

INTERPERSONAL NEUROBIOLOGY (IPNB) THEORY AND APPLICATION

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Introduction

In his books *The Anatomy of the Soul* and *The Soul of Shame*, Curt Thompson praises Daniel J. Siegel's Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB) as the source of understanding reality, thus encroaching upon the realms of theology proper, anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology.¹²⁶ His counseling system answers crucial questions such as: Who is God? Who is mankind? What went wrong with mankind? What is the remedy? In answering these fundamental questions, Thompson's counseling system integrates IPNB with Scripture out of a commendable intention to help people. Yet, his methodology and underlying theory are arrived at primarily through the various aspects of IPNB, and only secondarily through an IPNB-informed interpretation of Scripture. There is nothing uniquely Christian about IPNB practices in pursuit of personal change. Thus, Siegel's IPNB is a deficient framework for biblical counseling and Thompson's theory and methodology based upon it fall short of the bountiful wisdom of the sufficient Scripture. I will critique Thompson's IPNB integrated counseling system below.

In this article, my thesis rests on three main arguments. First, IPNB utilizes the findings of neuroscience as a basis of explanatory power in its eclectic

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¹²⁶ Curt Thompson "is a board-certified psychiatrist and the founder of the Center for Being Known, LLC, an organization that develops resources to educate and train leaders on the intersection between interpersonal neurobiology and Christian spiritual formation." (Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 292, Kindle).

and unbiblical approach to human flourishing. Second, the neurobiological underpinnings of IPNB are scientism, thus IPNB is primarily a multifaceted philosophy that is contradictory to Scripture.¹²⁷ Third, based on these two arguments, IPNB should not be utilized by Christians to counsel those experiencing shame or any other problem of life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).¹²⁸

Core Principles of Interpersonal Neurobiology Defined, Described, and Critiqued

Interpersonal Neurobiology, conceived by Siegel, emerged in the early 1990s as a term describing a multidisciplinary approach utilizing the common ground “across disparate scientific disciplines and building a conceptual framework from their usually independent ways of studying, measuring, conceiving, and describing the nature of reality.”¹²⁹ Rather than being a discrete therapy itself, IPNB is “a consilient framework for understanding reality that can inform therapy, as well as a broad range of human endeavors that support mental health, education, parenting, public policy, and planetary

¹²⁷ The present author has adopted T. Dale Johnson’s definition of scientism: “philosophy couched in scientific terms” (Ernie Baker, T. Dale Johnson, Heath Lambert, and Jenn Chen, “Can Jesus Heal Our Trauma? - Biblical Counseling Panel Discussion,” First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, September 22, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lbarv1HDnxw&t=2495s>).

¹²⁸ Unless otherwise specific, all Bible references in this paper are to the New American Standard Bible, (NASB1995) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

¹²⁹ Daniel J. Siegel, Allan N. Schore, and Louis J. Cozolino, eds., *Interpersonal Neurobiology and Clinical Practice*, The Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2021), 1, Kindle. Siegel writes, “Mind, body, and relationships function as ‘three aspects of one reality.’ Reality is energy and information flow” (Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 8). According to his publisher, “Noted neuropsychiatrist Daniel J. Siegel, MD, is clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California Los Angeles School of Medicine, and executive director of the Mindsight Institute in LA. He is the founding editor-in-chief of the Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology” (“Daniel J. Siegel,” www.norton.com, March 16, 2024, <https://www.norton.com/author/SIEGELDANIEL>). At the time this writing, the Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology has over one-hundred published titles accessible at <https://www.norton.com/catalog/nonfiction/mental-health/interpersonal-neurobiology>. Thus, a comprehensive evaluation of IPNB is beyond the scope of this paper and instead, an examination of key aspects of IPNB within the domain of counseling will be defined, described, and critiqued. Siegel is the primary creator of IPNB which informs Thompson’s counseling and biblical exegesis.

well-being.”¹³⁰ These endeavors seek “to understand and improve the world [through] contemplative practice, art, music, literature, history, political movements, public policy, environmental protection, social justice, parenting, education, and many other fundamental aspects of being a human member of life on this planet.”¹³¹ Thus, there is virtually no aspect of life untouched by the far-reaching description of reality according to the IPNB framework.

Siegel is not beholden to the popularity of exclusively materialist biogenetic approaches to psychiatry that were first proposed in the nineteenth century and reemerged in the 1970s and 1980s but instead, he seeks to bring science and subjectivism into conversation.¹³² The construction of IPNB was catalyzed in response to the absence of a definition of the mind and the lack of a standard definition of health or normalcy for the mind within mental health education globally.¹³³ Siegel seeks to build IPNB as an “interdisciplinary view of mind,

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2. Consilience is “the discovery of common findings from independent disciplines... popularized by E.O. Wilson... [and is] the intellectual approach to the field of IPNB” (Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 391). It appears that Siegel et al. are aiming for a grand unifying theory of reality as demonstrated by the breadth of what the framework of IPNB seeks to address. Wilson saw the natural sciences as “the key to unification” of knowledge across disciplines and as the answer to the “chaos” of philosophy and the social sciences (Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge, A Borzoi Book* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 8. Wilson’s view of consilience is based on William Whewell’s “Consilience of Inductions,” “a common groundwork of explanation” was made possible by “jumping together” “facts and fact-based theory across disciplines” (Ibid.; William Whewell, *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, Founded upon Their History* (London: J.W. Parker, 1840), 230.

¹³¹ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 3. There appears to be no hierarchy between the disciplines relied upon for IPNB because it is built on consilient concepts between them regardless of the subjectivity or objectivity of their beliefs.

¹³² Daniel J. Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology: An Integrative Handbook of the Mind* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), XI; Andrew Scull, *Desperate Remedies: Psychiatry’s Turbulent Quest to Cure Mental Illness* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2022), 339-343, 379-380, Kindle.

¹³³ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 2. The authors characterize the condition of the mental health field prior to IPNB, writing, “We do not have a common curriculum, nor a common grounding in science, that joins our fields in the professional effort to understand the mind and to heal mental suffering. Amazingly, surveying over 100,000 mental health professionals in person from around the globe... reveals that over 95%...indicated that in their formal educational programs... they were not given any definition of what the mind actually is, nor what a healthy mind might be” (Ibid.). The lack of a definition of the mind implies one cannot “say what the ‘health’ is referencing” (Daniel J. Siegel and Chloe Drulis, “An Interpersonal Neurobiology Perspective on the Mind and Mental Health: Personal, Public, and Planetary Well-Being,” *Annals of General Psychiatry* 22, no. 1 (February 3, 2023), 3. Mental health is a construct traceable to Benjamin Rush (Thomas Szasz, *The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement* (New York; London: Harper & Row, 1977), 137-59.

brain, and relationships [that attempts] to create new ways to define the mind and bring well-being into the world.”¹³⁴ Thus, IPNB is philosophical rather than purely scientific because it contains subjective elements and concerns theories of the immaterial mind, which is not empirically observable.

There are five fundamental principles of IPNB with the first two being the most foundational.¹³⁵ The first principle states that IPNB joins “empirical research from a range of fields published in peer-reviewed journals to the practice of psychotherapy and the understanding of mental health and mental suffering”¹³⁶ The second principle builds on the first, focusing on the impact of relationships as central to mental soundness, or as Siegel expresses it, “Relationships are not icing on the cake of a life well-lived; they are not even dessert—they instead can be seen as the main course.”¹³⁷ The third principle of IPNB states that the ‘inter,’ or what happens in one’s relationships is directly related to what happens in the ‘inner,’ meaning the human body.¹³⁸ The fourth principle of IPNB incorporates the second half of the term and thus refers to

¹³⁴ Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, XII.

¹³⁵ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 2.

¹³⁶ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 2. “Empirical” and “peer-reviewed” are employed as a basis for authority but “rationalist philosophy has revived with a powerful critique of the assumed objectivity of science” (David Powlison, “Which Presuppositions: Secular Psychology and the Categories of Biblical Thought: Journal of Psychology & Theology,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 12, no. 4 (1984): 271). Powlison argues, based on the authority of Scripture, that there is no objectivity apart from a receptivity and commitment to the theistic view which exposes the weakness of empiricism (*Ibid.*, 271, 273). If Powlison is correct, as is the view of the present author, then one cannot assume science is objective in addressing the subject matter revealed in Scripture such as theology proper, anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology—subjects breached by all counseling systems.

