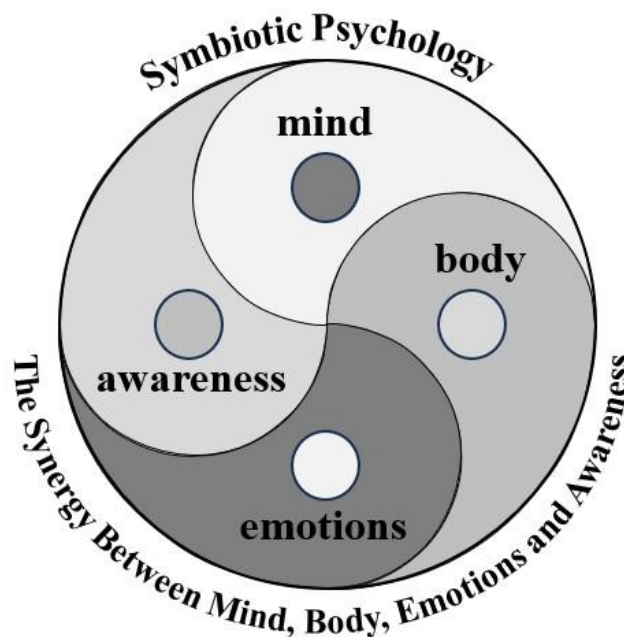


Cognitive-Emotional Operant Conditioning: A Psychological Unified Field Theory (rev2026-08-23a)

By: Andrew O. Jackson



Note: further logic, arguments, citations, and references for claims made in the following essay can be found in my technical paper, [“Cognitive Regulation with Emotional Awareness: The Linguistic Semantics of Cognitive vs. Emotional Dysregulation”](https://symbioticpsychology.com/) (a free PDF download is available from <https://symbioticpsychology.com/>).

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All my work is dedicated to a promising young University of
Wisconsin long distance runner who committed suicide.

Sarah Shulze (2000-2022)

We taught her how to run, but not how to live.

Cognitive-Emotional Operant Conditioning:
A Psychological Unified Field Theory
(rev2026-08-23a)

Psychological unified field theory integrates the symbiotic harmony between 1) cognition, 2) physiology, 3) behavior, 4) emotions, and 5) conscious awareness and focus:

Cognition precipitates the physiology that animates behavior and conscious perceives as emotions. Humanity's individual cognitive-emotional operant conditioning mechanism has evolved to cognitively appraise and utilize emotional awareness to:

(a) enhance emotionally good-feeling cognitive activities that precipitate a healthy, robust, and biochemically balanced physiology conducive to successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess when conscious awareness is dwelling and focused upon that which IS wanted, desired, and intended in life's adventures and

(b) dissuade emotionally bad-feeling cognitive activities that precipitate an unhealthy and biochemically imbalanced physiology associated with major depressive disorder, psychotic mania, and schizophrenic tendencies when conscious awareness is habitually dwelling and focused upon that which IS NOT wanted, desired, and intended in life's adventures.

Which leads to the question, do (a) emotions... or does (b) the cognitive act of appraisal itself... precipitate the changes and states neurology, biochemistry, and physiology that animates and drives behavior? That is, could emotions be a correlative effect and perception of changes and states of physiological being rather than causal to these changes and states?

And, what if abnormal prefrontal cortex (PFC) findings and theoretical biochemical imbalances found in major depressive disorder, bipolar, and schizophrenic have evolved and are supposed to exist when an individual ignores emotions' feels-good and feels-bad bio-feedback

“messaging” to regulate cognitive behavior? Are these abnormal findings the result of emotional dysfunction processes or dysfunctional cognitive processes?

1.0 Technically, Behavior Is Physiologically Driven

Is maladaptive behavior in major depressive disorder, mania, bipolar psychosis, and schizophrenic tendencies a result of emotional dysfunction and disorder or cognitive dysfunction and disorder? But, the highly complex, biological neural processor called the brain orchestrates the changes and states of neurology, biochemistry, and physiology that animates the body. Technically, behavior is physiologically driven.

