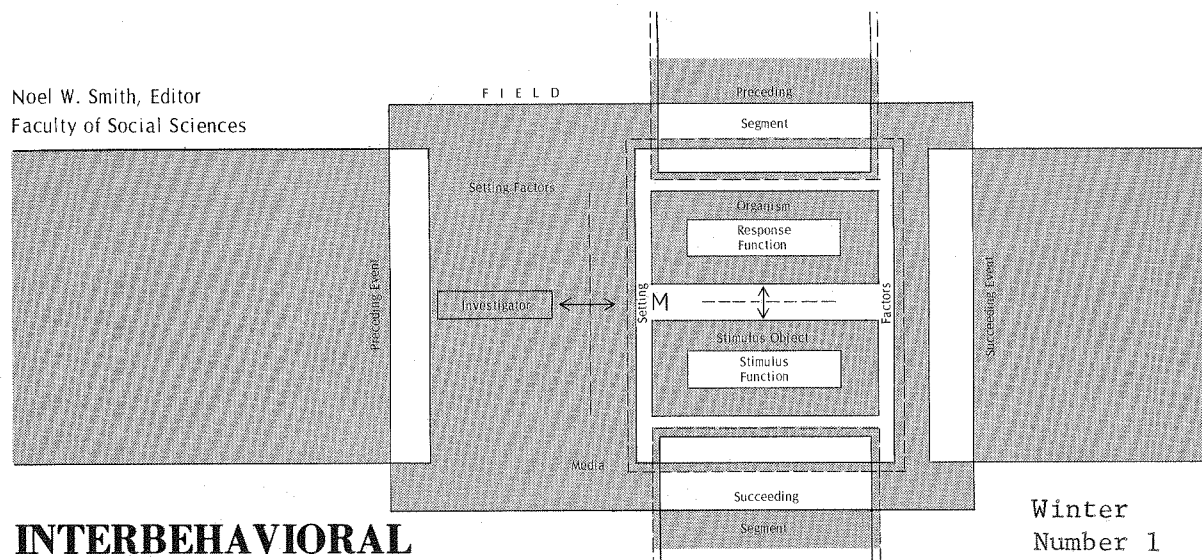


Noel W. Smith, Editor  
Faculty of Social Sciences



## INTERBEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGY

# NEWSLETTER

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To perfect Behaviorism there is also required, as the name Interbehaviorism indicates, the rejection of the view which regards psychological events as acts of organisms asymmetrically impelled by external stimuli or internally determined by various hidden powers. The central hypothesis of Interbehaviorism is that psychological events consist of symmetric fields in which the acts of organisms and the acts of stimulus objects are the simultaneously occurring poles.

--J. R. Kantor: THE SCIENTIFIC EVOLUTION  
OF PSYCHOLOGY, Vol. II, p. 377

Indeed, in some respects Aristotle's functional and contextual behaviorism seems to be superior to our own biological and mechanistic behaviorism, because it views human experience, not as the interaction between a "merely" biological organism and a wholly illogical world, but as a co-operation between an intelligent biological organism and an intelligible world.

--John Randall: ARISTOTLE, p. 106

### THE AGORA

With this issue the Newsletter will change from a quinterly to a quarterly. Hopefully, each quarterly will be a little fuller than the quinterlies; but that depends on how much material we receive.

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The Jensen attempt to substantiate the notion of native intelligence seems to have the advantage--along with the major disadvantage of giving ammunition to the racists--of stirring up some renewed critical examinations of this old dogma. A new book edited by Robert Cancro (INTEL-

LIGENCE: GENETIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES, Grune & Stratton, 1971) contains the full gamut of positions. Articles by Bijou and by Hunt are of special interest to those uncommitted to an organism containing fixed entities or powers. Results were recently released from a five year study at the Milwaukee Infant Education Center using children intellectually stimulated from infancy as compared with a control group. Differences in I.Q. scores between the group run on the order of 50. Numerous other studies in the past that were less systematically controlled

