In Response

The ABP Noncontingency: A Response to "The ABP Contingency"

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In the first sentence of the *In Response* titled "The ABP Contingency" Trice (1985) says, "Vargas (1984) has proposed *postcedent* as the name for the final term in the three term contingency, as a replacement for *consequence*." I did not suggest "postcedent" as a replacement for "consequence" in the three-term contingency anymore than I would suggest replacing "discriminative stimulus" with "antecedent." What I recommended was using the term "postcedent" where "consequence" is not appropriate. Events, either arranged or accidental, often follow responses and have no functional significance to those responses. The term "consequences" is obviously inappropriate. "Postcedent" simply designates the time relation of an event to a response and is convenient in the same sense as "antecedent." (In the last two paragraphs, the writer restates or extends some of the reasons I gave for that convenience. I disagree with much of what is said in the first two paragraphs, but discussion would take us into other issues too far afield.)

The writer's response to my suggested term provides me the opportunity to stretch the matter at hand a bit further. The three-term contingency implies a causal relation, or denotes functional significance, between "three" sets of events occurring at the time, before, and after. Thus, all behavioral and stimulus events in the three-term contingency "fit" into a time frame partitioned into antecedent, current, and postcedent. We use "consequence" as a generic term for events

that follow others and that appear to have a causal relation with them. The term does not specify the exact nature of those relations. We denote them in more specific fashion with terms such as "reinforcement," depending on the particular effects arranged and observed. There seems to be no comparable generic term for events with implied causal significance that come prior to the current action. "Discriminative stimulus" won't do. It is too specific. So are other terms such as "conditional discrimination," and "establishing stimulus." (The "establishing operation" refers more to the arrangements to make stimuli effective in certain ways, for example, the manipulation of any given motivative variable, and addresses events both antecedent and postcedent to the response in focus.) Thus, we've recruited "antecedent" to make do, placing it in complementary relation to "consequence." That jars. On the front part of the three-term contingency, we have a term that means nothing more than a time relation and, on the back part, one that carries a causal meaning. But the three-term contingency implies functional significance between its parts, not just simply relations of time. And so when we imply causality in the expression "three-term contingency," we distort to some degree the meaning of the word "antecedent" when used in conjunction with the word "consequence." Perhaps "setting events" can do the job. It is used in a general sense already as Leigland (1984), in an excellent earlier paper in this journal, pointed out. At the first Southeastern Association for Behavior Analysis meeting (November 15-17, 1984, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina), a spirited discussion followed a set of pa-

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pers on Kantor's interbehaviorism and the speakers were challenged to detail what meaning "setting events" had that was not already covered, and more specifically, by such terms as "discriminative stimulus," "conditional discrimination," and others. It was evident from what the speakers said that "setting events" was all of those and none of those; in short, a generic category for them.

Considering the points above, we might then have the following conventions:

Time placement of events:
antecedent—current—postcedent

Three-term Contingency [general]:
setting events—actions, responses, etc.—consequences

Three-term Contingency [specific]:
discriminative stimulus (etc.)—operant—reinforcing stimulus (etc.)

I believe the suggested conventions more accurately sort out the controls over our verbal behavior.

REFERENCES

- Leigland, S. (1984). On "setting events" and related concepts. *The Behavior Analyst*, 7, 41–45.
 Trice, A. D. (1985). The ABP contingency. *The Behavior Analyst*, 8, 129.
 Vargas, E. A. (1984). On Terms: A new term and some old advice. *The Behavior Analyst*, 7, 67–69.