

the terms of "mentalism" that human agency is an essential aspect of all significant social and historical occurrences; further, that human agency is not totally determined or "shaped" from without and is not exercised except by a knowing and an aware entity with purposes.

The critique of mentalism. Skinner has reminded us often of the defects of the "homunculus" theory and has put on notice those traditional "humanistic" programs that would construct a scientific psychology by placing little persons within the frame of the visible one. I have applauded this critique elsewhere and have brought it to bear on several trendy "third force" schools (Robinson 1979). But as Skinner would not want to associate himself with everything said under the banner of behaviorism, so too there are "mentalists" who would not accept the burden of defending everything said in behalf of mentalism. I would put forth as the core principles of a defensible mentalism these:

1. Adult persons organize their actions around a set of irreducibly *psychological* considerations that are most aptly and usefully described by such terms as plans, desires, objectives, wishes, duties, and responsibilities. The actions that proceed from these considerations are best *explained* by just such terms in addition to various logical and psychological connectives.

2. The *origins* of these considerations present a separate problem of inquiry although, to a first approximation, behavioristic accounts enjoy the benefit of conformity to common sense. Still, and particularly in the matter of the *moral* dimensions of human psychology, there would seem to be a sturdy barrier blocking environmentalistic explanations of *all* such psychological states and considerations.

3. To the antique empiricist claim that "nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses," the mentalist (and rationalist), drawing on the patrimony from Leibniz, replies, "Nisi intellectus ipse"; nothing but the intellect itself. Mentalism finds it *necessary*, if human actions are to be understood and explained, to grant far more by way of innate faculties and dispositions than behaviorists have been wont to allow. We can all agree that Shakespeare is not "explained" by being called a "genius" or supplied with a "muse." But we retain the right to be impatient with behavioristic attempts to account for his achievements. Such attempts are a species of "psychohistory" in which the theorist has matters too much his own way.

4. Mentalism in a defensible form must also finally take a stand on the issue of *determinism* (both "soft" and "hard") and come down on the side of freedom. (The question of "dignity" arises only after we see how this freedom is used.) The freedom presupposed by mentalism is not *anarchy*. It is a kind of Kantian freedom; in other words the freedom available to a moral being who is (paradoxically) bound by the "laws of freedom." One is not "free" to contravene the law of contradiction. Moral freedom is available only to beings that are *rational* as such. Every suspension of rationality is, therefore, a forfeiture of the freedom itself.

5. In accepting this element of freedom into its psychology, mentalism also rejects the claim that all motives, plans, duties, and the like are externally supplied. Rather, it takes these states or conditions as *authentic*. If Smith's commitment to rationality has been, as it were, installed by others, then although we can say the commitment is "his," we cannot say that it is "his own." Mentalism regards it as *his own*. Interestingly, only Smith's introspections can finally be used to settle this question. Thus, our only means of verifying the authenticity of a psychological disposition is to grant authenticity to the introspective reports of the person whose disposition is under scrutiny.

6. Mentalism is not adopted by its advocates as a lazy habit that has survived during centuries of ignorance about the actual "causes" of behavior. The caveman probably civilized his litter with a stick. Indeed, Skinner is far too dismissive when he refers to "an occasional phrase in classic Greek authors." Plato's *Dialogues*, and especially his *Republic*, provide careful, systematic treatments of environmentalistic and hereditarian attempts

to comprehend social and political life. These works are not to be depreciated. As a "social psychology" Plato's *Republic* is nearly radically behavioristic and is, if I may say, rather more sensitive to the limitations of behaviorism than are any number of contemporary writers. But to put the case briefly, I note only that mentalism is adopted when the *facts* of human conduct are most plausibly explained in mentalistic as opposed to behavioristic or physiological terms.

