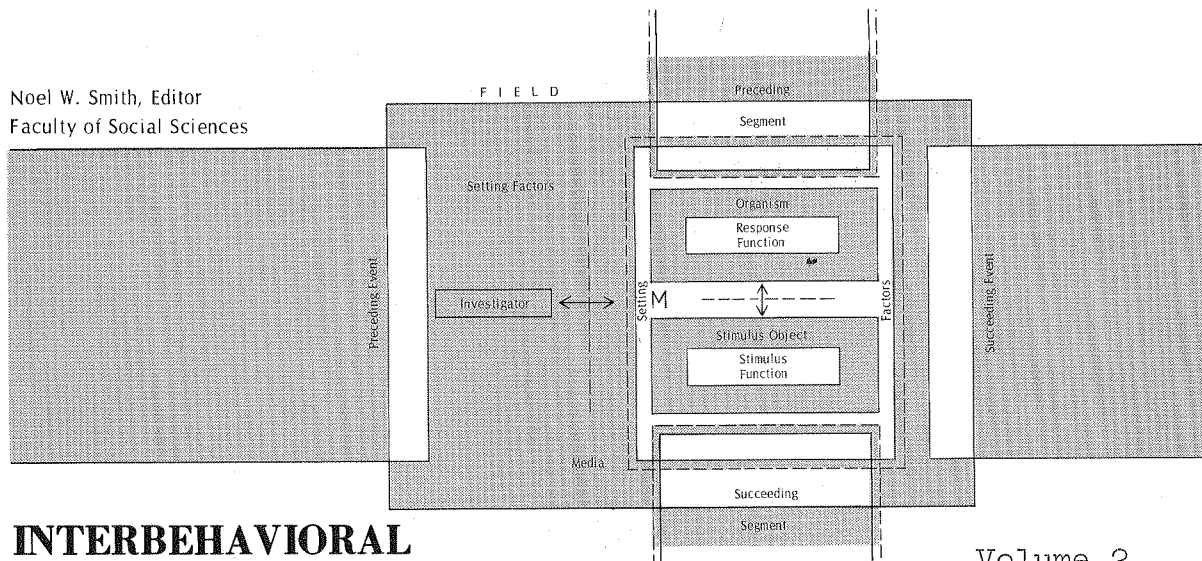


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Faculty of Social Sciences



# INTERBEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGY NEWSLETTER

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"It was a saying of Demetrius Phalereus, that 'Men, having often abandoned what was visible for the sake of what was uncertain, have not got what they expected.'"

Athenaeus, "The Deipnosophists"  
VI, 23 (ca. 200)

## THE AGORA

In the January issue we noted an article by Sarbin and Mancuso on the problems with the mental illness notion. In The Progressive, June 1971, appears "A Psychiatrist Looks at the Uses of Abnormality" by Seymour Halleck, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin. This article nicely complements and reinforces the Sarbin and Mancuso thesis.

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Galloping mentalism: An article appeared in University Review, State University of New York, Autumn 1970 entitled "The Future of the Mind." The author is John McHale, labeled as sociologist, artist, designer, director of the Center for Integrative Studies at the School of Advanced Technology, University Center at Binghamton. In one passage he states "In discussing the mind, I find it helpful to think back to my

earlier formative experience as an artist. In art, in creative work, the mind often seems to work best when you are least conscious of it. The mind does much of its work without your cognizant knowledge of its operation. In a sense, the thinker doesn't sit down and think about something, he puts something into his mind and the mind goes on and thinks about it for him." This is typical of the entire presentation. But this beautiful flow of pure animistic mentalism uncorrupted by actual events becomes tainted as he proceeds, for eventually the events start getting in the way of his verbal constructs. In another passage: "You can't literally change your mind because your mind remains the entity in your skull. You change certain habits or patterns of thinking, and the influence of those patterns of thinking are probably much less evident in action

Crude Data

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than in the unconscious." Here he has allowed "action" to creep in. Inevitably he gets to brain as mind but decides that mind is more than that--it is "the effects of the whole body process." Mind seems to switch from effector to affected.