¹³⁷ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 2. The centrality of interpersonal relationships to IPNB is not a novel concept but it is a descendant of Carl Rogers’ humanistic theory, stating, “If I can provide a certain kind of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur” (Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 42; Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 33). IPNB’s integration bears striking resemblance to Rogerian reorganization, although it is far more developed (Rogers, 33-36; Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*; 43-9). However, contra Rogers, IPNB advocates some gentle direction in mindfulness practices (Rogers, 226; Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 230).

¹³⁸ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 2. In interpersonal neurobiology the ‘inter’ refers to relationship and the ‘personal’ refers to the “inner” aspect of the person (*Ibid.*, 3). Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino write, “When the term IPNB was created, the feeling, the intention, the motivation of the words was to being with this inner-inter focus” (*Ibid.*).

the undergirding “processes of mind and mental health” explored through neurobiology as a starting point that was inspired by “the 1990s [as] the Decade of the Brain.”¹³⁹ The fifth principle of IPNB is that, as a framework of understanding, it is not a specific methodology but an “invitation to individuals to explore the tenets of its consilient approach and then extend them in their own specific and unique ways.”¹⁴⁰

The aforementioned five principles of IPNB form a single approach from which it draws on its source disciplines to form the following twelve integrative principles:

- (1) The mind is broader than the brain and bigger than the body, (2) Energy and information flow is fundamental to mind, (3) Energy and information flow occurs within an individual, between individuals, and between individuals and the planet—the world of nature, (4) ‘mind’ involves at least four facets: subjective experience, consciousness, information processing, and self-organization, (5) One facet of mind can be defined [as]: an emergent, self-organizing, embodied, and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information, (6) A healthy mind is one that cultivates integration, within [itself] and between [itself and other minds], (7) Mental unhealth emerges with impaired integration, (8) Relational and neural integration are mutually reinforcing, (9) Where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows, (10) Mind in its regulator role both monitors and modifies energy and information flow, and these are learnable mindsight skills, (11) The term ‘mindsight’ can refer to the capacity to have insight into one’s own inner state of energy

¹³⁹ Ibid., 3. The authors have come to regret the limitations inherent in neurobiology and, thus, would choose a more accurate second word for the framework such as ‘science,’ or ‘knowing’ to be more inclusive of ‘all the ways of studying the nature of reality beyond merely a branch of biology’ (Ibid.). Once the door is opened to other avenues to gaining knowledge beyond science, IPNB shows itself to be primarily philosophical with some apparently scientific aspects integrated into it. Neurobiology does not address metaphysics, so it is limited in accomplishing the goals of Siegel et al.

¹⁴⁰ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 3. IPNB provides initial common ground but practitioners are free to “offer differentiated strategies of cultivating health” toward “the infinite capacity to expand ...[their] knowledge” (Ibid.).

flow, to sense that in others as empathy, and to modify that flow within and between toward integration, and (12) There are nine domains of integration: consciousness, vertical, bilateral, memory, narrative, state, interpersonal, temporal, and identity.¹⁴¹

The twelve integrative principles constitute a philosophical “consilient approach to reality,” that is rooted in the social sciences, “biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics.”¹⁴²

IPNB’s concept of the mind encapsulates several of its twelve integrative principles. Siegel connects two qualities of the mind, namely, it is both embodied and relational with the imperative to know information about the nervous system’s structure and interaction throughout the body, which he refers to as ‘the brain.’¹⁴³ The fifth integrative principle above implies that “the mind is a verb, not a noun,” and it is an emergent process arising from the system composed of the body and global interactions such as those formed

¹⁴¹ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 3-12; Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, 1st ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 71-75; Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe about Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 36-40, Kindle. Siegel coined the term “mindsight” for how one perceives and respects one’s own mind and those of others by embracing the three capabilities including: the capacity to cultivate insight—awareness of one’s own inner life, empathy—sensing the inner life of another, and integration—“linking differentiated elements into a coherent whole” (Daniel J. Siegel, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 108, Kindle). Two types of integration are articulated by Siegel, see 6n16 of the present paper. The tenth integrative principle appears incoherent because the mind cannot be ontologically regulating but simultaneously rely on the capacity for introspection and the learned skills of insight, and empathy—mindsight (Ibid.).

¹⁴² Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 3. Philosophy speculates upon unobservable phenomena and theories of reality (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philosophy>). The body is directly observable, whereas the mind is not.

¹⁴³ Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 1-5. There are two types of integration: (1) State integration is “The embodied brain—the head’s brain and its connections to the gut’s brain and the heart’s brain—is a parallel distributed set of networks that function in the dynamic unfolding of states of neural activity. The subjective sense of these dynamic ever-changing states is called a state of mind,” and (2) “Individuals are born into the world and establish connections with attachment figures early in life as the first way their differentiated self is connected with other selves—the core of linking differentiated persons in interpersonal integration” (Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 6). Siegel et al. see the early childhood experience as determinative, writing, “In developmental and relational terms, when our self is obliterated early in life, we can feel shame when our subjective experience and perspective are denied, and humiliation when our agency is destroyed. The sense of self that then arises is directly altered by these self-shaping experiences (Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 20).

by social signals within interpersonal relationships.¹⁴⁴ Siegel proclaims the mind as having “a natural drive toward integration,” which is often hindered by “challenges to well-being” in the form of “sub-optimal experience with caregivers in early life...random events, genes, epigenetic factors, or toxic chemical exposures or infections...in early life, or during the formative period of adolescence.”¹⁴⁵ Thus, man is born, at minimum, a blank slate, if not good, and is subsequently corrupted by his environment—a view that denies human moral agency.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 1-5. Siegel uses mind as both noun and verb throughout his works. Expressing both the essence of the mind and one of its central qualities, Siegel writes, “So at a minimum we are proposing that the system that gives rise to the mind, the system that has mind as some aspect of itself, has as its basic element the flow of energy. Sometimes that energy stands for or symbolizes something other than itself. In this case we say that the energy has information. So there is something about energy and information flow that may be fundamental to mind” (Siegel, *Mind*, 46-47).

¹⁴⁵ Siegel, *Mind*, 199. Beyond understanding environment and genetics as mere shaping influences, Siegel writes, “The structure and function of the developing brain are determined by how experiences, especially within interpersonal relationships, shape the genetically programmed maturation of the nervous system” (Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 3). Siegel writes, “Within IPNB, we view mind, brain, and relationships as three aspects of energy and information flow. Brain is the embodied neural *mechanism* shaping that flow; relationships are the *sharing* of the flow; mind is the embodied and relational process that *regulates* the flow of energy and information” (*Ibid.*, 7).

¹⁴⁶ B.F. Skinner’s materialism deemed all factors Siegel cites as environmental forces of natural selection, thus both achievement and responsibility were not attributable to man (B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1972), 22-23). Ironically, Siegel forsakes materialism but its ideas creep into IPNB mostly through the neuroscience’s embracing of evolution and attachment theory (Siegel, *Mind*, 170-83; Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 13-3, 14-2, 14-5, 21-10, 42-4, 42-5, 42-6-42-8, A1-45). IPNB combines attachment theory with the bio-deterministic Polyvagal Theory of Stephen Porges (Stephen W. Porges, *The Polyvagal Theory: Neurophysiological Foundations of Emotions, Attachment, Communication, and Self-Regulation*, 1st ed, The Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology (New York London: W.W. Norton, 2011); Bonnie Badenoch, *Being a Brain-Wise Therapist: A Practical Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 1st ed, Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2008), 15, 128, 139. The scientific claims of the Polyvagal Theory have come in to serious question (“After 20 Years of ‘Polyvagal’ Hypotheses, Is There Any Direct Evidence for the First 3 Premises That Form the Foundation of the Polyvagal Conjectures?”, ResearchGate, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.researchgate.net/post/After-20-years-of-polyvagal-hypotheses-is-there-any-direct-evidence-for-the-first-3-premises-that-form-the-foundation-of-the-polyvagal-conjectures>; David G. S. Farmer et al., “Brainstem Sources of Cardiac Vagal Tone and Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia,” *The Journal of Physiology* 594, no. 24 (December 15, 2016): 7249-65; Diana A. Monteiro et al., “Cardiorespiratory Interactions Previously Identified as Mammalian Are Present in the Primitive Lungfish,” *Science Advances* 4, no. 2 (February 21, 2018): eaq0800.