So the question becomes do emotions initiate the changes and states of physiology that drive behavior as humanity has been neurolinguistically programmed for the last 3000-years... since Homer inscribed “*The Iliad*” and Achillies’ wrath drove his destruction upon the Greeks? Or could cognitive activities of the mind... that produce thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning... initiate changes and states of physiology that drives behavior and emotions are the perception of these changes and states of physiological being?

What if emotions are like the instruments on the dash of a car? They “inform” the driver of the goings on under the hood. They are not dysfunctional and in need of control when they go beyond standard operating limits indicating something is amiss. In fact, such “emotional” suppression would be hazardous to the health of the vehicle. Or how about the dysfunctional biological signature of a burnt hand? The physiological abnormalities of a burnt hand are a natural result of a hand left on a hot stove. Although for the need of therapeutic attention, the issue is not the burnt hand but why was physical pain ignored, and the hand left on the hot stove? Or, in the case of mental illness, why is the cognitive mind ignoring negative, bad-feeling emotional awareness and continuing its self-abusive and self-destructive cognitive focus on that which is not wanted?

When emotional bad-feeling awareness of “negative emotions” becomes blocked, convoluted, or suppressed... similar to a natural protective mechanism involved when physical pain is blocked from conscious awareness... *unrestrained and unregulated good-feeling cognitive activities* go unabated precipitating the physiology associated with mania, psychotic mania, and schizophrenic tendencies. A similar, but reversed condition arises where “positive emotions” become ineffective in challenging emotionally negative’s cognitive domination of conscious awareness.

Both these dysfunctional, habitual conditions are reinforced within the plasticity and neural development of the brain that they may become an inflexible physiological, “hard-wired” program needing years of psychotherapeutic counter *cognitive-emotional* programming and neural development... with pharmaceuticals as a necessary, but temporary crutch.

This psychology unified field theory integrates the symbiotic harmony between 1) cognition, 2) physiology, 3) behavior, 4) emotions, and 5) conscious awareness and focus (Jackson, 2026b). The following brief outline integrates a perspective of cognitive and emotional behavior that has evolved within an operant condition mechanism to enhance health, well-being, and successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess. A simple and illustrated explanation of this unified theory and symbiotic harmony for primary and secondary school educators is available from my websites (Jackson, 2026d).

But first, the importance of understanding emotions’ historical context within the origins of “modern” emotional psychology and the foundational basis of today’s emotional regulation is necessary.

2.0 Language and Literary Emotionally Driven Behavior Education

Primary, secondary, and collegiate language, literacy, and literary educators are teaching a psychology of “emotionally driven behavior” as inscribed by Homer’s “*The Iliad*” nearly 3000 years-ago:

“Goddess, sing me the anger of Achilles, Peleus’ son, that fatal anger that brought countless sorrows on the Greeks and sent many valiant souls of warriors down to Hades, leaving their bodies as spoil for dogs and carrion birds: for thus was the will of Zeus brought to fulfilment” (Homer, 800-700/2009).

Achilles’ anger brought countless sorrows upon the Greeks. Achilles’ anger sent many valiant souls to Hades. Homer inscribes the emotion of anger as causal; that is, anger is the cause of Achilles’ behavior. (Note: Achille’s emotion is translated by other authors as “wrath”.) This literary linguistic paradigm of emotionally driven behavior demands emotional regulation, management, and control (even with the use of pharmaceuticals) because dangerous emotions can drive destructive behavior.

