A Reply to Leigland's "Is a New Version of Philosophical Pragmatism Necessary? A Reply to Barnes-Holmes"

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In Leigland's (2003) reply to my article, "Behavioral Pragmatism: No Place for Reality and Truth" (Barnes-Holmes, 2000), he states that it "raises a number of excellent points and appropriately and productively expands the literature relating behavior analysis to pragmatist philosophy" (p. 298), and that it contains "excellent points in [the] descriptions of a number of important issues" (p. 302). Naturally, I was pleased to receive such high praise from a colleague, whose own work I have come to admire and respect greatly over the years. However, Leigland also questions the article's narrow focus on the work of the pragmatist philosopher, Quine (1960, 1974, 1990), and the necessity of the term *behavioral pragmatism*. In what follows, I will address these two main questions and a number of other more minor issues raised by Leigland.

Why Not Review a Wider Range of the Literature on Philosophical Pragmatism?

The primary purpose of my article was to respond to the argument presented by L. J. Hayes (1993) that scientists who apparently adopt utility in the domain of practical affairs as a truth criterion, as opposed to correspondence, in fact adopt the latter rather than the former when seeking to establish the utility of a given statement. In my article, I sought to respond to this claim behavior-analytically, rather

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than philosophically (at least in the traditional sense). Certainly, I could have used arguments from Rorty (e.g., 1989) and other pragmatist philosophers to counter Hayes' argument. However, Hayes may have retorted, quite reasonably, that her arguments were not directed primarily at pragmatist philosophers but rather at behavioral scientists who claimed to be adopting pragmatic truth criteria. A counterargument to Hayes, therefore, required the response of a scientist who employs the pragmatic truth criterion of successful working. Consequently, I described the emergence, expression, and application of pragmatic strategies within the science of behavior analysis, as I have personally experienced them as a scientist, and I labeled this experience *behavioral pragmatism*. In so doing, I hoped to demonstrate that utility-based truth, at least for me, does not, upon close scrutiny, collapse into correspondence-based truth. In light of Leigland's generally positive comments pertaining to many of the points contained in my article, I presume that I was successful, at least from Leigland's perspective, in defending the concept of utility-based truth within behavior analysis.

Given that one of my main goals was to address the verbal and nonverbal practices of behavior analysts who describe themselves as pragmatists, one might ask why I focused so much attention on the work of Quine (1960, 1974, 1990). In fact, an earlier version of the article did not contain the material on Quine or his concept of the observation sentence. However, on the recommendation of an anonymous reviewer who pointed out Quine's close

association with behavioral psycholo-
gy, it seemed reasonable to review his
work. In retrospect, I think the article
benefited considerably from this re-
view, but I maintain that it was not a
necessary part of the core defense of
the utility-based truth criterion *within
the discipline of behavior analysis*. In
my view, what I describe as behavioral
pragmatism, in and of itself, provides
the appropriate and adequate defense.

Behavioral Pragmatism:
Why Introduce a New Label?

The fundamental assumptions of
what I call behavioral pragmatism, and
the implications arising thereof, are
broadly consistent with, and in part de-
rived from, much of the writing al-
ready found within pragmatist philos-
ophy. As I indicated in the original ar-
ticle, the work of Rorty (1989) pro-
vides one example, and indeed there
are others, such as Putnam (1981,
1987) and Rouse (1987).[1] However,

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[1] Rorty's (1979) focus on conversation as "the
ultimate context in which knowledge is to be
understood" (p. 389) echoes Skinner's (1957)
emphasis on verbal behavior as a socially me-
diated activity. Putnum's (1990) statement that
"Our image of the world cannot be 'justified'
by anything but its success as judged by the *in-
terests and values* [italics added] which evolve
and get modified at the same time and in inter-
action with our evolving image of the world it-
self" (p. 29) seems to parallel S. C. Hayes and
Brownstein's (1986) focus on scientific goals in
determining truth in behavior analysis. Rouse's
(1987) *practical hermeneutics* holds that skills
("knowing how") precede theoretical knowl-
edge ("knowing that"), thus leading to the con-
clusion that all knowledge is local, situated from
the perspective of an embodied agent, and root-
ed in practical daily activities. This view seems
to overlap with what S. C. Hayes (1993, 1997)
calls *functional contextualism* (engineering is
provided as a typical model), and in particular
the distinction he draws between verbal and
nonverbal knowing. The work of other prag-
matist philosophers is also reflected in some of
the writings and practices of behavior analysis,
but in each case there are also differences that
are often subtle and complex in nature (see, e.g.,
Roche & Barnes-Holmes, 2003, for a detailed
examination of the similarities and differences
between behavior analysis and one modern in-
carnation of the pragmatist tradition in the form
of social constructionism).

none of this philosophical writing, as
far as I am aware, is cast in the sci-
entific language of behavior analysis.
In contrast, behavioral pragmatism em-
ploys this language (e.g., Barnes-
Holmes, 2000, p. 199; see also Barnes
& Roche, 1997). In my view, therefore,
the use of the term *behavioral prag-
matism* seemed justified, in part, be-
cause I could not find a widely recog-
nized pragmatist philosopher who em-
ployed the language of behavior anal-
ysis. Parenthetically, I also noted that I
was unwilling to employ the label *rad-
ical behaviorism,* because at least some
individuals would disagree with behav-
ioral pragmatism, or some parts of it,
and yet consider themselves to be rad-
ical behaviorists (cf. Barnes & Roche,
1994).