In IPNB, a healthy mind experiences optimal self-organization, which leads to it exhibiting “the five qualities of FACES: flexible, adaptive, coherent (resilient over time), energized, and stable (reliable not rigid).”¹⁴⁷ Learning the ‘mindsight’ skill of seeing the mind in oneself and in others is the key to remedying the disintegration of the mind because it enables the individual to discern different streams of awareness. With such a new ability, the capacity to intentionally alter the direction of information flow—to use the skilled focus of attention to change the mind—enables us to amplify the activity of certain pathways and inhibit others.”¹⁴⁸

The neuroscientific underpinnings of IPNB appear to stand in stark contrast to its subjective elements based on the social sciences and spirituality. IPNB’s use of neuroscience provides its most visible link to empiricism with the appearance of an empirical basis.¹⁴⁹ Yet, neuroscience is subject to many

¹⁴⁷ Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 6. Upon review of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* editions III-5, Siegel discovered that “every symptom of every syndrome could be re-envisioned as an example of chaos or rigidity,” leading him to conclude that “human relationships can foster resilience and emotional well-being by facilitating an integrative capacity” (Siegel, *Mind*, 77; Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 14; Daniel J Siegel, “The Mind in Psychotherapy: An Interpersonal Neurobiology Framework for Understanding and Cultivating Mental Health,” *Psychology and Psychotherapy* 92, no. 2 (June 2019): 227-28). Siegel defines self-organization, a principle of complex systems in mathematics, as “the way a complex system regulates its own becoming. In other words, arising from the system (the emergent aspect) is some process that, in a recursive, self-reinforcing way, organizes its own unfolding (self-organization)” (Siegel, *Mind*, 36; Siegel, “The Mind in Psychotherapy,” 225-27).

¹⁴⁸ Daniel J. Siegel, “Mindfulness Training and Neural Integration: Differentiation of Distinct Streams of Awareness and the Cultivation of Well-Being: Social Cognitive & Affective Neuroscience,” *Social Cognitive & Affective Neuroscience* 2, no. 4 (December 2007): 260. Siegel writes, “When we come to realize that the brain develops across the lifespan, we can see that we can use our relationships to ‘inspire to rewire’ our own and others’ brains toward integration to cultivate more well-being and compassion in our lives” (Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 304). Thus, the brain is incorporated and sometimes used interchangeably with “mind” in IPNB. For example, “neural firing patterns” in the brain are referred to as “a fundamental part of the mind and where the mind resides” (Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 1-8). In IPNB the mind can be thought of as “brain +” with the plus equating to things beyond brain function in the forms of consciousness and information processing (Siegel, *Mind*, 15, 113, 118).

¹⁴⁹ Francisco Ortega and Fernando Vidal, eds., *Neurocultures: Glimpses into an Expanding Universe* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2011), 118. Alain Ehrenberg writes, “Neuroscientific reductionism has a particular appeal because it holds great sway not only in the brain sciences, but also in the social sciences” (*Ibid.*). In their ten simple tips for avoiding “neurohype,” L. Syd M. Johnson and Karen Rommelfanger warn: “Avoid assuming that brain-based data are inherently more genuine or valid than behavioral data” (L. Syd M. Johnson and Karen S. Rommelfanger, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Neuroethics*, Routledge Handbooks in Applied Ethics (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 257).

limitations that will be detailed in the following paragraphs which undermine its value as a means of explanatory power for IPNB.

Contra IPNB, neuroscience cannot provide the biological basis for complex human behavior.¹⁵⁰ Frank Rösler points to both the advances in the last seventy years of neuroscience and its limitations, writing, “Neuroscience does provide many basic and domain-specific explanations, but it is still far away from providing exact predictions of individual behavior or, even more ambitious, explanations of the interactions of mind and body.”¹⁵¹ The combination of the physiological domain with the subjective psychological domain poses several difficulties in terms of immediately perceivable measurements of the subjective phenomenon and a lack of clearly defined psychological concepts, such as “clear temporal segregation of states, events and processes which form the basis of psychological categorizations.”¹⁵² Rösler concludes that to achieve a complete reduction of a psychological concept to biological activity “is unlikely to ever be achieved” as it is dependent on “unequivocal one-to-one relationships between the subjective psychological and objective physiological.”¹⁵³ Jerome Kagan reveals that scientists “do not know how to translate the metric of a biological measure into that of a psychological one; say, a certain increase in

¹⁵⁰ Frank Rösler, “Some Unsettled Problems in Behavioral Neuroscience Research: Psychological Research,” *Psychological Research* 76, no. 2 (March 2012): 131; Sally L. Satel and Scott O. Lilienfeld, *Brainwashed: The Seductive Appeal of Mindless Neuroscience* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 150; Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*, (New York, NY: Hill & Wang, 2010), 37, Kindle. Rösler, a German psychologist, is “one of the pioneers of Cognitive Neuroscience” (https://www.leopoldina.org/fileadmin/redaktion/CV_R%C3%B6sler_Frank_EN.pdf).

¹⁵¹ Rösler, 131-32. Thus, the fourth principle of IPNB falls because it seeks an impossibility: understanding the mind based upon neurobiology.

¹⁵² Rösler, 133. Rösler discusses the implications of the problems, writing, “On the one hand there are biological physical measures and derived variables that can be measured by clear-cut operations. Such measures, variables and derived concepts are ontologically objective. These are “brute” facts, which are almost completely independent from the observer and which can be observed and measured always in the same manner—today, yesterday, and tomorrow, in Asia, Europe, or Africa. In contrast, psychological-social concepts, variables, and measures depend on the observer and his or her assumptions. These concepts are ontologically subjective, as they do not exist in an absolute sense by means of their spatial-temporal reality, but only in a relative sense. They rest on introspective experience and social agreement. Due to this they cannot be fully grasped by objective measurements” (*Ibid.*, 134). Rösler makes a compelling argument but it assumes brute facts in a secular paradigm; cf. Powlison, 270-78.

¹⁵³ Rösler, 137. Rösler highlights the complexity of the problem with an illustration of the sensation of shock or surprise as not being able to be mapped on to a single neuron or a set of neurons but the sensation involves “a specific pattern of activations that comprises millions if not billions of elementary activity changes within the brain and whole body” (*Ibid.*, 134-35).

blood flow to the amygdala into a rating on a seven-point-scale of the intensity of ‘anxiety’ a person feels at the moment,” which amounts to an inability to translate the biological directly into the psychological.¹⁵⁴ Yet, Siegel et al., rely heavily on explanations rooted in neurobiology to explain human behavior within the framework of IPNB.¹⁵⁵

The results of brain scanning technology often produce flashy headlines but are, in reality, limited in their capabilities in the realm of the mind and body. Brain scans, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), cannot see the individual mind, or a group’s minds, nor can it see experience.¹⁵⁶ Since brain scans cannot provide any information about the immaterial mental state and may only suggest some kind of activity in the brain, these brain scans therefore do not contribute anything new to traditional data-gathering methods such as interviews or questionnaires.¹⁵⁷

It is somewhat ironic that some strong skepticism regarding neuroscience comes from Siegel himself as the IPNB library is filled with explanations of mental states and behavior based on neurological functioning.¹⁵⁸ Siegel admits,

¹⁵⁴ Jerome Kagan, *An Argument for Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 218. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost). In other words, structural or functional brain images cannot produce “conclusive inferences of causal linkages between brain activations and psychological states or traits” (Johnson and Rommelfanger, 254-55).

¹⁵⁵ Louis Cozolino explains, “The amygdala is an organ of appraisal that guides us in making basic approach-avoidance decisions. It is the source of our anxieties, tensions, and fears and guides us toward what we have experienced as safe and away from what has proven to be dangerous. It is when this primitive executive system is overly active that we experience anxiety disorders, panic attacks, and PTSD” (Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 65). A calm mental state is confounded with the state of calm amygdalae in the presence of a trusted other, leading the authors to conclude, “Without doing anything, our neural systems were rewiring in the direction of secure attachment (Ibid., 128). Siegel’s remedy for the over-excited amygdala is, in one instance, imagining [one’s] amygdala as “sighing with relief, having discharged its duties to warn,” resulting in one’s sense of doom dissipating (Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 277).