Behaviorism at 70. Skinner would have behaviorism prosper as something richer than mere descriptivism or "Baconian" science. But he has not said what this promised behaviorism will look like or how it will differ from just that "Baconian" body that was propped up 20 years ago. It is my judgment that the triumph of behaviorism in the 1940s and 1950s was due less to its intrinsic merits than to the wearisome and habitual failures of psychoanalytic formulations and primitive "psychobiologies." Watson's early success was built on the defects of structuralism; Skinner's on those on Freudianism. After decades of irrationalism and instinctivism – and after a world war in which both seemed to be at the core of things – the Western psychological community was ready for a Machian housecleaning. Professor Skinner and his able disciples did what was needed then. But it is not at all clear that their program contains within it the potential for anything more than repetition, rediscovery, self-congratulation. If behaviorism is not descriptivism exhaustively applied to reduced and rather mechanical settings, then it is a somewhat overstated and even gaudy utopianism, unalarming because incredible. What is lacking is the intermediary step; the step that elevates us from the handbook-filling tedium of the "rat lab" to a coherent and unavoidably *theoretical* psychology that does more than take jaded Darwinism for granted. Frankly, I can expect only more of the same, for there would seem to be nothing in this *ism* except a method for rediscovering itself.

The behaviorist concept of mind

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The "central argument" of Skinner's behaviorist position is "that behavior which seemed to be the product of mental activity could be explained in other ways." To the degree to which this argument holds good, mental states are idle when it comes to explaining behavior.

To evaluate this claim, we must understand just what Skinner means by "mental activity" – what it is, according to his conception of the mental, for a state to be a mental state. On the basis of views of the mental that derive from 17th-century rationalist discussions, for example, being mental might definitionally preclude susceptibility to scientific treatment. Relative to such conceptions, it would not only be obvious and uncontroversial that mental states play no role in explaining behavior, it would also be uninteresting. But presumably there are conceptions of the mental that are less loaded, and according to which Skinner's claim would be an empirical hypothesis. We would then have to see whether we could actually dispense with reference to mental states, so conceived, and still explain behavior. Perhaps there are even conceptions of the mental according to which it would seem obvious, in advance of investigation, that mental states would play an active role in explaining behavior.

Some theoretical opposition to Skinner's views seems to reflect the tacit adoption of the third sort of conception of the mental. Following such conceptions, we can dismiss behaviorism on nonempirical grounds. What those critics mean by "mental" makes it clear that mental states will almost certainly be important to explanations of behavior. By contrast, Skinner's own discussions sometimes seem to oscillate between the first

two conceptions – between conceiving of mental states neutrally, in a way that leaves open for empirical determination the question of whether those states figure fruitfully in explaining behavior, and conceiving of mental states in a way that precludes that possibility.

Thus Skinner expresses apparent neutrality about this issue when he writes that “no entity or process which has any useful explanatory force is to be rejected on the ground that it is subjective or mental.” This seeming receptivity of the mental is in part a product of Skinner’s rejection of operationism. “Science often talks about things it cannot see or measure.” Accordingly, behaviorism correctly construed does not “exclud[e] so-called sensations, images, thought processes, and so on,” at least not “because they are out of reach of [behaviorist] methods.” But, operationism aside, “the fact of privacy cannot . . . be questioned.” So, when behaviorists exclude private states for methodological reasons, “the charge is justified that they have neglected the facts of consciousness.” Thus, although the study of vision, for example, should focus on discriminative visual behavior, “possible private accompaniments must not be overlooked.”

But set against this seeming liberalism about the mental is Skinner’s persistent tendency to use “mental” and its cognates as epithets of disapprobation. Mentalism is variously the “theory of an invisible detachable self,” the belief in inner events that lack “physical dimensions,” and the positing of mental “way stations,” which contribute nothing to, and even obstruct genuine explanation. Sometimes Skinner seems almost to use “mentalistic” as short for “antibehaviorist,” and his remarks sometimes come close to caricature. Thus, having grouped mentalistic and psychic explanations together, he speculates that both “originated in primitive animism,” and that they invariably involve some appeal to a homunculus. These statements strongly suggest a conception of the mental which, by itself, would imply that mental states could not figure in scientific explanations. Skinner’s behaviorism would be correct, according to this conception, but at the cost of being made into a truism.

