

In Response

Comments about the Isolation of Behavior Analysis

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In this note, I comment on some recommendations offered to behavior analysts by Proctor and Weeks (1988) in their reply to Harzem (1987). I make these comments not to criticize the paper by Proctor and Weeks as a whole but rather to discuss some of the issues that the authors have raised.

First, Proctor and Weeks have noted that behavior analysts should publish less in in-house journals and more in other journals of psychology. It is true that behavior analysts have tended to publish their work in journals of behavior analysis rather than in other journals. But, it is easy to lose perspective when we think about this matter. We need to remember that specialization does not make our journals unique. Consider, for example, *Human Development*, a journal whose contributors take a particular approach toward the study of human development. Specialized journals offer their readers a collection of papers by authors who share a set of assumptions about past achievements, current problems, and appropriate methodologies. In these journals we see the progress made when a group of people agree on fundamentals and move forward within the domain so defined. So it is with journals of behavior analysis.

Specialized journals might foster isolation, but we cannot blame this isolation entirely upon the contributors. All psychologists can read these specialized journals and thereby inform themselves of new developments. For example, behavior analysts can read the literature of personality theory, where they will find some useful research on self-awareness and self-monitoring (see Singer & Kol-

ligian, 1987). No one would suggest that personality theorists should publish in our journals to inform us of their work. Likewise, other psychologists can inform themselves about behavior analysis by reading our journals. If they do not, then perhaps this omission reflects only that they do not find our work useful in their own work, which, after all, often depends on assumptions which we do not share with them.

This acknowledgement of disparate assumptions leads to my second comment, which concerns Proctor and Weeks's (1988) recommendation that behavior analysts should desist from rejecting cognitivism. In rejecting cognitivism, we reject the assumption that psychology's subject matter consists of a cognitive system inside the head. In fact, a small minority (e.g., Dewey, 1930; McDougall, 1912; Ryle, 1949/1966; Skinner, 1938, 1953, 1987a) has long worked to turn psychology away from this invented subject matter which is juxtaposed between behavior (read "action") and the central nervous system. From this point of view, behavior analysis has more than so-called "principles of conditioning" (Proctor & Weeks, 1988) to offer psychology as a whole. Behavior analysis contributes by exploring fully the ramifications of taking behavior-in-context-and-through-time as a subject matter in its own right. If behavior analysts did abandon this ontological (and not ideological; cf. Proctor & Weeks, 1988) commitment, then they would no longer be doing behavior analysis.

Proctor and Weeks have also suggested that behavior analysts should acquaint themselves with cognitive psychology. We could reply that in fact cognitive psychologists should acquaint themselves with behavior analysis. This retort might

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seem snide. But, as Sidman (1986) has noted, the reluctance of some psychologists to use the body of knowledge that has accumulated in behavior analysis suggests "a kind of 'scientific malpractice'" (p. 44). Consistent with this, Bindra (1984) has commented that cognitivists have ignored the literature of learning and motivation and have failed to show how cognitive concepts might be integrated with the rest of psychological knowledge. It is worth emphasizing that Bindra felt able to distinguish cognitivism, which he described as a parochial approach, from the main body of established knowledge in psychology. He described cognitivism as a *new psychological school* which includes cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, and information-system modelling, among other things. Bindra's comment is surprising when considered from the perspective of behavior analysis, because we have tended to assume that all other psychologists are cognitivists. Perhaps we should reconsider that assumption. At the same time, we should familiarize ourselves with some of the critiques of cognitivism written by people who would not identify themselves as behavior analysts (e.g., Ades, 1981; Coulter, 1982; Norman, 1980). We would find that we have much in common with these writers. In sum, it is difficult to see what we would gain from acquainting ourselves with cognitivism, for the reasons already stated. We would do better to spend our time contributing to and working out the full implications of a data-rich and contingency-oriented science of behavior.

On a more conciliatory note, behavior analysts (e.g., Skinner, 1987b) can admit that other psychologists, including cognitivists, have observed many interesting behavioral phenomena. However, contrary to Proctor and Weeks, our task is not to develop alternative explanations of the relevant *data*, which, after all, were collected for nonbehavioral purposes and with nonbehavioral methods (cf. Wiest, 1967). Our task begins in constructing contingency-oriented interpretations of the *behavioral phenomena*. Segal's (1975) interpretation of studies of how children

learn to talk is exemplary in this respect. Other work that invites a contingency-oriented interpretation includes Flavell's (1972) analysis of developmental phenomena, Abelson's (1981) discussion of the cognitive concept of the script, and McNeill's (1985) analysis of gestures as linguistic (read "as verbal"), among many other examples. Our task continues in using contingency-oriented interpretations as the starting-points for empirical analyses of the phenomena of interest. In this work, we would spend our energies contributing to a science of behavior rather than arguing about the interpretation of cognitive *data*, which are often of interest only in relation to cognitive theory if only because they are laden with cognitive theory.

As we make progress, other psychologists, including cognitive psychologists, might find our methods and results increasingly useful in their own work, and they might then read our journals and accept our papers for publication in their journals. At that point, we might more often find research published in the literature outside behavior analysis that we can use in our own work. We can hope for such a convergence of interests in the long run. In the meantime, we would do well to concentrate on doing behavior analysis under the scrutiny of peers who are committed to a data-rich and contingency-oriented psychology. (By the way, with its consistent commitment to a contingency-oriented psychology, *The Behavior Analyst* has a special place among psychology journals. We should keep it that way.)

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