¹⁵⁶ Robert Alan Burton, *A Skeptic’s Guide to the Mind: What Neuroscience Can and Cannot Tell Us about Ourselves* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013), 2, 101, 142, Kindle.

¹⁵⁷ Satel and Lilienfeld, 150; Burton, 144.

¹⁵⁸ Examples of neuroscience-based explanations include, “Cognitive neuroscientists generally agree, however, that it is the pattern of firing in the map — the particular clusters of neurons activated in a specific pattern — that, somehow, creates the experience of mind.” (Daniel J. Siegel, “Toward an Interpersonal Neurobiology of the Developing Mind: Attachment Relationships, ‘mindsight,’ and Neural Integration,” *Infant Mental Health Journal* 22, no. 1-2 (January 2001): 69); “When emotion is highly dysregulated, thought cannot regulate

“On the level of neuroscience...no one understands how neural firing might create the subjectively felt experience of a thought, memory, or emotion. We just don’t know.”¹⁵⁹ Elsewhere, he also admits that one’s mental life cannot be objectively measured, that there is no measure for integration, that self-reports cannot capture “inner subjective awareness,” that the subjective inner experience can never be known by another, and that “neural correlations do not solve the ‘hard problem’ of how the physical property of neurons’ firing... gives rise to the subjective experience of being aware.”¹⁶⁰ As a result, Siegel adopts eclecticism—turning to the spiritual—in search of knowledge to fill the gaps in neuroscience, such as his incorporation of mindfulness into IPNB.¹⁶¹

A Biblical Evaluation of the Core Principles of IPNB

Siegel’s religious upbringing, experience, and attitudes provide some clarity concerning the nature and origin of the core concepts of IPNB above. Although ethnically Jewish, he was raised without any formal religion and attended pacifist Unitarian and Quaker churches during the Vietnam War period until bringing his own family to mosques, Baptist churches, and regularly attending a local Hindu center.¹⁶² Thus, Siegel’s religious views are as eclectic as the

emotion, because under these conditions everyone “flips their lids,” as Daniel Siegel likes to say, as prefrontal areas of the cerebral cortex responsible for executive functioning (rational decision making, sound judgment) go offline. And when this occurs, the primary way to calm down involves interactive, not auto, regulation, through attuned, empathic relationships” (Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 266-67); “The prefrontal cortex can go ‘offline’ as we ‘flip our lids’ as represented by the sudden raising of the fingers above the limbic thumb [in reference to the hand model of the brain]” (Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 3-2-3-4) See also multiple explanations involving the debunked triune and “reptilian” brain concepts based in evolutionary neuroscience (Ibid., 10-4, 13-3, 14-1, 20-4, 20-10, A1-61, A1-83). Cf. Lennart Heimer, ed., *Anatomy of Neuropsychiatry: The New Anatomy of the Basal Forebrain and Its Implications for Neuropsychiatric Illness* (Amsterdam; Boston: Academic Press/Elsevier, 2008).

¹⁵⁹ Siegel, *Mind*, 33.

¹⁶⁰ Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 37.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 43. IPNB’s use of spirituality is discussed in detail in the following sections.

¹⁶² Siegel, *Mind*, 190-96. Siegel’s experience in the Unitarian Church influenced him to embrace all religions and emphasized understanding the good in all faith traditions (Ibid., 195-96). He further describes his vision of the worldview of IPNB, writing, “It made sense to differentiate our cultures, religious beliefs, and ethnic identities, and honor those differences and promote compassionate linkages. That would be an integrated world, a world of compassion, a world that enabled people to belong and thrive not only in spite of differences, but because of those differences. Integration could be envisioned as the source of kindness and compassion. That would be an integrated world, a world that flourished, a world in which kindness and compassion were signs of well-being” (Ibid., 196).

IPNB framework he constructed. Siegel explains, “I was raised to believe in being human, to defend the rights of all people to find their way to their own truths.”¹⁶³ The spirituality of IPNB is syncretistic because it draws upon the ancient wisdom traditions of the Lakota, Polynesian, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, and Jewish religions in the pursuit of constructing “a useful bridge between science and spirituality” toward an integrated humanity through “compassionate linkages.”¹⁶⁴ For example, IPNB’s mindful awareness is a ‘third wave’ behavior therapy concept and practice that is not a novel product of science but traceable instead to ancient Buddhism.¹⁶⁵

Unwary Christians and atheists alike could embrace IPNB because the spiritual aspects of it consist primarily of mindfulness practices of which the origin may not be readily apparent to them.¹⁶⁶ Christians, however, must understand that New Age practices involving spirit guides, Yoga, and other forms of Eastern meditation are based on ancient religion and, therefore, ignore

¹⁶³ Siegel, *Mind*, 196. In sharp contrast, the Bible reveals the truth of one Creator God from eternity to eternity who revealed Himself to all men through His creation (Gen 1:1; Deut 33:27; Ps 90:2; Isa 41:4; 44:6; 57:15; John 17:3; Rom 1:18-23). See John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017) 143-45. Siegel trespasses on the territory of the theologian as he positions himself as medicine-man and priest in an attempt to heal body and spirit—an inevitability for the psychotherapist (C G Jung, *Modern Man In Search Of A Soul* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1933), 278).

¹⁶⁴ Siegel, *Mind*, 204. Consilience becomes an avenue for confirmation bias as Siegel welcomes all views that confirm his ideas as useful and incorporates them into IPNB but there is no objective evaluation or overriding authority such is in the case of Christianity’s use of Scripture to discern ultimate truth.

¹⁶⁵ Gerald Corey, *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 10th ed. (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 2017) 250-51; Callie W. T. Joubert, “Mindfulness and the Brain: A Christian Critique of Some Aspects of Neuroscience: *Conspectus*,” *Conspectus* 12 (September 2011): 61-62; Daniel J. Siegel, “Reflections on the Mindful Brain,” *Openground Mindfulness*, accessed March 28, 2024, <https://www.openground.com.au/assets/Documents-Openground/Articles/0e39aa6bc0/reflections-on-the-mindful-brain-siegel.pdf>, 5.

¹⁶⁶ Siegel writes, “Mindful awareness can be intentionally created by practices such as meditation, yoga, tai’ chi’, qigong, or centering prayer... The terms ‘mindfulness’ and ‘mindful traits’ are used in various ways in the scientific literature and may refer to a way of being and to measurable enduring aspects of a person’s personality, respectively. Studies of mindful traits...reveal elements of being nonjudgmental, nonreactive, aware of moment-to-moment experience, being able to label and describe the internal world, and, independently for those who practice mindfulness techniques such as meditation or yoga being self-observant” (Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 6-2). It must be emphasized that the human philosophies and knowledge which form the basis for IPNB are susceptible to the noetic effects of sin and amount to human interpretations apart from biblical revelation, thus leaving IPNB and its adherents susceptible to serious error (cf. Ps 14:1-7; Prov 1:7; Acts 17:22-34; Rom 1:21; 2 Cor 3:7-16).

God's warnings about syncretism and violate His moral law (Exodus 20:1-5; Matthew 22:36-40).¹⁶⁷ Scripture is also clear that God is unique, possesses one essence while, in contrast, "idols are vain and empty" (Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:4; 32:21; Psalm 96:5; Mark 12:29; Isaiah 40:18; 43:10-11).¹⁶⁸ The Bible is also clear that God is jealous and will not share His glory, people, or worship with another (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; Joshua 24:19-20; Psalms 78:58-59; 79:1-7; Ezekiel 39:25; James 4:5).¹⁶⁹

The ultimate authority of polytheistic IPNB, although not stated explicitly, is subjective lived experience since one is free to adopt spirituality according to his preferences and perceived needs. For example, Bonnie Badenoch writes, "From the viewpoint of interpersonal neurobiology and inner community work, the respect we experience for our patients guides us to enter their spiritual worlds as they bring them to us. In this sense, everyone's life has spiritual dimensions."¹⁷⁰ Subjective experience is a dangerously deficient

¹⁶⁷ Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, *America, the Sorcerer's New Apprentice : The Rise of New Age Shamanism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1988), 45. The authors write further, "In the process of calling 'new' what is in fact extremely old, the mystical is being marketed as technological... The average Yoga student in the West is not aware that Yoga was introduced by Lord Krishna in the Baghavad Gita as the sure way to the Hindu heaven, or that Shiva, 'The Destroyer' (and one of the three most powerful and feared of Hindu deities) is addressed as Yogeshwara, or Lord of Yoga...The fact that Yoga is at the very heart of Hinduism is usually suppressed and often denied" (*Ibid.*, 46). Furthermore, Hunt and McMahon reveal transcendental meditation was popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the West only after suppressing its Hindu roots and marketing it as science (*Ibid.*, 47-49).

