Book Note

Understanding Human Behavior: A Review of Reese and Parrott's *Behavior Science*

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Some behaviorists will disagree with the advances selected by Reese and Parrott in this volume. However, the editors do not claim to present all advances in behavior science, or even the most important ones. Rather, the nine articles are advances that most interest them. These selections are representative in that they address theory and method, as well as events, and are important in that, to a greater or lesser degree, they all focus on human behavior.

How valid is it to judge our science by its progress in addressing human behavior? The two most prolific and influential behavioral scientists, J. R. Kantor (1888-1984) and B. F. Skinner (b. 1904), who are cited 34 and 35 times respectively in this volume, have valued human behavior as the subject of scientific endeavor. Kantor, whose work was primarily philosophical, analytical, and critical, stated over 60 years ago that psychology is a natural science that studies human behaviors and has as its goal the understanding and controlling of these behaviors (Kantor, 1924, p. 1). When he perceived that the experimental analysis of behavior (TEAB) was ineffective in its approach to human behavior, he challenged TEAB to modify its methods (Kantor, 1970). His final book proposed a naturalistic analysis of that most human of events, tragedy (Kantor, 1983).

B. F. Skinner, whose work has been primarily methodological and empirical,

is renowned for pioneering studies of pigeons and rats (witness the ubiquitous and continuing presence of Skinner boxes in teaching and research settings). He is equally known for applying to human behavior principles derived from this work. Here we may cite his societal engineering efforts in *Walden Two* (Skinner, 1948) and a recent article entitled "What is Wrong with Everyday Life in the Western World?" (Skinner, 1986).

Clearly, both Kantor and Skinner have viewed the understanding, prediction, and control of complex human behaviors as the ultimate goal of psychology. Given this historical precedent, we may now ask how effectively the nine articles in the present volume present advances in human behavior.

The first three articles occupy forty-seven percent of the volume and emphasize philosophical and theoretical issues. In a provocative article, Reese proposes that private events (e.g., problem solving and mediating) are amenable to scientific analysis by both inferential and analogical methods. He argues effectively and presents research examples to support his claim that theory is potentially useful to behavior analysts.

Parrott, in a clearly written, straightforward essay, chides behaviorism for its public-private event dichotomy, which she sees as a subtle form of dualism. She calls for the adoption of naturalistic postulates, specifically those of Kantor, to counter the cognitive revival in psychology.

Like Parrott, Delprato exhibits wide knowledge and keen analytic skills in a second clear demonstration of Kantor's approach. Delprato shows how long-held, simplistic assumptions have impeded the

Reese, H. W., & Parrott, L. J. (Eds). (1986). *Behavior science: Philosophical, methodological, and empirical advances*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. 260 pp. Reprints of this paper may be obtained from the author, Department of MHRH, 600 New London Ave., Cranston, RI 02920.

identification of response patterns in cases from general activity of nonhumans to human self-control and cognition. He describes the results of fairly recent multiple-response analytic strategies which suggest that behavior science is evolving to the level of integrated field theory, much as physics did when it moved from Newton's mechanics to Maxwell's equations.

The need for interactive methodologies to study verbal behavior, conceptual discrimination, and social behavior, respectively, forms a common thesis for the next three chapters. In "Language as Behavior: Functional Mediation Versus Morphological Description," Ribes presents an alternative to the conceptual scheme derived from operant conditioning principles and shows that this Kantorian approach produces a variety of research questions. Grant applies behavior analysis to categorization, the process by which humans describe disparate objects and events as members of a common class, and demonstrates that categories and concepts are "... not entities in themselves but pertain to relations between our behavior and the properties of the environment with which we interact" (p. 159). A conceptual framework presenting the social relation as a context in which social behavior, social stimuli, and social control may be defined and empirically studied is the contribution of Hyten and Burns.

The nature of events studied is the focus of the last three chapters. While any minimally competent behaviorist can list good reasons for applying scientific principles to gerontology, few can equal Williamson in articulating specific behavioral research needed to dispel the cultural myths of age.

Precedence does not justify calling Malott's essay on self-management an advance since, for example, Benjamin Franklin recorded and attempted to modify his own behaviors as early as 1728 (Mountjoy & Sundberg, 1981). However, this update of Malott's well-known diaries reminds us that behaviorists use

themselves as subjects in the tradition of medical technological evolution; and, as Thompson (1983) has noted, Malott's self-analyses assist us to reexamine the assumptions and implications of our science.

The volume ends with a short review by Bernstein and Brady of human research in programmed environments. More extensive repertoires of behavior are available than with methods adapted directly from laboratory studies of nonhumans.

As a whole, this book is interesting reading for behaviorists. It supports an optimistic conclusion that behavior science has progressed in studying complex human behaviors and shows promise of further advances. For a general reader, the book in its present form may be too technical, especially the first three chapters. Behavioral scientists who see the potential of the volume for classroom usage should draft a commentary on assigned chapters that specifies the intent of the respective authors as constructive critics and that states the proposed theoretical, methodological, and empirical reforms. In addition, the reader's guide should also clearly link each contribution to the overall theme of advances in the understanding, prediction, and control of human behavior.

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