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Under a \$120,000 grant from Office of Economic Opportunity a research team has produced "A Theory of Cognitive Functioning and Stratification: What the Brain Does, Who Makes It Do It, and Why." They conjecture that a left dominant hemisphere provides functions of verbal abilities and conceptual and propositional thought and is characteristic of the white culture while a right dominant hemisphere is strong in associative and perceptual abilities and appositional thought. These latter functions are characteristic of blacks, women, youth and other subdominant members of our culture because of their lack of training in propositional thought. While the behavioral characteristics are event-oriented and descriptive, whether or not veridical (are there not vast differences within each of these groups?), the brain ascription is of the same genesis as McHale's approach: medieval theology.

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The feature article is the body of a letter from Ronald G. Heyduk, University of Michigan. It serves as an excellent critique of the foregoing news-item.

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(S-R)

Readers of the Newsletter, might be interested in the following four passages relevant to the relationship between the nervous system and psychology, spanning 1769-1970. I find them to be very revealing of the extent to which an unrecognized and unacceptable assumption can "dog" scientific enterprise, blinding scientists to the futility of their seemingly objective pursuits. The first two quotes are found in Kantor's Problems of Physiological Psychology (1947), while the latter two quotes I came across recently.

Bonnet (1769):

The philosopher does not investigate how the movement of a nerve causes an idea to arise in the soul. He simply admits the fact and readily renounces the attempt of discovering the cause. He knows that it springs from the mystery of the union of two substances, and that this mystery is for him inscrutable.

Ranson (1933):

I shall leave out of account entirely the most difficult part: how when these propagated disturbances reach the brain they give rise to conscious sensation which appears to be something of an entirely different order than a neural activity. I cannot understand how such a thing as a sensation of warmth makes its appearance as a result or as a concomitant of the activity of certain nerve cells in my brain. I can only admit the fact and leave to the future, perhaps the far distant future, the problem presented by the relation of brain and mind.

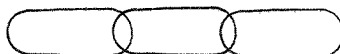
John (1967):

Rejection of these speculations (i.e., about the "neural correlates" of memory) on the basis that we know of no mechanisms at present which could accomplish the sensing of its own state by an aggregate would display an immoderate respect for our present level of knowledge. We are ignorant of how the mind arises from the brain. The answer to that riddle is the most challenging unsolved problem for science.

Dember and Jenkins (1970):

...we have tried to give an account of how a pattern of electromagnetic radiation strikes the photosensitive retinal cells, and is transformed into a pattern of electrical activity that is eventually "displayed" in a specialized "visual area" of the cerebral cortex. The question that naturally arises at this point is: How does the electrical display in the visual cortex get further transformed into the events that we call visual experience? That is, while the neurophysiological and neuro-anatomical bases of visual experience can now be described in impressive detail..., the problem of the relation between these physical events and those we categorize as "mental," "experiential," or "phenomenal" remains to plague us.

It seems inconceivable that after a full 200 years of frustration, psychologists interested in biological influences upon psychological events would still fail to recognize the "blind alley" of reductionism. Dutifully they pursue a "scientific solution" to the mind-body problem, expecting momentarily to find the key to crossing some imagined "physiological-psychological boundary" between the electrochemical activity of neurons and the organismic interactions which are psychological events. It should be apparent by now, even if it were not before, that neither covert nor overt psychological events can be conceptualized as "arising from" biological events. Yet, in the absence of a recognized alternative, the reductionistic model (and the "self-actional" metatheory supporting it) is self-perpetuating. It will continue to be so until a model based on interactional principles is brought forth with sufficient predictive power and research implications to capture the fancy of the most skeptical experimentalist. Perhaps then, finally, psychologists will give up the notion that psychological events "emerge from the depths" in favor of the notion that they are perfectly naturalistic occurrences, receptive to the influences of events from many other disciplines, but servant to none. The mind-body problem will disappear as quickly as these interbehavioral views are accepted.



Rosenblith, W.A. & Vidale, Eda B., "A Quantitative View of Neuroelectric Events in Relation to Sensory Communication," in S. Koch (ed), Psychology: A Study of a Science, vol. 4, McGraw-Hill, 1962.

On the other hand, evidence pointing to the not-so-specific organization of the nervous system has accumulated: Lashley's experiments on mass action, experience with the re-education of brain-injured patients, as well as the outcome of many ablation experiments--all emphasized the futility of looking for a localizable structure in the nervous system whose normal functioning is indispensable to all discriminations within a specific sense modality. In a given modality, deficits in sensory performance that are attributable to neural dysfunction are rarely of the all-or-none type; they tend to be task-specific rather than modality-specific. (p.344).

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