

Advancing an Independent Discipline on All Fronts

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The promotion of a natural science of behavior requires a multifaceted organizational response. We already have in place a massive, and perhaps well failed, organizational effort to persuade fundamentally mystical people to adopt the natural philosophy and science of the behavioral phenomena on which they dwell ...people who themselves are already organized in their own way to validate scientifically the implications of their mystical assumptions. On another front, we also have a newer organized effort that pursues, in an uncompromised way, the expansion of the natural science frontier. We now turn to the *training* mission, and we begin to address the problem of how best to train new members of the natural science community that concerns itself with behavior-environment functional relations.

We undertake this venture during unstable times. Most current training opportunities in the natural science of human behavior are fragmented and severely denatured by an uncritical and thorough integration with fundamentally incompatible elements of antithetical paradigms ...the legacy of more than half a century of trying to co-opt the discipline of another community instead of bearing the substantial short term costs of establishing our own independent discipline.

Students from around the world, whose local training missions do not offer even a fragmented approximation of the natural science of behavior, seek training opportunities in the United States. However, along with American students, they discover that, to access fragments of relevant training, a substantial fraction of their precious resources must be consumed by the required purchase of training in irrelevant pseudo-sciences. At the same time, we find ourselves in the midst of an unprecedented world-wide communal revolution sustained by the new electronic media, one hopeful implication of which is that training options will no longer be dictated by geography.

A balanced disciplinary advance is important. The International Society for Behaviorology has focused on an essential and sometimes neglected facet of the total disciplinary mission, namely, the experimental generation of new science. It is appropriate that that aspect of the emerging discipline has received early and somewhat intense organizational

attention, but like many, I do not believe that the necessary mission-balance can develop exclusively through operations conducted by that kind of organization.

A mature scientific discipline is organized around three main missions: (a) the generation of new science and philosophy, (b) education (the training of new members of that scientific community), and (c) the redesign of cultural practices in ways that involve the products of that discipline. In the long run, I would hope for a consolidation into a single large disciplinary organization featuring those three major mission-related divisions. Each division would have at least one journal, and be maintained by a membership representing the requisite expertise.

The Association for Behavior Analysis will not contribute effectively until it shifts its real focus to disciplinary development and stops using hollow pretensions of commitment to that mission to mooch the resources of the host discipline from whose house it has refused to move like a well lodged but unwelcome relative. The International Society for Behaviorology, pursuing its deliberately insular policy, is making its valuable and focused contribution, which manifests in the nature, quality, and integrity of our science. For the time being, I think that a new group can begin profitably to work (independently for now) on the development of the other two pieces of the organizational tapestry.

I believe that the matter of how best to impact the culture at large deserves careful re-examination. We seem best postured at the moment to emphasize the education mission, and few would argue against the importance of education. I have thought about the practical problem of how a worthwhile and substantive curriculum of studies could be endorsed, or even offered, by our new kind of organization (i.e., The International Behaviorology Institute). The failure, over the years, of the behavior analytic movement to organize, or even endorse, a separate discipline has left behavioral training fragmented, with the pieces scattered among the training programs of other disciplines (most of which are fundamentally antithetical to behaviorology). The single exception (in 1998) seems to be at the University of North Texas, where a behavior analytic department operates apart from that institution's psychology department.

But more typically, while any single behavioral professor may be prepared to offer from one to three or four courses, or while, in the far more rare instance, a small and isolated cluster of behavioral faculty members may be able to offer a limited track of behavior studies, to get a respectable full fledged degree program, a trainee would usually have to pick up a course here and a couple of courses there, until a program of studies had been completed. That could be made to work if a central program-coordinating unit exercised the oversight to insure that the training (obtained in pieces from a variety of sources) had the necessary thematic and programmatic integrity.

One advantage for such a traveling student, aside from getting to see a lot of the country, would be personal contact with trainers selected because they were prepared to offer excellent examples of their respective pieces of the training puzzle. And the electronic revolution will mean, probably sooner than most suspect, that students may not actually have to travel to accomplish the same thing.

Perhaps it will be possible to secure funded projects to bring foreign scholars to the United States to study the natural science of human behavior. Perhaps the student's program could be put together by our organization, and the student would simply go to where the best courses were being offered. The project would cover travel, lodging, and tuition. The program of study could be given an interdisciplinary twist by including a variety of related electives, perhaps in fields such as evolutionary biology, ecology, human factors engineering (ergonomics), behavioral education, and economics. The subject matter of many behavior-related fields can be reinterpreted behaviorologically to great advantage. Much of economics, for example, amounts to the study of how economic realities control human behavior, a subject matter that we approach through our consideration of various contingencies of reinforcement.

Eventually, perhaps, our organization could supervise final products (e.g., theses and dissertations), provide unified program transcripts, and award the degrees. In any case, some organizational groundwork would now seem to be in order. ☺