¹⁶⁸ MacArthur and Mayhue, 174. God's unity is fully revealed in Christ and the Trinity does not divide the divine essence (John 17:3; Acts 17:24; Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:4-6; Eph 4:5-6; 1 Tim 2:5) (*Ibid.*).

¹⁶⁹ MacArthur and Mayhue, 185; Grudem, 205. Grudem writes, "People sometimes have trouble thinking that jealousy is a desirable attribute in God. This is because jealousy for our own honor as human beings is almost always wrong...we do not deserve the honor that belongs to God alone (cf. 1 Cor 4:7; Rev 4:11)" (*Ibid.*).

¹⁷⁰ Badenoch, 94. Fundamentally, spirituality itself does not have much to do with change through IPNB. Instead, more focused on feelings, Badenoch writes, "Our part in this work is simply to create a neuroception of safety in regard to bringing spiritual issues into the room, so our patients can allow their whole person to be present (*Ibid.*, 96). Ernie Baker and Howard Eyrich warn about mixing belief systems and the resulting dilution of the systems, writing, "Counseling systems, by their very nature, are really philosophical belief systems. If this is true, then we must be on high alert for the danger of syncretism (Robert W. Kellemen, ed., *Scripture and Counseling: God's Word for Life in a Broken World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 161, 168-69). IPNB's syncretistic spirituality contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture (Exod 20:1-5; Col 2:8). Badenoch, PhD, LMFT, is author of three IPNB titles emphasizing relational psychology and attachment, including, *The Brain-Savvy Therapist's Workbook*, *The Heart of Trauma*, and *Being a Brain-Wise Therapist* (<https://www.norton.com/search/YmFkZW5vY2g=>).

authority and thus, it is inferior to Scripture as a sufficient source for soul care (Proverbs 3:5-7; 14:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

IPNB has been demonstrated to have a deficient view of God, to be syncretistic, and to have unbiblical answers to mankind's problems of living. Its presuppositions are philosophy and empty deception (Colossians 2:8). Can IPNB be redeemed by a Christian seeking to integrate it with biblical wisdom?

Critique of Curt Thompson's IPNB Approach to Shame

Curt Thompson's integrated counseling approach relies heavily on IPNB principles to understand God, man, problems of living, the solutions to those problems, and as an interpretive lens that ultimately obscures Scripture.¹⁷¹ The following critique will highlight his IPNB-informed counseling theory and methodology as expressed in *Anatomy of the Soul* and *The Soul of Shame* where they clearly conflict with Scripture.

As a practitioner of IPNB, Thompson's writings rely on the ever-sinking sands of human wisdom primarily in the form of various practices from world religions cloaked in the language of neuroscience rather than the solid foundation of the Word of God (Matthew 7:24-29; Colossians 2:8).¹⁷² For example, he writes, "Theological facts, such as the fact of my sinful nature or other presuppositions about God or man...are not very helpful on their own in getting us to live the way we want to live...They do not reflect our total

¹⁷¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 205-220. See especially page 214 where Thompson explicitly says he is interpreting the fall of mankind from a neuroscience perspective. President of the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) Tim Clinton sees the future of Christian counseling as further integrating "transtheoretically" with IPNB as part of an "evidence-based lens" adding complexity to the integration of "deep theology [and] rich and deep psychology" (Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, "Christian Counseling, Interpersonal Neurobiology, and the Future," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 40, no. 2 (2012): 141-45.

¹⁷² Ibid., 9. Thompson concedes, "Not only do our minds change, but scientists' understanding of how the human brain works is also developing. That means anytime you read 'the brain does this' or 'the mind does that,' what I am saying is more akin to 'This is how we currently believe the brain behaves.'" (Ibid.). Thompson's fullest understanding of IPNB is expressed comprehensively in *Anatomy of the Soul* (Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 31).

experience...they may not provide enough practical guidance.”¹⁷³ Thompson’s reliance on extrabiblical authority results in several misunderstandings of God and His nature within the realm of theology proper.

God is independent, sovereign, and immutable but Thompson denies this, writing, “God as we believe him to be—in control and invulnerable—not God as Scripture describes him to be: risk-taking and able to be hurt badly.”¹⁷⁴ Thompson later contradicts both himself and Scripture as he claims God is never controlling (Cf. Proverbs 16:9; 16:33; 19:21; Psalm 135:6; Lamentations 3:37; Ecclesiastes 7:13-14; 9:1-2; Isa 14:24; 45:6-7; Amos 3:6; Romans 8:28).¹⁷⁵ It appears that Thompson holds to a form of process theology as he sees God as capable of being surprised and making discoveries—violations of the doctrines of God’s immutability and impassibility.¹⁷⁶

Instead of viewing Exodus as concerned with YHWH revealing Himself to Moses and Israel, Thompson interprets it as God’s being enamored with man, writing, “I suspect that God really enjoys the attention that he gets from us. The degree to which we pay attention to him affects not only us. It

¹⁷³ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 133. The truths of Scripture are reduced to mere data of the Western left-brained emphasis on facts (Ibid., 127, 132). Sensing God is displeased with oneself is not achieved by measuring oneself against the standards of Scripture but is the problematic result of trauma-induced “disorganized right-brain circuitry” leading one to shun intimacy with God (Ibid., 131).

¹⁷⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 18. Ironically, here Thompson looks to Scripture’s authority but distorts its meaning. Later he opines, “I believe he [God] allows himself to be deeply affected by our attitude toward him, though often we don’t grasp this aspect of his character” (Ibid., 23). Subsequently, he concludes, “God’s engagement was contingent upon Moses’ emotional/behavioral, or mind/body state” (Ibid., 100). Additionally, Thompson writes, “In fact, from the beginning God has had to trust us as much as he asks us to trust him. In creating us he risks everything (Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 161) He claims God’s vulnerability toward mankind is fundamental to healing shame and promoting human flourishing (Ibid). Thompson claims God is open to wounding, pain, rejection, death, and “having a rough go of it” by virtue of creating man (Ibid., 156). Cf. Exodus 3:14; Psalms 102:25-27; 115:3; 135:6; Isiah 46:9-10; Malachi 3:6; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:11; James 1:17.

¹⁷⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 145.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 219; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 166-67. Grudem attributes the appeal of process theology to one wanting to feel significant in the universe, which squares with man-centric IPNB (Ibid.).

affects him.”¹⁷⁷ In chapter four of *Anatomy of the Soul*, Thompson takes this approach to God and Scripture because he integrates IPNB’s emphasis on awareness, attempts to unpack it in Scripture, and then proceeds to explain the workings of the inner person in terms of neurobiology.¹⁷⁸

God is omnipotent and takes the initiative in revealing Himself to mankind, thus He cannot be known through human effort or wisdom but by Scripture alone (Matthew 11:27; Romans 1:18-25; 1 Corinthians 1:21).¹⁷⁹ In contrast, IPNB’s emphasis on experience and being known or feeling felt, leads Thompson to conclude, “You cannot know God if you do not experience being known by him. The degree to which you know God is directly reflected in your experience of being known by him...your relationship with God is a direct reflection of the depth of your relationship with others.”¹⁸⁰ Finally, also conflicting with God’s omnipotence is Thompson’s prerequisite of a particular neurobiological state as necessary before the Holy Spirit can change

¹⁷⁷ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 51. Betraying his use of IPNB as an exegetical lens, Thompson subsequently asks, “From the viewpoint of neuroscience, what does it mean for us to pay attention?” (*Ibid.*). In other words, the sole purpose of mentioning Moses and the burning bush is for Thompson to introduce the IPNB ideas surrounding awareness. More specifically, the idea that “the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC)” is the location of the “voluntary focusing mechanism” (*Ibid.* 52-53).

