

HUMANISTIC BEHAVIOURISM

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In the October 1977 issue, the *Educational Leadership* published an article by Arthur Combs, James Popham and Philip Hosford entitled "Behaviorism and humanism : A Synthesis?" This article was the reproduction of the papers given by these three scholars during the ASCD 1977 Annual Conference in Houston where Hosford presented the Combs-Popham debate under the same title. "We are on the verge of a major breakthrough in American education based on taking the best from each of these two theories and breaking free of past conflicts," said Hosford, the President of ASCD at the conference. However, as can be seen from the question mark at the end of the title, there was an obvious doubt if the expected synthesis had actually emerged from the debate.

This Combs-Popham debate has renewed educators' interest in the controversial nature between humanism and behaviorism since the other historical debate between Carl Rogers and B.F. Skinner took place in 1962. In the years that followed the Rogers-Skinner debate, controversial issues raised by Rogers and Skinner such as determinism vs. freedom to choose, objectivity vs. subjectivity of personal experiences have not been sufficiently resolved so as to provide a guide for educators in their teaching and thinking. The ASCD 1977 debate was primarily concerned about the *implications* of humanism and behaviorism for education, rather than on their *theoretical* differences. Consequently, behaviorism was equated with the objective and systematic approach to education, and associated with the accountability of teaching and learning results, as well as a systematic method to bring about these results. On the other hand, humanism was equated with a general and global goodwill towards the well-being of students.

COMBS-POPHAM DEBATE

Arthur Combs, as the proponent of humanism, believed that humanism and behaviorism could not be synthesized. Those theories were viewed as two fundamentally different tools, each was useful in its own way, yet could not and should not be synthesized. "What is needed is not synthesis, but synchronization". Combs believed that only humanism can deal with broad, holistic goals of education, internal life and experiences of human beings, in his opinion, the precise void left by behaviorism.

James Popham, as a spokesman for behaviorism at the ASCD conference, pointed out the danger of labelling, and the often inaccurate and emotionally laden connotations associated with the words "humanism" and "behaviorism". He believed that humanistic educators could adopt behavioristic approaches to teaching and evaluation. He also believed that whether to call these educators behavioral humanists or humanistic behaviorists would only be misleading, as "multi-meaning labels are not serviceable", and only the result of teaching should be counted.

Labelling is important as Popham pointed out, and does affect our impression formations relating to the concepts, objects or events the label intends to represent. This paper intends to reiterate the

basic assumptions and differences between humanism and behaviorism and to propose a synthesis of humanistic behaviorism.

THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN BEHAVIORISM AND HUMANISM

Education has depended upon psychology as a source to provide information concerning human behavior, how we learn, grow and develop. However, psychology itself has had many different theories of learning, and among psychologists themselves, there have been fundamentally opposing approaches to understand human behavior which has left educators baffled and divided.

In the radical behaviorism, with B.F. Skinner and J.B. Watson as its most well-known spokesmen, motivational and dispositional constructs are annunciated. Instead of trying to infer motives and conflicts, radical behaviorists devote themselves to the experimental analysis of the observable conditions that control behavior. Behavior is looked upon as the result of previous conditioning with unconditional stimuli, or the result of a past reinforcement schedule. There is no inner construct which cannot be directly and readily studied through observable behavior. Freedom is only an illusion since all of us are controlled by antecedents and consequences of our behaviors which are beyond ourselves. Radical behaviorism has been very productive and has stimulated a great deal of systematic research on the effects of reinforcement, the patterning of reinforcement, and the phenomena of generalization and discrimination in learning. However, to many, psychology as dominated by this mechanistic behaviorism "first lost its soul, and then its mind."

On the other hand, the humanistic psychologists represented by such prominent people as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Alfred Adler, among many others, insist upon the importance of the "self", the person's subjective, internal experiences, his/her self-concept, and his/her subjective interpretation of the surrounding events. Over the years, humanism has made significant impacts in the areas of education (humanistic education), counselling (client-centred therapy), and personality theory (the phenomenological approach, the self-psychology).

Humanism's emphasis on the person's cognitions and personal interpretations of experiences appeals to many people who believe that Skinnerism bypasses a significant part of human beings. Humanism stresses that the way the individual sees himself/herself and the world is one of the most influential forces in one's life, and that "we are what we make of ourselves". However, what are the causes/variables that govern the making of individuals and the way they conceive of themselves? There have been limited experimental studies and evidences to support humanism's rather general statements.

The most fundamental criticism of humanistic psychology is that it is incomplete conceptually and that it does not provide a sufficiently detailed and comprehensive analysis of the causes which control behavior. Personal constructs such as mental states, perceptions, cognitions, feelings or motives are often used as explanations of behavior whereas the causal variables of those neutral states themselves are usually ignored, leading to Skinner's criticism of "mental way stations" for circular and unfinished causal/consequences explanations. The humanistic approach, at its most, is descriptive rather than explanatory of human nature (Smith, 1950).