Have a person’s core beliefs of emotions – which may have been neurolinguistically molded from childhood (Kemmerer, 2015) through family interactions and, in later years, through reading and comprehending literary works such as Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, Poe’s *The Raven*, Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* – impacted their current understanding of emotions and cognition (Tomasello, 2005)? A shared cultural and linguistic development (Bavin, 2012; Allen, 2019) of core beliefs and conceptual understandings about emotions is required for young students to comprehend and follow the emotional twists and turns within these famous English literary works. As students mature and are introduced to the more advanced pieces of William Shakespeare and others, comprehension is even more dependent upon the prior assimilation of cultural and linguistic paradigms (Evans, 2017; Kenrick et al., 2015). Conceptions of emotions are further reinforced by the logic and reason applied in today’s scientific literature, research, and discussions about emotions (Ekman & Davidson, 1994; Kring & Sloan, 2010). (References found in (Jackson, 2026b), “*Cognitive Regulation with Emotional Awareness: The Linguistic Semantics of Cognitive vs. Emotional Dysregulation and Disorder (with Supplements)*”).

For nearly 3000 years, since Homer’s “*The Iliad*” where Achilles’ dangerous and aberrant emotions drove his destructive behavior upon the Greeks, humanity has been neurolinguistically programmed in a belief that emotions drive behavior... and in our modern

psychological world... a belief and understanding of emotional control, regulation, and management, even with pharmaceuticals if necessary.

What do you see within a person fearfully running from a bear in the woods? Are his emotions driving him... creating the neurological, biochemical, and physiological changes in his brain and body that motivates and drives “him” from the bear? Are emotions causal to these changes and states of being as you have learned as a child... or could *emotions be a correlative effect, the perception of changes and states of physiology in the brain and body precipitated by a cognitive “situation, attention, and appraisal” sequence?* (Jackson, 2026b)

Why do well researched and evidence-based cognitive behavior modification therapies work? Why does reprocessing, reconstructing, and reappraisal of cognitive behavior associated with thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning change emotional behavior? Behavior, like running from a bear, is a very complex neurological, biochemical, and physiological rhythm of changes and states being orchestrated by a highly evolved biological neural networking processor called the brain. Technically, behavior is physiologically driven.

The task of logically resolving the intricate maze and complex cognitive architecture encountered if behavior’s changes and states of physiology are emotionally derived has fostered many multifaceted arrays of carefully defined and structured theories of emotions and emotional regulation. On the other hand, there is a simplicity within “Occam's Razor” and “form follows function” if cognitive activities of the mind initiate the changes and states of physiology that animate and drive the body... and emotions are the perception of these changes and states of physiological being. Emotional awareness could influence physiologically driven behavior after emotions are cognitively perceived and reappraised through an evolved and natural cognitive-emotional operant conditioning mechanism.

A cognitive-emotional operant conditioning mechanism has evolved to cognitively appraise... and reappraise... and utilize emotional awareness to (a) enhance emotionally good-feeling mental activities that precipitate a healthy, robust, biochemically balanced physiology conducive to successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess and (b) dissuade

emotionally bad-feeling mental activities that precipitate an unhealthy, biochemically imbalanced physiology associated with major depressive disorder, psychotic mania, and schizophrenic tendencies.

Very loosely woven in psychology's literary adaptation of emotional behavior are (1) a neuroplastic brain that (2) reinforces habitually used neural networks and weakens an unused neurology and (3) the brain as a highly complex biological neural networking processor orchestrating the (4) neurological, biochemical, and physiological changes and states that animate and drive the body. And not even mentioned is (5) the evolutionary significance of the good or bad-feeling aspect of emotions, moods, attitudes, and feeling. Psychology's 3000-year-old literary linguistics of emotions and emotional regulation begins to disassociate and dissolve when incorporating the modern sciences of physiology, neuroplasticity, and evolution.

3.0 The Feeling-Good or Feeling-Bad Aspect of Emotions, Moods, Attitudes, and Feelings

Emotionally feeling-good or emotionally feeling-bad aspect within cognitive thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning have huge evolutionary significance. Emotionally feeling good mental activities must have an evolved correlation with a healthy, biochemically balanced physiology of the brain and body conducive to empowerment, well-being and successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess. And emotionally feeling-bad mental activities must have an evolved correlation with an unhealthy, biochemically imbalanced physiology of the brain and body vulnerable to accidents, ill-being, and poor critical analysis and decision-making ability (Jackson, 2026b).