¹⁷⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 52-53. Betraying his use of IPNB as an exegetical lens, Thompson subsequently asks, “From the viewpoint of neuroscience, what does it mean for us to pay attention?” In other words, the sole purpose of mentioning Moses and the burning bush is for Thompson to introduce the IPNB ideas surrounding awareness, and more specifically, the idea that “the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC)” is the location of the “voluntary focusing mechanism” (*Ibid.*, 52; Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 159-69, 394). The point at which Thompson drives is that “deeper activation of the mind” and attention on “the very activity of the mind itself...wires our brains in certain patterns...[and] also greatly influences our relationship with God” (*Thompson, Anatomy of the Soul*, 53). The fact that this neuroscientific method was not available for over two centuries of Christianity is not addressed by Thompson but cannot be ignored as it is a direct attack on the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Peter 1:3).

¹⁷⁹ Grudem, 149.

¹⁸⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 24. Describing the type of therapeutic relationship central to IPNB-informed counseling, Thompson writes, “Through this conversation and others like it, Jeremy slowly began to understand what it meant to be known, to have another person validate and accept his feelings, preferences, and dreams. For the first time, he understood what it meant to be accepted for who he was rather than what he knew or what he did” (*Ibid.*, 25). Thus, Thompson’s theology and integration drive his counseling methodology. Yet, being known by God is not a human work but one is known by confessing, repenting, and becoming a child of God. God knows those who belong to Him (cf. Ps 139; Nah 1:7; Matt 7:22-23; Acts 2:37-39; 1 Cor 8:3; Eph 2:1-10). Ultimately, God who is omniscient sees all (Jer 23:24; Heb 4:13). Man must know God to flourish (John 17:3).

a believer.¹⁸¹ Once one has achieved an integrated brain, Thompson writes, “They have put themselves in the position to be available for the Holy Spirit to create those very characteristics that we so long to take root in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”¹⁸²

Only by Scripture does one come to know the mind of God as He revealed it, therefore, if the Bible has not revealed it to mankind, God’s mind regarding that particular is unknowable (1 Corinthians 2:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Yet, Thompson claims to know God’s mind, writing, “God knows that unless our right brains are transformed and our neural networks are integrated from left to right and from bottom to top, we will remain in the narrow, constricting, well-hewn grooves of the networks we have formed over our lifetimes [and] we so often help create in our children.”¹⁸³ Thompson confounds the categories of the constitution of man: God does not mention the brain in Scripture nor the need to integrate its neural networks.¹⁸⁴

Scripture reveals God created mankind with a material visible body, which includes the brain, and an immaterial invisible aspect referred to as heart, mind, soul, or spirit with a primacy given to the immaterial (Genesis 2:7; 6:5; 41:8; Proverbs 4:23; 23:7; Luke 6:45; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 10:28; 1 Timothy 4:8).¹⁸⁵ Thompson again confounds the immaterial with the material claiming the former is dependent on the latter, writing, “Were it not for our fully embodied experience of our mind, we would be unaware of much of what

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁸² Ibid. Cf. Gal 6:7-8. Thompson gives additional insight to his theology of the Spirit, writing, “The process of being known is the vessel in which our lives are kneaded and molded, lanced and sutured, confronted and comforted, bringing God’s new creation closer to its fullness in preparation for the return of the King. It is the communal container in which the information about the mind and relationships that we will explore in this book takes its shape and gives birth to the graces of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Ibid., 13-14). In contrast, Scripture emphasizes the need for mankind to know God (Jer 31:34; John 17:3; Phil 3:10-12; 2 Pet 3:18).

¹⁸³ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 81.

¹⁸⁴ Joubert, 61.

¹⁸⁵ MacArthur and Mayhue, 416-24. Matthew 10:28 demonstrates that God acts in ways on immaterial man that are inaccessible to mankind, the immaterial is distinct from the material and is a matter of life and death, the immaterial survives physical death, and the fear of God ought to exceed the fear of what man can do to the body (Joubert, 69).

our mind is trying to tell us (cf. Luke 9:30-31; 16:19-31; Revelation 6:9-11).”¹⁸⁶ There are also numerous instances where Thompson uses brain and mind interchangeably, leading to confusion.¹⁸⁷ Yet, passages such as Luke 16:19-31 and Revelation 6:9-11 seem to indicate awareness in the disembodied state between death and glorified bodily resurrection. Thompson also speaks of brain-to-brain interaction absent any mention of the mind being active in the interaction.¹⁸⁸

Thompson promotes several unbiblical notions concerning man’s emotions. Adopting the out-sized emphasis on emotion characteristic of IPNB, he writes, “Emotion is the very energy around which around which the brain organizes itself... It is the means by which we experience and connect with God, others, and ourselves.”¹⁸⁹ For example, he teaches that one’s emotions can be damaged

¹⁸⁶ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 33. The cited passages demonstrate the intermediate state between embodied mortal existence and embodiment in the resurrection body. MacArthur writes, “Ultimately, all souls will be reunited with resurrected bodies. At Jesus’s return to earth, the martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11 will be resurrected so they can reign in Jesus’s kingdom on earth (Rev 5:10)” (MacArthur and Mayhue, 418). See also Revelation 20:4 (*Ibid.*).

¹⁸⁷ For example, the renewal of the mind in Romans 12:1-2 is confounded with neuroplasticity under the assumption that one can change neural networks at will resulting in concurrent transformation of mind and brain (Thompson, *Soul of Shame*, 44). Thompson explains, “Neuroplasticity is the feature of flexible adaptation that makes possible the connection (or pruning) of neural networks and thus the formation and permanence of shame patterns. And attention is the function that drives the movement of neuroplasticity. Via intentional attunement we connect the neurons located within the PFC with the neural networks correlated with the nine previously listed domains. By this attention we move them toward differentiation and linkage, bringing them together as an integrated whole” (Thompson, *Soul of Shame*, 45-46). Thompson attributes cognitions, affections, volitions, relating, and desires to the brain rather than immaterial man (*Ibid.*, 43, 52, 55, 69, 130, 182; Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 2, 41, 76, 78, 95, 101, 118, 176). The previous citations are examples, but not exhaustive. It is clear that IPNB informs Thompson’s exegesis rather than the reverse.

¹⁸⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 101. Thompson is not innovating but employing IPNB. Bonnie Badenoch and Susan Gantt write, “We have seen such a synchrony develop where one person moving into an intense implicit state pulls the rest of the group into a calm, empathetic, holding state of mind, very like a dance of neural circuits operating between brains for the betterment of the whole” (Bonnie Badenoch and Susan P. Gantt, *The Interpersonal Neurobiology of Group Psychotherapy and Group Process* (London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 12, eBook Collection, (EBSCOhost)). What is being described is another determining the immaterial state heart/mind of another but Scripture connects relational problems and negative inner states as coming from one’s own thoughts, desires, motives, and intentions (Gen 4:5-7; Prov 23:7a; Mark 7:14-23; Luke 6:45; Jas 4:1-3). In contrast, Thompson elevates shame as “the emotional feature out of which all...sin emerges (Thompson, *Soul of Shame*, 122).

¹⁸⁹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 90.

by being treated harshly, leading to emotional injury and shame and resulting in one's left-brain-caused impressions of God that raises questions of His love, care, or appraisal of one's person.¹⁹⁰ Thompson's two-pronged deterministic theology of emotion blames the brain and relationships for one's emotional states, which amounts to biological/environmental determinism thereby constituting an explicit denial of human moral agency.¹⁹¹

In contrast to Thompson's view, Scripture shows that emotions experienced as subjective feelings flow from thinking and behavior. Therefore, the immaterial heart must be addressed because bodily approaches only relieve symptoms temporarily (Genesis 4:3-7; James 4:1-3; Romans 2:14-15; 1 Peter 3:10, 16).¹⁹² What man has deemed negative emotions proceed from the conscience's judgment of the motives and intentions of the heart, thus, one's emotions are not damaged by what happens to him but are functioning as God designed (Romans 2:14-15).¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 35.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 35, 90-91, 96; Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 4. Thompson writes, "emotion is something that both regulates us and that we regulate," thus man cannot be seen as a responsible moral agent under his paradigm (Ibid, 49). Thompson characterizes emotion as brain, not immaterial heart function (Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 91). Cf. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 96-7 where Adams attributes man's emotions to his voluntary aspects of his immaterial nature. Cognition, volition, affection are all processes of man's immaterial heart (Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 17, 50, 103). He embraces the notion of uncontrolled emotion and sense of well-being in the lower mammalian and reptilian brain rather than maintaining moral agency and locating emotion driven by the intentional works of the immaterial heart (Ibid. 94). Cf. Mark 7:14-23; James 4:1-3. Thompson elevates shame to one's constitution writing, "To be human is to be infected with this phenomenon we call shame" (Thompson, *Soul of Shame*, 4). Furthermore, he uses shame as a term synonymous with authority, Satan, evil, and evil's vector as he personifies shame as desiring and willing with its own agenda (Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 78-80, 170-73, 195). Ironically, this undermines one's angelology as Satan is misunderstood as an impersonal force with more power than God allows him in reality.