TOWARD A HUMANISTIC BEHAVIORISM

As early as 1974, Bandura predicted the development of a kind of humanistic behaviorism where behavior modification as well as other techniques found to be effective would be used toward humanistic goals (Kiestler & Cudhea, 1974). To him, and many others, the dispute between humanism and behaviorism is artificial. However, behavior modification in particular, and behaviorism in general have been so imbued with negative feeling that it was difficult for the public to understand them objectively. Those who oppose them do not realize that their opposition is based on the *same*

assumption radical behaviorism is built upon, i.e., behavior is controlled by its consequences. "When Skinner gets rid of autonomous inner man, he creates an autonomous environment that controls man", Bandura pointed out (p. 29). The common fear of behaviorism is also, ironically, based on this belief that men are hopelessly controlled by their environment, and that by manipulating the consequences and by controlling the environment, human behavior can be changed deviously and passively against individuals' will.

In recent years, social behaviorism has emerged as a major force which may provide the linking bridge between radical behaviorism and humanism. Social behaviorism is the dominant trend in social and cognitive psychology today. Social behaviorism utilizes the same experimental methodologies as employed by radical behaviorism, and builds upon behaviorism's research findings on the effects of reinforcement. However, social behaviorism is concerned basically with human social and interpersonal behavior, thus the central component of this approach are the mediating variables such as cognitive processes, expectancies and values, the awareness of learning, role and symbolic processes and the vicarious learning.

Within the framework of this social behaviorism, a synthesis toward a humanistic behaviorism is proposed here. In essence, the postulates of this humanistic-behaviorism are :

1. Human beings are active thinkers, and how they think about themselves, the world, and their ability to interact with their world significantly affect their actual interaction with the world.
2. Human beings actively organize their experiences, formulate questions and find answers in order to understand events in the world. Their subjective perception is affected by, but does not always correspond to the objective occurrence of events.
3. Human beings are influenced by their environment, but they also influence their environment. In a triadic deterministic manner, a person's personality structure (including cognition), behavior (including skills), and the person's environment interact continuously and reciprocally. Changes may occur through rearrangement of environment, improving personal skills, but the enhanced expectancy of self-efficacy in the person's cognitive structure is the centre for behavioral changes.
4. The motivation for effectance, to produce an effect on one's environment, may be an inborn tendency in human beings. This motive, as well as human cognition, perception and emotion, can be studied, analyzed and understood in terms of how they occur; their antecedent conditions and consequent events.
5. Empirical evidences should be the primary sources to derive means and ways in order to enhance the person's self-efficacy.

DISCUSSION

Although the humanistic behaviorism proposed here may sound similar to humanism, there are however, several fundamental differences. Its central cognitive process differs from the "inner self" in humanism in that even though the person's expectancy may be subjective, it is learned, and can be unlearned, studied, analyzed, and understood. Furthermore, with an insistence on empirical evidences, this form of humanistic behaviorism is built upon empirical evidences and therefore, will be constantly self-improving and renewing. General and global statements about human nature, if they do not lend to empirical hypothesis testing, stay as general and global opinions at most, and are only philosophical exercises.

All educators are concerned about students' well-being, and like to consider themselves humanists. Perhaps to be a humanist takes far more than just to have positive regard and goodwill toward the well-being of others. Perhaps the most humanistic way a teacher can adopt is to know why certain change will help the students and how this change can be accomplished. As demonstrated by Carol Dweck (1975), the best way to alleviate children's feelings of helplessness is not to provide *only*

successful experiences. A better and more humane way to teach these helpless children to take responsibility for failure experience and to attribute the failure to their own lack of effort, as the success-only group continued to go to pieces after failure and the personal-responsibility group showed markedly contrasting behavior to failure and much reduced test anxiety.

As also demonstrated, although unsolvable problems, and inescapable traumas cause learned helplessness, uncontrollable rewards also impair responding for future rewards (Seligman, 1975). In other words, it is not the *lack* of rewards, rather it is the *non-contingency* of rewards to one's action that eventually leads to the deterioration of subjective belief of personal control. When rewards and/or punishments in one's life happen independently of one's behavior, one eventually believes that one's action is futile and stops trying to obtain reward and/or to avoid punishment.

There may indeed be an innate human motive to produce an effect in one's environment, a drive for competence, to resist compulsion, or to avoid helplessness (Seligman, 1975). A humanistic behaviorism based on this assumption echoes humanism's contention of self-actualization as an innate human potential. However, it also stands behind the insistence of behaviorism to rely on empirical evidences and accountable methods to foster this innate potential. Indeed, "goodwill towards men" alone may not be sufficient to bring about humane and efficacious interactions. We all feel sorry for Johnny who cannot read. If Johnny is convinced that he cannot read because of the school environment and because of insensitive teachers since everybody tells him so, Johnny may never read. To deprive Johnny of his share of responsibility in his own learning is to deprive Johnny of his sense of personal competence, which renders Johnny helpless in his personal quest for learning. Out of goodwill, this may actually be the most inhumane act of all.

By stressing the cognitive process as the centre of acquisition of retention of human behavior, and the importance of subjective perception of the relationship between one's behavior and its consequences, this form of humanistic behaviorism will bring back human beings their "mind" deprived by the behaviorism. By insisting that although human beings are controlled by environmental contingencies, the contingencies are also often of their own making, this form of humanistic behaviorism will bring back human beings their share of the "responsibility" in their own destiny.