One might argue at this point that
the use of behavior-analytic terminol-
ogy in my discussion and definition of
behavioral pragmatism involves con-
flating science and philosophy in a
rather unorthodox manner. Indeed, this
may be so, and I am happy to admit to
the "crime" of unorthodoxy. For me,
engaging in the science of behavior
analysis involves, ipso facto, adopting
the type of pragmatic approach to sci-
ence that I outlined in the article. In
other words, the science and the phi-
losophy are not independent do-
mains—they are, in a sense, continu-
ous (cf. Callebaut, 1993). And here
again, I found another basis for the
conjunction of the words *behavioral*
and *pragmatism.*

Another reason underlying the use
of the term *behavioral pragmatism* is
actually identified by Leigland when
he writes, for example, "the diverse
positions taken among the pragmatist
philosophers regarding truth are ex-
traordinarily complex" (p. 301) and
also when he points out that behavior
analysis, as a scientific field, has a
"different set of goals, methods, and
problems" (p. 302) from that of phil-
osophical pragmatism. The debates
within philosophical pragmatism are
indeed diverse and complex, and thus
I believe there is some benefit in at-
tempting to extract a relatively simple

and straightforward expression of the pragmatic approach to science found within behavior analysis so that this can be easily examined, debated, and modified within the discipline itself (see also Barnes & Roche, 1994). The different goals, methods, and problems of our field will likely limit the usefulness of this exercise for philosophical pragmatism, as indeed philosophical pragmatist writings may have limited utility for science (e.g., see Diggins, 1994, on the relevance of Rorty's pragmatism to scientific practice and investigation). Given this apparent separation between philosophical pragmatism and the pragmatic approach within behavior analysis, the use of the term *behavioral pragmatism* seems to function as an important stimulus for discriminating between these two intellectual domains. The use of the term, therefore, should not be taken to imply the creation of a new philosophy qua traditional philosophy. Rather, behavioral pragmatism is a label for a particular set of verbal and nonverbal scientific practices within the science of behavior analysis that is to be approached and understood behavior-analytically (see Barnes & Roche, 1997).

Other Issues

Leigland also raises a number of other points, some of which are related to those above, that I would like to address briefly, and these are as follows.

General conclusions concerning pragmatism. The general statements to which Leigland refers were made either in the context of discussing L. J. Hayes' (1993) or Quine's (1960, 1974, 1990) work, and when the article first focused on Quine it was stated that, "There are, of course, many other pragmatist philosophers" (p. 194). Given the context, therefore, it seemed unnecessary to refer to Quine when making statements about pragmatism—such statements were clearly based on his writings alone (e.g., the phrase "Quine's pragmatist philosophy" is used in the paper's abstract).

Moreover, having discussed the work of Hayes and Quine, I subsequently pointed to the work of Rorty (1989) as providing some overlap with behavioral pragmatism, and thus any conclusion on behalf of the reader that Hayes and Quine represent the whole of philosophical pragmatism seems highly unlikely.

The subtitle. Leigland suggested that pragmatist philosophers would find the subtitle of the article, "No Place for Reality and Truth," "ambiguous and puzzling" (p. 300). Perhaps, but three contextual issues are worth noting. First, the title of L. J. Hayes' article, which provided the main basis for mine, was entitled "Reality and Truth," and thus my title explicitly recognized this historical connection. Second, any puzzlement caused by the title would be removed quickly when one reads the abstract. Third, although a title may simply inform a prospective reader of the content of an article, an unusual title may also pique some interest in actually reading it (e.g., perhaps because it causes puzzlement). Thus, the most accurate title might not always be the best title (assuming that increasing readership is the writer's goal).

Science as a social process. Towards the end of his article, Leigland takes care to emphasize the social nature of scientific activity by reminding us that "the goals of scientists develop in the context of the scientific and larger cultures" and that behavior analysts "have the shared goals of being part of a scientific community" (p. 303). For the behavioral pragmatist, any claim that science is inherently social is not considered to be an ontological fact, but is treated as a statement that may be relatively useful in some contexts but not in others. If Leigland's emphasis on science as a social process is pragmatic in this sense, I agree with him. And of course, the very concept of behavioral pragmatism itself should be treated in the same pragmatic way. Although I have argued that the concept may be of some value in helping

us to clarify our fundamental assumptions and facilitate and focus our discussions on the relevant issues within the science of behavior analysis, my rendition of behavioral pragmatism should be seen as simply another instance of verbal behavior that may or may not produce the desired outcome.

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