¹⁹² Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 93-4. Again, theory drives practice. Although Freudian transference and Rogerian acceptance are not explicitly cited, these concepts are present in IPNB's acceptance and non-judgmental approach to emotions demonstrated by Thompson's unbiblical theory and practice (Ibid., 100-104).

¹⁹³ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub, 1986), 110-11. Rich Thomson sees shame as the clearest indicator of a sin induced sense of guilt in one's immaterial conscience (Rich Thomson, *The Heart of Man and the Mental Disorders: How the Word of God Is Sufficient*, 3rd ed. (Sugar Land, TX: Biblical Counseling Ministries, Inc, 2022), 542).

Scripture shows mankind as individuals who will be judged by God based on actions flowing from the immaterial heart (Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 18:1-32; Romans 14:10-12; Revelation 20:11-15). In contrast, Thompson describes attachment theory as supporting the idea that there is no such thing as an individual brain and that one's style of attachment determines one's brain (by extension one's mind) based on how one previously attached to one's parents.¹⁹⁴ Based on this biological/environmental determinism, he teaches that God holds parents responsible for "shap[ing] the neurological wiring" of their children, a subject not breached in Scripture.¹⁹⁵

Scripture is clear that man's post-fall depravity is his central problem producing eternal separation from God remedied only by God's gracious redemption through the gospel (Genesis 3; Psalms 51:5; 58:3; John 3:16-19; Romans 3:9-18; 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-10; Revelation 20:11-15). Thompson deemphasizes man's plight and instead directs counselees to focus on man's pre-fall status by emphasizing God's pleasure with man as His creation (cf. Hebrews 11:6).¹⁹⁶ Contra Thompson, Heath Lambert points counselees to the reality that sin damaged all of creation and more specifically, mankind's standing before God in the areas of motivations, thinking, emotions, bodies, and relationships.¹⁹⁷

According to Thompson, man's central problem is choosing to be "mindless rather than mindful," as seen in Adam and Eve's interest "in knowing right from wrong (a dominantly left-brain hemisphere function used to cope with fear and shame) than knowing God, which requires the integration of all parts of the brain."¹⁹⁸ Thus, a lack of integration in one's brain becomes the original

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 109-10.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 110-11. Thompson does allow for the individual temperament (heart) to have some influence but his approach amounts to an inversion of the reality that adverse childhood experiences, as shaping influences, merely shape one but one's heart determines him (Ibid., 112; Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 2nd ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005) 3-7, 10-11).

¹⁹⁶ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 147.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 147; Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 219-25. See Ps 51:5; Prov 2:14; Rom 5:12-14; 8:20-22; 9:2-3; Col 1:21; 1 Cor 15:21-22; 15:42-4; Titus 3:3; James 1:13-15; 3:13-16; 4:1-3. Thompson does not discuss the implications of the fall for counseling an unbeliever as opposed to a Christian.

¹⁹⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 4. Cf. Genesis 3; Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18, 23; 5:12; 6:23a;

sin.¹⁹⁹ One merely finds themselves on the “low road” leading to sin due to a disintegrated prefrontal cortex preventing them from appropriate responses to people and circumstances.²⁰⁰ Thompson’s view of confession redefines sin in IPNB terms. For example, he writes, “From a neuroscientific standpoint, when we admit our penchant to ignore emotion, to be inattentive to memory, to dis-integrate our minds, and to reap the behavioral consequences—in other words, our penchant to sin—we acknowledge the presence of neural networks that have been...repeatedly fired to wire in a way that represents our ‘old self with its practices’ (Colossians 3:9).”²⁰¹

One final way that Thompson distorts hamartiology is through what he labels “toxic rupture.” Toxic rupture is defined as the result of situations in the form of “intensely painful mental states.”²⁰² Yet, as has been discussed above, the situation does not determine one’s response to it, and the primary problem is not the situation, which is under the sovereign hand of God, but one’s sinful immaterial heart response to it.²⁰³

Revelation 20:11-15. Man’s problem, starting with the fall of man and ending with the lake of fire, is sin.

¹⁹⁹ Thompson writes, “Sin severs your relationship with God. When you are separated from God, you are separated from others and experience commensurate separation between different elements of your own mind.... ‘Being separated,’ then, is a metaphor for disconnection, dis-integration, and a host of other ideas that are also used in neuroscience and attachment theory” (*Ibid*, 183).

²⁰⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 163. Cf. Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:10-18, 23; James 1:13-14; 3:13-16; 4:1-3.

²⁰¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 163. Confessing mere biological states creates an artificial distance between one and his sin, bypassing conviction and undermining the process of confession and repentance unto godly sorrow. It creates an opening for worldly sorrow since there is a lack of owning one’s sin as connected to his very being (2 Cor 7:9-11).

²⁰² Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 190. Thompson describes toxic ruptures, writing, “We scream and call someone names. Or we withdraw into a vault of silence. We nurture a hurt or wound, ruminating about it, deepening the sadness or anger felt or expressed into a state of despair. We verbally or nonverbally engage in a campaign of contempt” (Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 190).

²⁰³ Nicolas Ellen writes, “We cannot control people or the outcome of situations (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11, 7:13-14, 9:1-2). We can only control our own thoughts, emotions, desires, words, and actions (Romans 12:2-3, Proverbs 16:32, Psalm 37:4, Ephesians 4:29, 22-24). Therefore, we need to evaluate and take responsibility for how we are responding to people and the outcome of situations (Galatians 6:7-8, 5:16-25). We need to evaluate what is motivating us with people and the outcome of situations (James 1:13-14, 3:13-16, 4:1-3). Are we motivated by love for God above our selfish desires? Or, are we motivated by our selfish desires above love for God? (1 John 2:15-17, James 4:4, James 3:16)” (Nicolas Ellen, *Biblical Counseling Practicum* (Houston, TX: Expository Counseling Center, 2009), 162).

In contrast to Scripture's Christ-centered solution to man's sin through the gospel, Thompson takes a man-centered, IPNB-informed approach to an alternative way of salvation (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; 10:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Below, Thompson's general approach to man's problems will be discussed primarily from *Anatomy of the Soul* and then his shame-specific approach will be discussed primarily from *The Soul of Shame*.

In addressing the remedies to man's plight, Thompson forsakes God's moral law, seeing it as disconnected from His ways and different from what "true living is all about."²⁰⁴ Instead, he looks to bodily attunement, autobiographical narratives, and the experience of "feeling felt."²⁰⁵

Thompson's IPNB informed bodily attunement involves a technique called a body scan that he claims helps one recover previously lost implicit memories that were repressed due to trauma in hopes that experiencing the emotions surrounding those memories will help one work toward healing.²⁰⁶ Thompson suggests additional techniques, writing, "Movement exercises, such as yoga and tai chi, are additional means by which you can enhance your awareness of your body's sensations and breathing. Doing so enhances the integration between circuits from the insula and the prefrontal cortex."²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 168. Thompson adopts IPNB's vision of human flourishing—integration—rather than Scripture's vision for the good life, conformity to Christ and God's moral law (Matt 22:36-40).

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 170-74. For an IPNB perspective on the "remedies" of attunement, narrative, and "feeling felt" or resonance, see Siegel, Schore, and Cozolino, 34-69; 137-39; Siegel, *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology*, 19-6, 23-1 – 23-5.