The abnormal, maladaptive, and irregular behavior and the biochemical, neurological, and physiological signatures found within major depressive disorder, psychotic mania, and tendencies of schizophrenia have evolved as a natural part of evolution and are supposed to exist with emotionally bad-feeling cognitive thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning when conscious awareness is dwelling and focused upon that which is not wanted, desired, or intended in life's adventures.

Emotional regulation loses meaning if cognitive activities... associated with thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning... precipitate the neurological, biochemical, and physiological changes and states of being in the brain and body that (1) drive and animate behavior and (2) are perceived as emotions. Emotional awareness has evolved within a cognitive-emotional operant conditioning mechanism to guide cognitive behavior away from bad-feeling unhealthy, biochemically imbalanced physiology and towards a good-feeling, healthy, and biochemically balanced physiology conducive to well-being and successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess. Emotional psychology is not separate from the linguistics of cognitive regulation and cognitive psychopathology. (Jackson, 2026b)

Both emotional and cognitive psychology are attempting to intertwine the science of their research while working within a 3000-year-old linguistic paradigm of emotional behavior and control. Primary school educators are currently neurolinguistically programming our children into this belief of emotionally driven behavior. They could easily be teaching first graders the importance of how their emotionally good feeling thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning relate to a physiological health and well-being conducive to successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess. But they are not. Why not?

If emotionally good-feeling mental activities evolutionarily correlate with neuroplastic development towards a healthy physiology conducive to well-being and successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess; and bad-feeling mental activities evolutionarily correlate with neuroplastic development towards an unhealthy physiology vulnerable to poor critical analysis and decision-making? What happens if... through language and literacy education, psychological therapeutics such as mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and pharmaceutical medications... evolutionary emotional awareness and function are suppressed, obscured, and masked and cognitive-emotional regulatory processes become convoluted... allowing *dangerous and destructive emotionally bad-feeling cognitive behavior to continue unrestrained?*

Columbine High School massacre of 1999, which resulted in 16 deaths.
Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, where in 2007 33 people died

Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in 2012 with 28 deaths

Parkland High School shooting in 2018 which left 17 dead

Robb Elementary School shooting in 2022 in Uvalde, Texas, with 22 deaths

4.0 Re-Programming Neural Development

If a person has been neurolinguistically programmed from birth to where it has become physiologically impossible for them to stop malice aforethought and their *cognitively driven* vicious and deadly behavior, are they legally sane? (Jackson, 2026f) *“The Innocence and Trial of Nick Reiner”*)

A simple, illustrative narrative of symbiotic psychology principles is found in *“Cognitive-Emotional Operate Conditioning”: A Basic Information Packet for Primary and Secondary School Educators* (freely available as a PDF download from my websites). Educators can teach first graders how emotional awareness can guide their thoughts, memories, beliefs, imaginings, perceptions, and reasoning towards a robust, healthy, and biochemically balanced physiology conducive to successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess. But they’re not. Instead of a simple “let’s turn bad-feeling cognitions towards good-feeling mental activities” (reference Julie Andrews: *“My Favorite Things”* - The Sound of Music (1965) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IagRZBvLtw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IagRZBvLtw;);) educators are promoting a very cerebral emotional intelligence curriculum dissecting the intricacies of an emotional language and its intellectual meaning within our primary schools and children. Emotional intelligence education is wonderful for a university class in psychotherapy.

The neuroplastic brain has reinforced a researcher’s lifetime of study, exploration, and publication within an ancient language and literary linguistics of cognitive behavior, emotions, and regulation found in cognitive and emotional psychopathology. As such, is it even possible for an academic whose brain has been neurolinguistically hard-wired into one ideology to comprehend another? (Reference: *“Can Academia Escape from the Allegory of Plato’s Cave?”* (freely available as PDFs from my website.)

