



Behaving Without a Head: Implications of the Headless Way for Behavior Analysis

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Introduction:

● The Self in Behavior Analysis:

- *Relational Frame Theory* (RFT) and *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (ACT), two behavior analytic approaches to the human condition, both present related concepts of the self:
 - Self in RFT: Sense of self develops as a function of the acquisition of three deictic frames (I/You, Here/There, Now/Then)².
 - The Three Selves in ACT:
 - *Self-as-Concept*: The self as a ‘story’ (or set of definitions/rules); e.g. ‘I am smart’ or ‘I am awkward’².
 - *Self-as-Process*: The self as a repertoire of noticing and self-awareness responses; ‘seeing seeing’ (aka Knowing-Self)².
 - *Self-as-Context*: The self as a stable, transcendent perspective that experiences occur within².

● The Challenge Of Balancing Selves:

- Excessive responding to Self-as-Concept has been associated with greater suffering and dysfunction (Zettle, 2016).
- As such, Self-as-Process and Self-as-Context skills have important clinical implications.
- Both can be difficult to shape because they are more ambiguous than the Conceptual Self.
- Therefore, there is opportunity to develop diverse methods for introducing clients to these other selves.

● The Headless Way (THW; Harding, 2020): A promising path to experiencing the Contextual and Knowing self.

- An approach to mindfulness/meditation defined by its appeal to this observation: *that you can't see your own head*¹.
- Is considered to constitute a special kind of science called ‘The Science of the 1st-Person’ (S1)¹.
- Experiments in S1 test claims about oneself/experience (e.g. ‘The Pointing Experiment’)¹.

● Discovering the Selves with Headlessness

- Recognizing one’s intrinsic headlessness can be used to transition to both the *Contextual* and *Knowing* self.
 - *Context*: To be ‘headless’ is to be no-thing. In place of the head appears the world itself. *All* experiences - not just visual ones - can then be placed in this open, timeless, and headless space.
 - *Process*: Capitulating to headlessness facilitates momentary clear-seeing of one’s experiences; to ‘become headless’ one must first recognize that they cannot see their own head. In turn, they may recognize the true nature of *all* of their experiences.

Discussion:

- Self-as-Process and Self-as-Context skills are difficult to shape, but nonetheless have clinical importance.
- THW may offer an additional route to acquiring these skills.
- Because S1 has been developed independently of ACT over many years, it has cultivated a diverse set of experiments to draw from.
- Therefore, THW/SI may present promising idiographic research opportunities for developing Self-as-Process/Self-as-Context skill strategies.

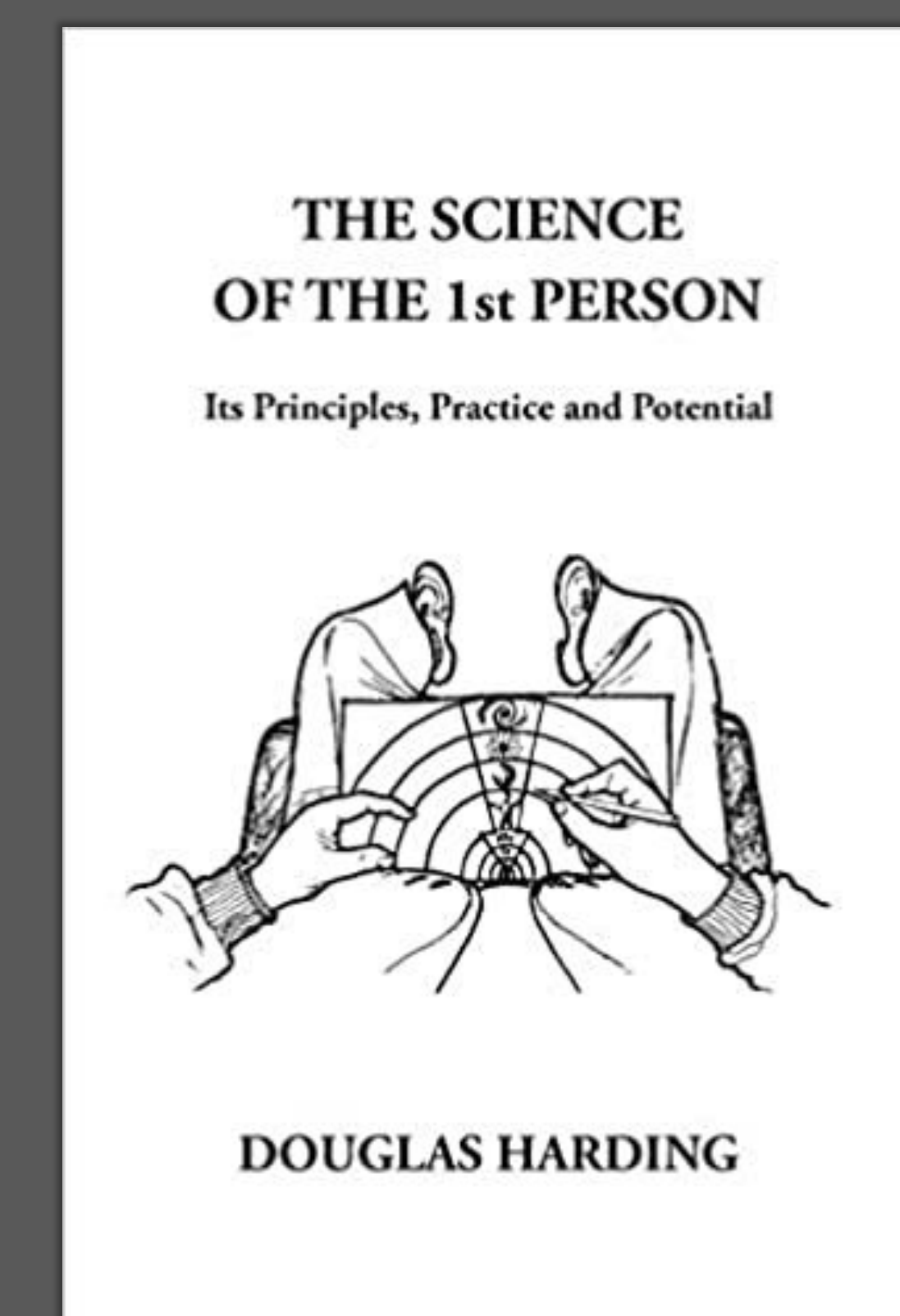
References:

1. Harding, D. (2020). *The Science of the 1st Person: Its principles, practice and potential*. The Shollond Trust.
2. Zettle, R. D. (2016). The self in acceptance and commitment therapy. In Moulding, R., Doron, G., Bhar, S. S., Nedeljkovic, M., & Mikulincer, M. (Eds.), *The Self in Understanding and Treating Psychological Disorders* (pp. 50-58). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139941297>



The Pointing Experiment:

Raise your dominant hand until it is clearly within view. Point at something in front of you. Identify what you are pointing at. Next, turn your index finger 180 degrees around, until you are pointing a where you are looking out of. Follow the tip of your index finger back to where it is pointing. Once again, identify what you are pointing at. This time, however, be clear to identify not what you *think* you are pointing at, but what you are *really* pointing at. You will likely notice that what you are pointing at is empty, a space where you know your head to be yet where no head appears.



The Science of the 1st-Person
(Harding, 2020)