Crude Data

Investigative Contact

Scientific Construction

showed 5 to 20 points difference and occasionally more. An excellent analysis of the intelligence controversy occurs in the Psychological Record, 1970, 20, 123-130 by Observer: "Innate Intelligence: Another Genetic Avatar". Another noteworthy approach is by John P. Frank & Gretchen Kagan in the February 1972 Progressive: "The False Standards of I.Q. Tests". It is a striking fact that occasionally we find (see Newsletter Vol. 2, Nr. 1) non-psychologists bringing a more objective view to bear than that of most psychologists--perhaps because so many of the latter are still wedded to the doctrines of inherited capacities, failing to recognize the distinction between constructs and events, while non-psychologists are not professionally indoctrinated and thereby free to take a more straight-forward uncluttered view. Frank & Kagan point out the culture-bound characteristics of I.Q. tests and the effects in specific situations. This should be glaringly obvious to all psychologists but gets pushed aside in the efforts to substantiate the old dogma. The authors are remiss only in giving scant attention to the importance of intellectual stimulation as a part of that cultural development of the individual that we construct as intelligence. The article concludes with a quotation from Gunnar Myrdal that we can do no better than to re-quote: "When we approach those problems on the hypothesis that differences in behavior are to be explained largely in terms of social and cultural factors, we are on scientifically safe ground. If we should, however, approach them on the hypothesis that they are to be explained primarily in terms of heredity, we do not have any scientific basis for our assumption."

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The Principia Press, Inc. which publishes the books of J. R. Kantor announces its removal from Granville, Ohio to 5743 South Kimbark Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60637

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On February 11 the editor presented an invited colloquim address to the Psychology Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro entitled "Interbehaviorism: Roots and Branches." Most of the members of the department already had some acquaintance with the works of Kantor and were quite receptive and interested. Graduate students also expressed interest including requests for copies of the address.

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Our feature article is a book review of Skinner's BEYOND FREEDOM AND DIGNITY by John Sullivan that will also appear in Teachers College Record. We will follow it in the next issue with an interbehavioral article by N. H. Pronko on that same controversy: determinism and free will.

S - R

SKINNER'S RAZOR\*

John Sullivan

New York University

B. F. Skinner's Beyond Freedom and Dignity (Knopf, 1971) is clearly an important book, but how important is difficult to assess at this time. Many books which have been historically influential have not been acclaimed when first published and many so acclaimed have not stood the test of later historical judgment. Some historians suggest that the significance of an event for the most part does not depend upon events which precede or accompany it. What follows is more important. For instance, Freud's Interpretation of Dreams (1900) would have been an interesting contribution to the explanation of dreams, but not much more. Because of the subsequent development of psychoanalysis and the drift of Western culture it has become one of the basic books of our time. By contrast, James Mill's Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind (1829) marked both the culmination and the end of the movement of simple association psychology. John Stuart Mill's doctrine of emergent properties, called chemism, and the influence of Darwinism resulted in a basic reorientation of British psychology. Though the historical importance of Beyond Freedom and Dignity is impossible to determine today, I shall attempt to evaluate its contemporary significance.

Skinner's fundamental method in this book is to define in a behavioristic language a number of terms common in the humanistic literature. Meanings and references of the humanistic terms are transposed from social contexts into paradigms used in the experimental study of learning. The intellectual feat is to make these translations in such a way that no meaning of the humanistic terms are unaccounted for and the new definitions have a practical use. Since he does not explicitly restrict his claims, it is assumed that Skinner has done both. An obvious advantage of his procedure is that he is able to make successful coordinations of terms from the humanistic literature to his experimental paradigms, and he knows the relevant variables in these paradigms, then he is in a position to make significant analyses of social situations. Social contexts may thus be analyzed in different ways than have been done in the humanistic literature. Skinner's analyses lead, so the claim goes, to beyond freedom and dignity to a social world based upon positive reinforcement that could lead to the development of man beyond the capability of our present social arrangements.

Such utopian dreams are symptoms of the discontents of our social world. These dreams have been called the "opium of the intellectuals." Dreams of the conditions for social justice invariably have a solution in terms of the particular thinker's favored paradigms. For Plato the solution was in the recognition of the natural hierarchy of classes and the harmony of the functions of each class. Christian tradition found the solution to living in this world to be composed of fortitude and love in this world, and faith in the utopian character of the next world. For Marx the solution was found in the abolition of class exploitation by a rearrangement of economic and political power. For Freud the utopian dream is viewed as a regressive wish for the good mother who satisfies every need without making demands. Reality, however, requires a measure of stoicism and an attempt to extend conscious control when conditions are propitious. For Skinner the dream is the design of social controls without the use of aversive stimuli.

\*Presented to the Graduate Student Psychology Colloquim at the New School, Jan. 1972.

Evaluation of Beyond Freedom and Dignity entails at least three components: (1) an analysis of Skinner's specific reductive procedures, (2) an analysis of the general empirical tradition, and (3) a review of alternative analyses. One who attacks, defends, or merely assesses the book is taking a stand on the experimental analysis of behavior, empiricism, and the generality of the experimental analysis of behavior.

