Book Note

Conversations with the Keepers of the Internal Order: A Review of B. J. Baars'

The Cognitive Revolution in Psychology

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In *The Cognitive Revolution in Psychology*, B. J. Baars (1986) proposes that the emergence of cognitive psychology over a period of approximately 25 to 30 years represents a shift in the fundamental metatheory of scientific psychology. Unlike other recent historical accounts, much of the present volume is devoted to interviews conducted by the author with many of the scientists and scholars whose names are by now synonymous with the ascendancy of cognitive psychology.

The book recommends itself to the behavior analyst on several grounds. In many respects, the lively verbatim transcripts of conversations with the likes of George Miller, Ulric Neisser and Noam Chomsky are both more entertaining and more informative than would have been a merely interpretive, historical narration. The different personal histories, professional training and current viewpoints of the interview subjects are fascinating for their diversity, and enlightening in demonstrating cognitive psychology to be no more unified nor coherent a metatheory than any extant alternative.

Also noteworthy are the author's considerable efforts to outline the relevant historical antecedents, behaviorism in particular, from which cognitive psychology emerged. This task, of course,

necessarily entails a description of behaviorism's limitations as a metatheory. In this particular capacity, Baars' critique unquestionably is weak, as readers of this journal likely will discover. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to observe how the many misconceptions regarding behaviorism, though well documented (see Todd & Morris, 1983), manifest themselves in the invective served up by Baars and his subjects.

Finally, if it is in fact the case that cognitive psychology represents the predominant metatheory for modern psychology—and there appears little reason to doubt this claim—then, behavior analysts would do well to inquire as to why this state of affairs exists and what its implications are for behavior analysis. What is it that the cognitive psychologist does so well and can it be done better? Because Baars' interviewees constitute the forefront of cognitive science, they represent an unimpeachable source of information about the discipline, its current concerns and its future directions.

Although the present interviews in no way provide an exhaustive account of the research activity constituting modern cognitive science, particular themes and theoretical considerations arise with considerable frequency throughout the book. Interestingly, there is much in the cognitive literature that, upon close inspection, cannot easily be differentiated from the experimental concerns of behavior analysis. Many such examples are to be found in the literature on verbal learning.

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Among the more celebrated findings in this important research arena is Bransford and Franks' (1971, 1972) demonstration that subjects recall the deep structure or meaning of an utterance more readily than they recall the surface structure. Being little surprised by this finding, the behavior analyst may be compelled to wonder why a theory of language whose response classes are defined functionally, rather than topographically, has been so reluctantly embraced by the cognitive psychologist.

In a similar vein, the Given-New contract of Haviland and Clark (1974) has revealed that readers comprehend a target sentence more rapidly when some of its key words have occurred in a previous sentence. In explaining this result the researchers suggest that new information is somehow coded into existing memory systems, to be accessed later when the target sentence forces a search of relevant contextual information. Of course, it needn't matter that this particular explanation appeals to internal processes or structures. What is instead important about the general Given-New strategy is its explicit recognition of the role of context in the explanation of behavior. Might this signify the psycholinguist's discovery of the operant?

Examples of this sort can be found sprinkled throughout the cognitive research literature, serving to remind us that cognitive psychology has reached its current disciplinary prominence for a host of reasons. Its proponents have promised that cognitive science addresses what is both real and relevant about human behavior, including such important phenomena as decision-making, language, and reading comprehension. Moreover,

it does so by utilizing human subjects and more ecologically valid research strategies. Finally, cognitive psychology is said to have recognized, in a way behaviorism never has, the richness and complexity of human behavior. In the present volume, Baars and his conversants provide considerable testimony to the ills besetting psychology prior to cognitive psychology's metatheoretical resurgence. All of this will be good news to non-behavioral readers. To readers of this journal it may merely be seen as further evidence of behaviorism's misrepresentation.

Its anti-behaviorist stance notwithstanding, *The Cognitive Revolution in Psychology* offers much needed insight into contemporary psychology. The behavioral reader, in particular, will be struck by the often uncanny parallels between the global research interests of behavior analysts and cognitive psychologists, though they may be difficult to discern against the book's backdrop of antiquated stimulus-response psychology that too frequently is masqueraded as modern behaviorism.

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