Can psychological academia work together and develop a strategy to revitalize our ancient language and psychology of emotionally driven behavior within the sciences of (1) changes and states of neurological, biochemical, and genetic physiology, (2) a plastic, biological neural networking processor called the brain, and (3) the simple, evolutionary significance of the good and bad-feeling aspects of emotions, moods, attitudes, and feelings guiding (4) cognitive behavior? A single Meeting of the Minds Conference on Cognitive & Emotional Behavior would initiate a new world of cognitive-emotional health education and wisdom in our primary and secondary schools and foster a new reality of well-being and success for our children... and future academics.

References and further reading are all freely available PDF downloads from my website:

<https://symbioticpsychology.com/>

- 1) (2026a) Can Academia Escape the Allegory of Plato's Cave?
 - 2) (2026b) Cognitive Regulation with Emotional Awareness: The Linguistic Semantics of Cognitive vs. Emotional Dysregulation and Disorder (with Supplements)
 - 3) (2026c) Cognitive-Emotional Health Education: A Primary and Secondary School Overview
 - 4) (2026d) Cognitive-Emotional Operant Conditioning: A Basic Information Packet for Primary and Secondary School Educators
 - 5) (2026e) Emotional Wisdom "Poster"
 - 6) (2026f) Innocence and Trail of Nick Reiner: Is Law Capable of Justice?
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Andrew O. Jackson

Andrew O. Jackson has an MS in Technology Education and an MS in Management Technology from the University of Wisconsin – Stout. He was a high school shop teacher, wrestling coach and professional alpine ski instructor; a college CAD (computer-aided design) instructor; a guest instructor in China teaching quality and inventory management; and a quality manager at an OEM (original equipment manufacturer). He is happily married and retired from mechanical engineering and twenty-five years of sailboat racing and coaching on the Melges E-Scow and is now spending his summers sailing and winters alpine skiing with his wife Barbie and their two cats. He is currently campaigning for academic and athletic coaching understanding and awareness of our natural cognitive-emotional reprocessing mechanisms that have evolved to attain and maintain our health, well-being, and successful critical analysis and decision-making prowess.

“I like to say I have a PhD in Psychology from the School of Hard Knocks. The difference being that an accredited school requires classes, exams, and a successful defense of one’s own dissertation. I, on the other hand, either realize, develop, and self-prescribe a new psychology of cognitive-emotional behavior more in line with natural evolution and live, or fail and die.”

Andrew O. Jackson suffered from psychotic mania, suicidal depression, and schizophrenic tendencies. He was in and out of mental hospitals from 1979 to 1996. Once after another “blackout” period, he “awoke” in a mental ward and wondered how he got there this time. The nurse said he went up to a police car and told them that his friend needed help. His “friend” was a trash can. Another time he “awoke” with a rope in his hand ready to put an end to this torturous life when a voice asked him, “Can you go on?” “They” wanted him to continue his painful and torturous existence a while longer. He replied, “Yes” and got himself to a hospital.

Around 1993, in a moment of inspiration that led him away from academia’s 3000-year-old literary linguistics of emotionally driven behavior and control, he began a self-directed healing program using his good-feeling emotions, moods, attitudes, and feelings as indicators of, and a progression towards a healthy biochemical, neurological, and physiological state of being. After a couple more psychotic episodes (one that landed him in the El Paso County jail and led to a divorce from his first wife) and after seventeen years of therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, he no longer needed the benefits of their assistance. He has been medication-free and without disassociation, depression, or mania episodes since 1996.

Since 2005, he has been writing to academics around the world advancing a new emotional paradigm that defines cognition as causal to and emotions as an effect of biochemical, neurological, and physiological states of being. Emotions, instead of being regulated by cognitive behavior as current psychological academia prescribes, have evolved into a cognitive-emotional control mechanism to guide cognitive behavior towards the health, well-being, and prosperity of the individual.
