Theory and Philosophy: Themes and Variations

M. Jackson Marr
Georgia Institute of Technology

The field of behavior analysis is firmly supported by a tripod comprised of (a) the basic science; (b) behavioral engineering and its practice, more commonly called applied behavior analysis; and (c) the conceptual and philosophical foundations, meaning largely various forms of *behaviorism*. The Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) had already sponsored conferences focused on the first two of these legs, and on November 2–4, 2012, convened the Theory and Philosophy (T&P) conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in recognition of the special contributions of conceptual and philosophical inquiry and discussion to the advancement of behavior analysis. The papers presented at that conference comprise the contents of this issue of *The Behavior Analyst*.

We introduce these contributions by providing some background history to the conference as well as some orientation to its content. Planning for the T&P conference began in earnest nearly 2 years before when Maria Malott, in conjunction with the support of the ABAI Council, confirmed that the association would sponsor a Theory and Philosophy meeting. At the request of ABAI, Linda Hayes and I agreed to plan the program within the usual constraints of budget, time, and number of presenters. Outside of these necessities, Linda and I had a free hand to arrange the program to best reflect some of the principal issues that define this domain, and, of equal significance, invite the premier scholars who

have contributed to the ongoing discussion of these issues. We met in Reno and elsewhere to formulate the program, selecting the topics and invitees. As you might imagine, the number of possible topics for formal presentation was far beyond the constraints of a single 2-day meeting; we hoped those issues represented would be sufficiently reflective of the field as well as properly provocative. Linda and I were especially delighted at the enthusiastic agreements of all our invitees to participate.

We also wanted to encourage the participation of others, especially students, and thus arranged an evening poster session in which more than 60 posters were presented. These greatly extended the scope, depth, and quality of the conference.

Now, a few details regarding how Linda and I arrived at the T&P program represented by the papers in this issue. First, we should say a few words about how the topics were selected. Our initial criteria were suggested by the question: What are the conceptual and philosophical issues and questions any natural science of behavior should address? Second, what are the enduring (and thus presumably most difficult) issues that define different and disparate points of view *within* the field of behavior analysis? Although most behavior analysts would enthusiastically agree with Baum's assertion (2005) that there can be a science of behavior, they quickly part company regarding putative fundamental issues defining that science, as demonstrated in this set of papers. As an opening example, behavior analysis is the only self-proclaimed natural science we know of that still vigorously debates its proper subject matter!

Please address correspondence to the author at the School of Psychology, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, Georgia 30332 (e-mail: mm27@prism.gatech.edu).

Our primary sources for topics were suggested by those issues most commonly discussed and argued about in the behavioral literature in the last decade or so as well as some that, in our view, had received less attention than merited. Examples of the former include "Consciousness and Privacy" (Moore and Rachlin with Dougher as discussant) and "What Counts as Behavior?" (Baum and Shimp with Pitts as discussant). For anyone even casually acquainted with the relevant literature, both of these have continued to be hot topics (full of controversy, if not rancor); just the conditions for lively debate. Examples of what we considered to be less often discussed, yet quite significant, issues include "Behavior, Values, and Ethics" (Hocutt and Staddon with Ruiz as discussant) and two topics that deal with the character of theory and methodology, and, posed in a larger frame, the behavior of the scientist. Skinner's hope expressed in *Verbal Behavior* (1957) for an "empirical epistemology" engenders the themes "Scientific and Logical Verbal Behavior" (Schlinger and Palmer with Hackenberg as discussant) and "Models and Theories in Behavior Analysis" (Killen and McDowell with Donahoe as discussant), the latter theme addressing the complex issue of patterns of explanation in behavior analysis, and, indeed, science in general. Whether well known or not, all the topics are rife with controversy. Although behaviorism is often said to be dead, the T&P conference presentations represented by the papers in this issue demonstrate that not only is behaviorism alive, it's very much kicking as well. We venture to say, of the three legs of the behavior-analytic stool mentioned earlier, conceptual and philosophical foundations evince, by far, the greatest internal dissention.

As Linda and I selected the topics, in parallel we also thought of the most appropriate presenters and discussants.

We were fortunate to have assembled the most eminent contributors to theory and philosophy in behavior analysis possible to be in one place at one time to spar together. Many, if not most, of these scholars have contributed in some way to all of the selected topics, but we chose to pair topics and people largely based on the different and often strongly contrasting perspectives they would likely provide on the particular questions and issues embedded in their topics. We believe the papers in this issue reflect these contrasts as well as some significant areas of agreement. Moreover, almost from the beginning, when Linda and I set out the topics to be addressed by the presenters, we were aware of how these nominally demarcated issues and questions interlaced, and this became all the more obvious as we listened to the presentations at the conference. The presenters themselves engaged in lively discussion of common themes and variations among the topics.

Returning to the tripod analogy mentioned earlier, just as most of us recognize that the science and the application of behavior analysis cannot stand as independent enterprises, likewise each of these cannot be independent of their conceptual and philosophical foundations. But how and to what extent do they interrelate? One way to approach this question is to consider how various conceptual positions and assertions by behaviorally oriented philosophers might or might not be empirically investigated by behavioral scientists and practitioners. Alternatively, we can ask what are the explicit and, especially, implicit assumptions behavioral scientists use to conduct, interpret, and model their empirical efforts, both basic and applied. As you read and contemplate the papers in this issue, you might consider these two approaches and thus ponder the significant and essential interrelations among the three legs of the tripod that supports the field of behavior analysis.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge those who made this project possible. First, we thank Maria Malott, the ABAI staff, and the ABAI Council for proposing the conference, selecting the enchanting site of Santa Fe, and arranging the complex logistics and numerous other details essential to making the meeting a success. Second, we thank all the contributors who in their thoughtful and scholarly papers have defined the current concerns and challenges of conceptual issues in behavior analysis. Third, given that ABAI was the sponsor of the conference, to ensure the presentations at the conference would be

published as a unit, we initially hoped the *The Behavior Analyst* would serve as the publication venue. To make this happen required not only the grace of the editors of *TBA* but their enormous efforts in helping us to prepare the papers for publication. We thank Matt Normand, Jesse Dallery, and Rachel Thompson for making the papers available to the behavior analysis community.

REFERENCES

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