

BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS: BEYOND LOCALISMS AND FASHIONS¹

ANÁLISIS DE LA CONDUCTA:
MÁS ALLÁ DE LOCALISMOS Y MODAS

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I am very honored to receive this award. To me it represents a recognition of the Latin-speaking and Latin-*thinking* scientific community, and very especially of the behavior analysts in Mexico and Brazil, who played a pioneering role in our discipline almost from its very beginning. I am personally indebted to three most distinguished scholars: Sidney W. Bijou, J. R. Kantor, and William N. Schoenfeld. Although none of them was my formal teacher, all three left long-lasting imprints in my personal and professional life.

In 1967, when I was a hard-core neo-Hullian, Sidney W. Bijou had the ability and wisdom to persuade me about the strength and power of a scientific strategy based upon the single organism under real-time sustained contingencies. He also encouraged me to do original research by "applying the principles" grounded on theoretical and experimental knowledge. Sid Bijou's dedication to teaching and setting applied laboratory programs was a permanent source of inspiration, and his intellectual honesty and personal modesty has been more than a model to follow.

Sid Bijou was my "bridge" in meeting J. R. Kantor. My first personal contact with J. R. Kantor was in 1974, when he was invited to be the Honorary President of the *First Mexican Meeting of Behavior Analysis* in Xalapa. This was the first of many reciprocal visits. I had the good fortune to talk many times with J. R. Kantor about a great variety of issues in psychology and its history. From Kantor I learned a different way to look at psychology and the importance

¹ Read in occasion of receiving the International Award for the Dissemination of Behavior Analysis at the 24rd Annual Convention of the Association for Behavior Analysis, Orlando, FL, May 22-26, 1998.

of making explicit the theoretical foundations of any scientific endeavor. Kantor always transmitted his personal concern about being aware and critical of models foreign to psychology as a natural science, whether they were influenced by spiritualistic conceptions or taken from other disciplines and sciences. I learned from him the specificity of psychology as a domain of scientific knowledge and the need to develop categories and methods akin to its epistemic purposes and scope. The concept of interbehavioral field and the distinction between functions, medium, and setting factors, were and still are, too innovative to be fully understood and incorporated by the mainstream of behavioral thinking.

William "Nat" Schoenfeld, using an allegory, could be said to be the "architect of my thought". I met him in New York in 1968 and since then I had the privilege to invite him several times to Mexico City and Guadalajara. Nat was an atypical "behavior analyst". He never felt that the "principles" were a complete set of conceptual tools that enabled to explain all behavioral phenomena. Nat was not especially proclive to hermeneutics, so he was permanently critical of the abuse of concepts such as "reinforcement" and similar ones. While he was an Aristotelian in his way of thinking, he was a Socratic in his way of teaching. This meant that Nat always questioned the nature of concepts and their applicability, the relation of concepts to facts and data, and the turn of events that could have taken place in science if prominent scientists had "seen" facts and events in a different way. There were no discrepancies in the way Nat thought and the way Nat taught. He used to "think" aloud and share his arguments with others. Nat never gave solutions. He rather used to ask questions and formulate problems. To quote Wittgenstein, I learned this "form of life" from him, and although sometimes it takes you away from social flattery and recognition, in compensation it always gives you the incomparable pleasures of intellectual consistency and ludic enjoyment of knowing, conceived as a very special kind of linguistic doing.

I do not mention the influence of these three great men just as a personal reminiscence. I think that their moral and thinking behavior should stimulate some reflections about the course taken by behavior analysis nowadays.

I would like to share some concerns I have regarding the present status and future of behavioral psychology. I will point to five basic problems in the practice of behavioral psychology:

- 1) Behavior theory has been replaced by behavior analysis. Behavior analysis is not a discipline. It is a methodology stressing the study of individual organisms under real time conditions, and in interaction with events, stimulus objects and other organisms in particular circumstances. Nevertheless, behavior analysis does not by itself provide concepts and logical categories, and the

meaningfulness of data divorced or autonomous from an organic theory of behavior is scarce and questionable. Behavior analysis as a method grew up from behavior theory, and as a method alone is becoming such a safe highway that nobody seems to know where it takes to. Although the availability of reliable procedures for collecting and analyzing data is a necessary condition for the development of a strong science, merely knowing how to obtain "hard" data independently of a theory of behavior (to distinguish it from simple hermeneutics) amounts to having a technology for its own sake.

2) The replacement of behavior theory by behavior analysis takes us to a second issue. Behavior analysis is being progressively conceived as a discipline separate from psychology. There are already attempts to transform behavior analysis in a discipline distinct from psychology, e.g., behaviorology and praxis. Whether the attempt to take behavior analysis away from the various mainstream psychological approaches is tacit or explicit, the general outcome is that behavior analysis shows little or no interaction with the general problems and issues of psychology. The perils involved in this isolationist strategy are obvious: behavior analysis is departing from the initial aspiration of behaviorism to transform psychology into a natural science, and by considering to be the only depository of scientific truth, behavior analysis secludes itself from the mainstream of psychology.