Skinner might seek to defend the empirical status of behaviorism by urging that these two sets of remarks are not actually in conflict. In keeping with the first set of remarks, nothing in the behaviorist position settles in advance whether reference to mental states will be useful in psychological explanation. Perhaps some mental states do have “explanatory force”; perhaps none do. We must examine each kind, case by case, to find out. As Skinner assures us, the objection to “wishes, cognitions, motives, and so on . . . is not that these things are mental but that they offer no real explanation and stand in the way of a more effective analysis.”

But, he might continue, empirical investigation does show that such reference is often, perhaps always, idle. Hence the second set of remarks: Skinner is there simply trying to explain the prescientific, intuitive attraction we have for explanations cast in terms of these scientifically idle states. Mentalistic psychologists are simply those who permit their preconceptions to blind them to the empirical finding that mental states contribute little or nothing to psychological explanations.

It is difficult to know whether to accept this claim about the empirical status of the behaviorist’s “central argument.” On this account, the objection to mental states is not that they are mental, but that they are idle scientifically. But Skinner tells us too little about his conception of the mental for us to know whether that conception, by itself, precludes the states Skinner calls “mental” from figuring in scientific explanations. Perhaps Skinner conceives of mental states as those about which we can make introspective reports. This answer will not help much without an independent account of what makes some reports introspective reports. Do reports of, say, throbbing veins and churning stomachs count as introspective? Perhaps he conceives of mental events as simply private events, and private

events as those that “tak[e] place within the skin of the organism.” This account faces the same difficulties as the answer based on introspection. Without some reasonably precise explanation of how Skinner conceives of the mental, we cannot tell whether his conception of the mental does actually allow for the possibility that mental states have “explanatory force.”

Even if we accept that behaviorism is an empirical hypothesis, the question about Skinner’s conception of the mental arises all over again. For without knowing what states Skinner counts as mental, we cannot test his hypothesis “that behavior which seemed to be the product of mental activity could be explained in other ways.” Moreover, we must know what states he counts as mental independent of his particular discussions of experimental situations. For we must take care, in testing his hypothesis, to avoid the danger that the data in such situations may be redescribed or reinterpreted so that the hypothesis automatically comes out true. Having a well-defined, independent account of what it is for a state to be a mental state is an indispensable prolegomenon to a successful formulation and defense of behaviorism.

“Behaviorism at fifty” at twenty

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Skinner is often taken to be the arch antimentalist of the contemporary scene, and “Behaviorism-50” is as good a source by which to evaluate that interpretation of his position as any. But I think a careful reading shows that Skinner is hardly the antimentalist he is often taken to be. Indeed, he appears to acknowledge or endorse the place of the mental in any comprehensive account (“the fact of privacy cannot, of course, be questioned”).

Skinner’s primary objection to the mental is not its existence (I will clarify this awkward reification in a moment), but its role in explanation. We might say of Skinner, then, that he is a descriptive mentalist, in that he desires to include in his account *all* psychological events, including those occurring inside the skin (traditionally, the domain of the mental). He is an explanatory antimentalist, however, in that he finds mental events to have no significant explanatory value (but see Zuriff 1979, for certain qualifications). Mental phenomena simply are not the kind of grist from which nourishing explanations of behavior can be milled: Rather, they are phenomena themselves requiring explanation.

Although it is not as clear in “Behaviorism-50” as elsewhere (e.g. Skinner 1974), Skinner distinguishes between mental categories corresponding to private events (e.g. feelings, thoughts) and mental categories that cannot be identified with occurrences in some directly confrontable way (e.g. “memory,” as distinct from instances of remembering and recalling). The former are descriptively relevant, the latter not. Indeed, about the former Skinner sounds downright Titchenerian at points (“radical behaviorism . . . restores introspection”; Skinner 1974, p. 16). But he will have no truck with the latter kind of abstract entity.

Skinner’s explanatory practices are widely misunderstood by most of his critics. His approach to explanation, indirectly treated in “Behaviorism-50,” is essentially the Machian one of providing the most economical account of the interrelationships among variables. Skinner does not hesitate to identify functional relationships between variables where a “cause” occurs at a temporal distance from an “effect” – for example, a punishment occurring in childhood whose effect is seen in adulthood. Interpretatively, at least, some of these temporal gaps span millennia (Skinner 1975a). It is the mentalists who attempt to fill