## I.

A network of interesting arguments is presented in Beyond Freedom and Dignity. They will be constructed here in a form slightly different from Skinner's presentation in order to heighten their dialectical quality and to stress their related character. The comments are my own.

### The Technology Dialectic

Antagonist: Man is an autonomous agent; thus prediction and control of his behavior are impossible. Skinnerian Reply: All behavior is determined, that is, under some control. A technology of control of behavior has developed as we have learned to manipulate environments which reinforce behavior.

### The Values Dialectic

Antagonist: The gap between what is and what ought to be is unbridgeable. This is the gap between science and ethics, a distinction between description and prescription. There can be no scientifically based, so-called naturalistic ethics.

Reply: An ultimate value for humans is survival. What is good is what contributes to long-term survival. To ask if something is good is only to ask if it contributes positively to the fulfillment of human development.

Comment: This is the Darwinian metaphysic of the Skinnerian system. It might better be stated as a hypothetical statement: If survival is our ultimate value, then whatever contributes to survival is good.

### The Autonomous Man Dialectic

Antagonist: Man's behavior is controlled by his wishes, perceptions, and ideas. Reply: To explain a person's actions by his ideas is simply to push the problem of explanation back to the conditions which determine the development of his ideas. Comment: A variation on this argument is to hold that behavior is determined by a person's habits, motivational states, individual differences like intelligence, and the environmental stimuli. It might then be objected that it is not the stimuli per se that are important but how the stimuli are perceived. But this is to require all over again that habits, motivational states, and individual differences explain the perception of stimuli.

### The Dignity Dialectic

Antagonist: Some people deserve credit for their strength of character and dignity. Reply: We tend to explain behavior in which the causes are inconspicuous as due to the properties of the agent or his will. But all behavior is under controls such that the person should be given neither blame or credit for his dignity.

### The Freedom Dialectic

Antagonist: Freedom is an unrestricted good, is the condition for the development of the person to the fullest, and is incompatible with control in any form. Reply: Behavior is always under control of some form or

another. The literature of freedom has arisen from a rejection of aversive social controls. This literature is largely concerned with avoidance or escape from aversive controls. But this formulation distorts the problem. The values of positive social controls are denied in the wish to escape from aversive controls. Since behavior is always under environmental control, the problem is to shift controls from aversive to positive stimuli.

### The Reinforcement Dialectic

Antagonist: Reinforcement theory which is at the base of your psychology cannot explain the behavior of people who are free, particularly their creative behavior. Reinforcement by its nature only increases the probability of what has already occurred. Reply: Creative behavior is under the control of normative systems, like language is under the control of syntactic rules which are learned. Such rules applied over and over again with different contents may generate infinitely varied sentences. Rule-mediated behavior is ultimately under the control of reinforcing environments. Scientific laws generally are learned by reinforcement principles and are maintained by social and physical reinforcements.

### The Empiricism Dialectic

Antagonist: Out of pure reason it is possible to construct concepts that have an explanatory function in the physical world. Mathematical concepts are standard examples. Reply: All knowledge comes from experience. In order to have meaning theoretical terms must be reducible to terms of direct experience. Comment: Skinner's work is in the tradition of radical empiricism. His reduction of the terms "freedom" and "dignity" is comparable in method to Hume's reduction of "cause" and "self" to elements of his psychology of impressions and ideas related by laws of association (A Treatise on Human Nature (1739)). Skinner's reduction is also similar in form to Mach's reduction to his psychology of the terms of Newtonian science (Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung historisch-kritisch dargestellt, Leipzig, 1883) and William James' reduction of "consciousness" ("Does Consciousness Exist." 1904).

## II.

Much that irritates about Skinner may be traced to the bland assertiveness of his style. This assertiveness is also of an extreme position that leads to paradoxical conclusions that are counter-intuitive and against ordinary language usage.

A cluster of notions has been traditionally associated with empiricism. The position was given a classic statement by Locke, who held that all knowledge comes from experience. This doctrine was aimed polemically at the Platonic doctrine of innate ideas (first stated in the dialogue Meno). The main thrust of Skinner's polemic is against abstract notions, with the accompanying doctrine that all behavior is controlled (ultimately) by reinforcements. Skinner is concerned with behaviors, not ideas. Classical empiricism concerned with knowledge and mind has been shorn of its mentalistic trappings and given a new formulation in terms of experimental analysis of behavior. Skinner's version is that knowledge comes from reinforcements and further that ultimately the control of behavior is to be found in reinforcements and not in ideas or knowledge.