²⁰⁶ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 124-26; 170-71. Secular sources now question the validity of the existence of repressed memories (Michael Scheeringa, *Analysis of The Body Keeps the Score: The Science That Trauma Activists Don't Want You to Know*, 2023, 57, Kindle). Scheeringa's study of "284 three to six year-old children who experienced a variety of traumas" produced "zero children who could not recall their traumatic events (Ibid.). For a more detailed discussion, see Elizabeth F. Loftus and Katherine Ketcham, *The Myth of Repressed Memory: False Memories and Allegations of Sexual Abuse*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

²⁰⁷ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 171. Thompson also recommends centering exercises involving meditation on a specific word, such as those in Galatians 5:22, and focusing on a single word per week by regularly invoking images related to that word in one's mind—especially in response to interpersonal difficulty (Ibid., 174). He writes, "Ask yourself how you can be a conduit of joy, peace, patience, or gentleness in this moment. This exercise will not only facilitate the integration of your own prefrontal cortex, you will be doing the same for those around you by creating space within which they can feel felt" Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 174.). This mediation is very similar to centering prayer also recommended by Thompson (Ibid., 47). It is rooted in Eastern religion and mysticism, see P. Gregg Blanton, "The Other Mindful

The autobiographical narrative is another method Thompson employs and recommends as a means of making sense of one's implicit memories and emotional responses—creating distance between one and his emotions—toward seeing oneself as a child in need of comfort rather than an angry and shameful son or daughter.²⁰⁸

Thompson claims the validation, sense of being understood, or “feeling felt” achieved through psychotherapy is key to the empowerment to control one’s emotions.²⁰⁹ He recommends counselees employ “the neuroplastic triad” of aerobic activity, focused attention exercises, and novel learning experiences to promote neuroplasticity because “neuroscience research confirms that mindful meditative exercises that stretch and challenge the attentional mechanism of your brain enhance the integration of the prefrontal cortex.”²¹⁰

In counseling shame, Thompson uses an IPNB theology and methodology as described above while specifically emphasizing vulnerability, being known,

Practice: Centering Prayer & Psychotherapy: Pastoral Psychology,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 1 (February 2011): 136; Thomas Keating, “A Traditional Blend: The Contemplative Sources of Centering Prayer: *Sewanee Theological Review*,” *Sewanee Theological Review* 48, no. 2 (2005): 145–49.

²⁰⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 171. Thompson explains, “Writing out your life story on a piece of paper requires focused attention and enables you to think more slowly and deliberately than you would if you were typing. This helps activate your right hemisphere, which is correlated with nonverbal and implicit memory—feelings, sensations, images, and perceptions—that is connected to the memory you are writing about. Inevitably, memories that you have not thought about for some time may surface as a result. Of course, as you write by hand, you will also activate the left hemisphere, which processes information in a logical, linear fashion. This process of combining language (left mode) with visuospatial, nonverbal, implicit experience (right mode) causes neurons from the right and left hemispheres to synapse more robustly with each other. In other words, you foster the integration of your brain” (*Ibid.*, 79). Autobiographical narrative is an important component in many psychotherapies.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 172. Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7; 12:9.

²¹⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 174–75. Thompson does recommend some biblical methods, namely, practicing the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, study, and confession but does so through a mystical approach as inspired by Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (*Ibid.*, 175–77). Thompson writes, “Spiritual disciplines have been practiced in the lives of deeply integrated followers of God for over three thousand years. Interestingly, they can facilitate the very things neuroscience and attachment research suggest are reflections of healthy mental states and secure attachment. Furthermore, these disciplines can strengthen the nine functions of the prefrontal cortex. In short, the disciplines enable us to pay attention to our minds in order to pay attention to the Spirit who is speaking to us through that very medium” (*Ibid.*, 180).

and practicing acts of imagination.²¹¹ He draws on the work of author and speaker Brené Brown who also sees vulnerability as a means of enhancing human flourishing, and he sees shame as the primary obstacle to people allowing themselves to be vulnerable in their relationships.²¹²

Thompson's final step to overcoming shame is practicing acts of embodied imagination which involves fostering relationships to hear the Father's voice of delight and "regularly and intentionally revealing our most hidden shame in the context of those relationships that comprise the great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. In this literal embodied act, our whole self is liberated from shame."²¹³ Thus, the experience of a Rogerian empathetic and accepting relationship of IPNB is the central means of solving one's problems—salvation—according to Thompson's integrated counseling theory and practice (cf. John 3:36; Acts 2:21; Romans 6:23).

Thompson teaches that "neuroscience acts like a magnifying glass, enabling us to see detail about the human condition that we might otherwise overlook," with the caveat that "God's story is our ultimate authority."²¹⁴ Yet, in practice, he does not use Scripture as a corrective concerning the findings of science or the polytheistic philosophy of IPNB. He fails to understand that Scripture, not neuroscience, is the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient revelation of God to mankind, and therefore, the Bible is the lens through which man

²¹¹ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 158-61; 162-65, 175; 195-97. For Thompson's approach to being known refer back to the previous paragraph.

²¹² Ibid., 158-60. For the primary source of Thompson's view of vulnerability beyond IPNB, see C. Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012).

²¹³ Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 180. Thompson explains, "When I see my friend's face, hear his voice, sense his empathy for my plight in real time and space, I am given the opportunity to imagine a different way of telling the story of what has been only shame, isolation and stasis. To imagine a different story requires my brain to be in a position to do so; for I cannot imagine a future if I have no memory on which to base it. Embodied acts of this kind provide the basis for imagining new possibilities. But this takes effort and perseverance" (Ibid.). For Thompson, healing happens in community but he holds no biblical doctrine of the centrality of the church, writing, "It is important to note that these communities can emerge in various settings. They do not form solely within religious circles. They exist in schools, in factories, in neighborhoods, at the office of the technology company, in the coal mine, in the departments of psychiatry in leading medical schools, in art associations, in restaurant kitchens" (Thompson, *The Soul of Shame*, 197).

²¹⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 205.

may discover the objective truth concerning God, man, sin, salvation, and all matters of life and godliness (Psalms 19; 119:89, 105; 2 Timothy 3:10-17; 2 Peter 1:304, 20-2).

Ultimately, Thompson's approach to Scripture and religion through the interpretive lens of IPNB leads him to a universalist position which sees all paths as leading to salvation in Christ.²¹⁵ IPNB has been shown above to be contradictory to Scripture in its theology proper, anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology; therefore, it should not be accepted by Christians as a validly applied theology.²¹⁶

CONCLUSION

IPNB utilizes the findings of neuroscience as a basis of explanatory power in its eclectic and unbiblical approach to human flourishing. Neurological structures and processes as products of evolution and environmental adaptation are improperly used to explain the complex behaviors of mankind. Some of the neurobiological underpinnings of IPNB are pseudoscientific, such as the attachment and polyvagal theories. IPNB joins neuroscience, which is unable to explain complex human behavior, and subjective philosophies. It is scientism. IPNB is demonstrated to lead to unbiblical counseling theory and practice, therefore, it should not be utilized by Christians to counsel those experiencing shame or any other problem of life and godliness.

Therefore, Thompson's integration of IPNB and Christian principles marred by his IPNB-informed interpretive lens is also fatally flawed. Despite

²¹⁵ Ibid, 264. Thompson confesses, "As a follower of Jesus, I believe that history is traveling in a particular direction and that at its culmination we will all submit to him as Lord of heaven and earth. I believe that the best of all religious experience, explicitly Christian, or not, will ultimately lead to Jesus, and salvation in every sense will come through a relationship with him" (Ibid.). His view cannot be true according to Scripture. Idolatry is one of the most consistently confronted means of wickedness in Scripture from the fall of mankind forward and, indeed, it was bound up in the very nature of the fall as Thompson herein admits (Ibid., 211). Cf. Thompson's view with Scripture: John 6:37; 14:6; 17:3, 6-12; Romans 1:22-23; Revelation 21:8; 22:14-16.

²¹⁶ In the end, Thompson is not integrating but merely using biblical illustrations to validate IPNB concepts.

the contrary claim of Thompson, theological facts rightly formed from Scripture about God, man, and sin, are not irrelevant, but essential to soul care in the form of counseling and provide the necessary practical guidance for life and godliness. Thompson's IPNB-informed approach, on the other hand, is not necessary. His counseling system employs syncretism cloaked in neuroscientific language in a fruitless attempt to establish extrabiblical authority. It robs his counselees of the hope that comes from a high view of God and Scripture in exchange for a god who is imperfect and subject to man. Thompson inadvertently destroys the hope available for Christians as they read of the suffering and trials of Job, Joseph, Ruth, Paul, and others, because he exchanges biblical hope for the determinism of attachment theory. Thompson puts words in God's mouth to promote IPNB principles, yet God makes his will clear for counselees—their sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3a). The somatic modalities—rooted in false religions—have no role to play in sanctification, and thus, Christians should not employ IPNB or Thompson's system in biblical soul care.