3) Two negative outcomes have derived from the implicit disqualification by behavior analysis of psychological theorizing and research. First, most behavior analysts do not usually read and, henceforth, do not quote what is being thought and done in psychology. Second, the ignorance of the psychological literature has been extended also to the traditional writings of early behaviorists and other scholars which founded modern psychology, in such a way that most of our colleagues seem to assume that psychology began in 1970, or maybe later! It is unnecessary to stress that this "ostrich" attitude has worked against the recognition and formulation of significant theoretical problems. Behavior analysis has become a discipline wedded to fashion, "discovering" every once and then problems that recurrently emerge in different conceptual traditions, as if they were only empirical issues bound to specific procedures and experimental preparations.

4) The lack of interest in behavior theory has promoted the acritical adoption, use, and defense of concepts without inquiring into their logical consistency, their historical origins, and their relevance to the subject matter of psychology: everyday behavior in some animals and human beings. The defensive attitude against philosophical analysis has often deprived behavior analysts of the teachings of distinguished philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin, and Kantor about the truly functional analysis of language, and about the importance of conceptual analysis in the formulation of significant

problems for theory and research. Data are not important *per se*. They are only meaningful under the light of concepts and categories, and in order to obtain good data it is, as important to correctly develop adequate categories, concepts and questions, as it is to have sophisticated and powerful instruments and quantitative resources.

5) Behavior analysis has become an orphan of theory. It is just too naive to assume that all behavior may be analyzed and explained through the (most of the times) oversimplified notion of the three-term contingency along with a few recent ancillary operational concepts. The lack of an explicit set of theoretical categories and its correlated corpus has necessarily fostered the adoption of models coming from other disciplines, without a prior conceptual analysis of their pertinence and adequacy for the description and explanation of behavior. Economics, physics, biology, mathematics, and other disciplines have inspired simplified and unconnected models, proposed for predicting and fitting behavioral data with numerous restrictions. Current literature in behavior analysis shows the closed character of areas of research, the lack of theoretical connection among them, and the virtual total independence between so-called experimental and applied behavior analysis. The divergence of ad-hoc models designed for different empirical areas, which most of the time are only significant in the context of the experimental procedures from which they arose, cannot be taken as an indicator of theoretical strength. On the contrary, it shows a weak theory, which has not been conceptually revisited, and that has been transformed into a collection of quasi-dogmatic principles, in spite of evident problems encountered when dealing with the systematic and heuristic functions that define the role of theory in the scientific endeavor.

Contemporary psychology, and behaviorism outstandingly, emerged and grew up in the context of the Anglo-Saxon culture provided by the prosperous and expanding Capitalism in the United States. In this sense, we may assert without fear of being mistaken that psychology and behaviorism are linked to the U.S. culture; but present U.S. culture seems to be quite distinct from the one undergoing a rich growing process at the beginning of this century. When psychology got its birth certificate in the U.S., the latter was a country open to immigration and new ideas, avid of learning from other countries and cultures. Today, the U.S. is the most powerful nation in the world, and considers that the rest of the world has to learn from what unfortunately has been called the "American way of life". Nowadays it is easier to buy than to learn.

Science is an international endeavor, even more in the time of information technology and economic globalization. Although English has become the official language of science, science is nurtured and developed in the context of cultures that are often quite different from the Anglo-Saxon culture. Scientific communities need to remain open to the conceptual and

empirical developments taking place in different countries and cultures. It is not advisable to restrict the accepted scientific literature to those communications published in English and only in a very limited number of journals. Science is similar to the philogeny of species: variation is required to avoid genetic defects and to assure a vigorous offspring! No discipline can survive when its publications work under the rule of self-citation and fashionable topics, and new ideas are rejected, resisted or ignored because they are not familiar to the members of that community, or because the antecedents and theoretical assumptions have been thought of and published in a language different from English. A lamentable example of this "closure" is the well-documented fact (Dinsmoor, 1997) that Nat Schoenfeld, cofounder of JEAB, stopped sending manuscripts to this journal due to what he called its "arbitrarily restrictive editorial policies" (p. 1377).

Psychology is still far from being a true science. It is the only discipline with no agreement on its conceptual subject matter. Behaviorisms, among many other conceptual attempts, are part of the historical process of building a science of psychology. In spite of the difficulties encountered in this endeavor, I share with you the conviction that we, behaviorists, are on the right track. But to reach our final destiny, we need to know where our assumptions and achievements come from, we have to be critical about the conceptual tools being used to construct the new science, and we have to be open to a diversity of approaches, not only from scholars with perspectives other than ours', but also from colleagues that look at the conceptual and empirical problems of a psychology based on behavior from the enlarged viewpoints stemming from different cultural and intellectual traditions. We have to abandon fashions and localisms, that are the by-products of a wrongly conceived free-market of ideas. Otherwise, sooner or later, we'll have to agree with Nat Schoenfeld, when he wrote in his last paper, paraphrasing John B. Watson:

Enough to explain why I am saddened, and often depressed, by what has been happening to "behaviorism", to behavior science generally, since 1913. How far have we come since then? Seems to me we may have slipped backwards. It looks to me sometimes, in my more depressed moments, like eighty years of no progress.

...we need *more*, not fewer, "radical behaviorists." More stubborn, *more* intransigent, ones... *More* science, not less. *More* attention to the data, not less. *More* care in theorizing, not less. Behavior science needs to become *more* behavioristic, not less. (1993, p. 24)

Thank you very much for your kindness, your attention and your understanding.

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