Review

Daedalean Behaviorism: Notes on A Radical Thinker's Journal: a review of Malott's *Notes from A Radical Behaviorist*

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Maintaining a personal journal is a respectable literary device with a celebrated history (cf. Thoreau, Gauguin). Publishing one's journal in installments every week or so as does Richard Malott in his *Notes From A Radical Behaviorist* represents a significant departure from tradition. *Notes* is a *pot pourri* of essays, film and book reviews, and short stories—a suitable vehicle for a doyen of radical behaviorism. The best journals are personally revealing. *Notes* reveals much about Richard Malott's values and beliefs. He worries over our collectively tenuous personal health and about fragile human relationships, ponders our teetering ecology and reflects on decadent politics. For all of his protestations to the contrary, Malott is a closet romantic passionately trying to save us all from our self-destructive ways. He still believes it's possible. If "Care Enough to Chart" was the Behaviorist buzzword a decade ago, *Notes* would have its readers believe "Rule-Governed-Behavior" is the new Holy Grail. "Why are we all so slovenly?" Malott asks. Why are we overweight, and why do we drink so much alcohol and smoke so many cigarettes when we know their damaging effects? Why don't we wear seat belts and floss our teeth? Possibly Malott would have hit upon his answer sooner had he spent more time reading Freud and less, Skinner. Malott's conclusion is that our personal slothfulness stems from a lack of adequate, verbally-mediated self-punishment developed through early learning. Freud wrote a good deal about the development of the

superego, as I recall. While Skinner has recognized the ubiquity of aversive control, he has always advised against its use. In reality, the impending loss of positive reinforcement (e.g., loss of affection or approval) is undoubtedly one of the predominant variables controlling human behavior in everyday life and is closely related to the development of self-control. Arranging immediate, verbally mediated punishment contingent on minor personal transgressions is what Rule-Governed-Behavior is all about. In the absence of the necessary early learning histories, Malott advises the reader to mend his or her ways by devising explicit rule systems which provide appropriate consequences for complying or failing to comply with one's own program for self-improvement.

As a recovered Micawber himself, Malott's style is more one of lenity than self-righteousness. *Notes* is written in a whimsical, breezy style, seasoned with hippy radical-fringe argot. Malott's little stories are amusing and occasionally brilliant, and his behavioral analyses often incisive. The *Notes* are almost too readable at times, for they give the casual reader the impression they actually understand material simply written, but expressing complex ideas. The naive reader may not. That's a problem with rule-governed-behavior—the contextual repertoire within which contingency governed behavior is imbedded is missing. Sidman, Stoddard and collaborators' recent work on stimulus equivalence and exclusion learning illustrates the richness of

stimulus-stimulus (and correlated response) class relations established under appropriate contingencies, which are minimized or lacking in the case of rule-governed-behavior. One suspects Malott is overly sanguine about the power and resilience of rule-governed-behavior.

Notes helps the reader re-think assumptions and implications of behavior theory. The *Notes* are most effective when they use literary or film sources as vehicles for analyses. Most of the readers are behavioral scientists already under stimulus control of the examples drawn from experimental and applied behavioral analysis. The reader has read Malott's critiques of higher education practices before. As with any stimulus remote from positive reinforcement, they are more effective as s-delta's than as discriminative stimuli. The reader turns the page much as the pigeons turn away from the key when the s-delta light is illuminated. The literary analyses provide fresh conditional discriminations in which novel stimuli become members of familiar classes. The reader experiences pleasure at the *Notes'* skillful illumination of such stimulus equivalence rela-

tionships. Some are done masterfully, as in the unpacking of Milan Kundera's . . . women don't look for handsome men, "they look for men with beautiful women" (Vol. IV, Issue 4). Rather than leading one to turn away from the page, they strongly control the reader's attention.

Notes is a labor of love. Like any serious writer, Malott works at his craft, writing from 5:30 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. daily. Knowledge of the habitual ritual of writing is not new, of course. In the 12th century, Peter Abelard wrote in a letter to Heloise, "Against the disease of writing one must take special precautions, since it is a dangerous and contagious disease." One senses a responsibility to confront Malott with the reality that he has turned into a problem writer. Our selfishness prevails. We derive too much satisfaction from exploring his intellectual ruminations to put a stop to our enabling his affliction. We wait by our mailbox for the next issue of *Notes* and turn our head the other way as Malott's beard grows more wispy and his reclusiveness becomes more pervasive as his writing affliction takes its toll.