Skinner is thus giving us a modern experimental psychologist's version of Ockham's Razor: don't multiply entities beyond reinforcements. Ockham's (don't multiply entities beyond necessity) thrust was against the existence of platonic universals and a preference for Aristotelian particulars. There

may be physical objects, white in color. These objects may be said to have the property of whiteness. Since many different objects may have the property of being white, whiteness is designated a universal. The problem is to consider whether "whiteness" has an existence apart from the objects which have it as a property. Nominalists like Ockham held that the only things that existed were particulars; they were against the multiplying of entities like Platonic universals. Freedom is also a universal of the Platonic type; the question is whether it is reducible to simple situations. Since it is not a variable in an experimental situation, the problem is to translate the term into behavioristic vocabulary. In performing this reduction, note that Skinner refers to the behaviors of people and not the property of an individual.

"Man's struggle for freedom is...due...to certain behavioral processes... the chief effect of which is the avoidance or escape from so-called "aversive" features of the environment." (p.42). "The literature of freedom... has been forced to brand all control as wrong and to misrepresent many of the advantages to be gained from a social environment. It is unprepared for the next step, which is not to free men from control but to analyze and change the kinds of control to which they are exposed." (p. 42-43). These two quotations, patched together as they are from Skinner's text, do not, I believe, distort it. The core of his argument is contained here. Briefly, in terms of the dimensions mentioned above, the literature of freedom arises in conditions of strong aversive control, but that we are able to use controls non-aversively toward goals which have ultimately good outcomes.

"We recognize a person's dignity or worth when we give him credit for what he has done. The amount we give is inversely proportional to the conspicuousness of the causes of his behavior. If we do not know why a person acts as he does, we attribute his behavior to him." (p. 58).

### III.

My evaluation of Skinner's proposals is based upon a fundamental agreement and a fundamental disagreement. The agreement is probably a professional distortion, sort of a special knothole view on the world, that psychology is the propaedeutic social science. This is the thesis that most of what is interesting in the social sciences can be given an explanation in psychological terms. The disagreement is on the question of how far a reduction can be made of any social phenomena. The question "how far a reduction?" is connected with the question, "to what psychology will the reduction of humanistic terms be most productive?"

It is reasonable to hold that even freedom implies the direction of a person's behavior by his own set of values, ideas, etc. Thus the notion of freedom implies control. The argument is not about control or no control but the loci of control. That there can be differences in the ratios of external versus internal control of a person's behavior is difficult to dispute. It is important in evaluating actions to assess them as wise or foolish, intelligent or not intelligent, compelled or relatively free. These actions are to be judged in terms of criteria relative to the pursuit of goals, ends, values, etc. The region where it is important to preserve the notions of freedom and dignity is precisely in the opportunity to have behavior under the control of one's own values, etc. and not someone else's. No doubt one's politics, religion, views on education, on love, life, etc., are determined by one's background, ultimately by reinforcement from one's own physical and social environments. To be controlled by someone else's background values, etc. is to be unfree. The argument is not for ultimate freedom but for freedom to control one's own behavior and environments in

terms of one's own states. The area in which terms like freedom and dignity occur is not in ultimate explanations but in immediate ones. This is a thesis of levels of explanation and causal chains.

My fundamental disagreement is to which of the various psychologies the terms of humanistic literature will be reduced. At this stage of our understanding of psychological processes one cannot rule out competing psychologies. Reduction of terms like "freedom" and "dignity" to a psychology that does not admit of inner states of organisms inevitably ends by dissolving these concepts. If one assumes the existence of mediating states or cognitive processes, the chance of the survival of some of the ordinary language meanings of these constructs is increased.

Skinner's Beyond Freedom and Dignity is of great value for it sharply illuminates the controlling features of our environments. As a result of this book we ought to be increasingly sensitive to being controlled and the opportunity to exercise counter control in our environments. How this works in the miniature can be illustrated by the fact that copyrights of Skinner's previous books were owned by the publishers. He, however, owns the copyright to Beyond Freedom and Dignity. He probably would interpret this behavior as rule-mediated which is reinforcing. I hold that this is an advance in Skinner's freedom and probably a considerable contribution to his worth.

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"A man sees a forest, a coastline, or a prairie in a time framework of the past, present and future; progress and decay; projects and prospects. His experiences is affected by duration--the amount of time he spends in the setting; tempo--a lake looks different when he is driving past at 70 miles an hour from when he is walking alongside it; sequence--certain paths provide contrasts and surprises while others prepare him for what is coming next; chronicity--several brief visits will produce an experience different from one based on a long visit; and familiarity--as a visitor, he and an old-time resident share space but their experiences will be different."

--Robert Sommer  
Natural History,  
Aug/Sept. 1971

