

LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR OF PSYCHOLOGISTS: THE EXAMPLE OF THE ADJECTIVE *HUMANISTIC*¹

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To limit oneself to consideration of externally observable behavior, to rule out consideration of the whole universe of inner meanings, of purposes, of the inner flow of experiencing, seems to me to be closing our eyes to great areas which confront us when we look at the human world. (In Wann, 1964, p. 119.)

There is no reason why a machine cannot be constructed so that it is altered by the consequences of earlier actions. Some have already been so constructed—we call them men. (In Kleinmuntz, 1965, p. 246.)

Quotations like the two preceding ones often seem to divide psychologists into two camps so far apart that one can hardly hear what the other has to say. Among the divisive issues hinted at in these quotations are the following: (1) Are men more than machines, i.e., is man's behavior more than behavior? (2) Is there an inner universe that must be dealt with if one is to deal with the whole man? (3) Can clinical psychology ever become scientific; i.e., can psychology be made an objective science? Labels for the two camps are numerous: subjective *vs.* objective; clinical *vs.* experimental; free will *vs.* determinism; phylogenetic discontinuity *vs.* phylogenetic continuity; mentalistic *vs.* physicalistic terminology; and so on. What this discussion attempts is a demonstration not that these camps are divided on the same plane, but that these camps are united even though they operate on different planes.

When oppositions are set up between these quotations and between the adherents of one against those of the other, arguments often dissolve into questions of ethics. One group is considered to be humanistic, compassionate, giving, loving, and concerned with people whereas the other group is considered to be hard-headed, dispassionate, almost automatons, and disinterested in what the outcomes of their research have to offer people. Yet it is upon the answer to an ethical question, the question of how the outcomes of psychologists' efforts affect people, that the two camps are united. The eth-

¹This discussion is a revision of a paper entitled "Behavior or Language: Contrasting Criteria for a Psychologist's Use of the Adjective *Humanistic*" delivered at the Southwestern Psychological Association's XVII Annual Convention in St. Louis, Missouri in April, 1970.

ical resolve of most psychologists regardless of ideological allegiances is to strive to insure the continuity of the quality of human life. The happy survival of the human species—whether fortunate or felicitous—is simply an issue so broad that it makes no sense for one to oppose this goal as that of a psychologist's and perhaps of every man's activity.

At least as far as eventual outcome is concerned, then, most psychologists are united. Yet, how are the specific, day-to-day outcomes of cold scientific research related to this eventuality, and how is the clinician's affectively warm involvement with a person also related to this eventuality? Further, how are these relationships mutually related?

It is likely that the differences in the ranges of description used by each of these groups contribute to the assumption that the groups study different subject matters. For example, a psychologist, described as objective and scientific, is scrupulous in his avoidance of words which imply that he has studied something besides behavior. To an objective psychologist, such as J. R. Kantor (1962), inferring a man is honest is behavior, an object of study, just as much as more typical examples of human action such as button pushing are behaviors also suitable for objective study. However, objective psychologists are seldom described as humanistic. The frequency of the use of this adjective, thus, appears to provide grounds for division between groups of psychologists and their activities.

If a psychologist's use of language descriptive of what he does controls his behavior, then he begins to behave differently from the psychologist whose behavior is under the control of other contingencies. When a psychologist comes under the control of the form of language usage of either of the introductory quotations in describing his own behavior, he behaves differently from the psychologist who just happens to use this or that kind of language as the best available description of what he does. Either description may turn into a formula which a psychologist might use, but this use of a descriptive formula is not necessarily accurately descriptive of what that psychologist actually does.

A psychologist, one who describes himself as humanistic, might write as if there were a psychologically real meaning to his words. To him humanistic is, thus, a meaningful description. To him human beings are infinitely complex, and the humanistic psychologist uses the richness of his native language in describing this complexity of those with whom he deals. A psychologist, one who describes himself as objective, writes, observes those contingencies exerting control over his and others' behavior, and writes some more. He is likely to

use a limited physicalistic vocabulary with a limited number of verbs representing his interactions with the physical environment. Clearly this seemingly profound division between these groups of psychologists is merely a difference between their uses of language not a difference of subject matters or of value systems.

If one steps back to look at this apparent division with regard to the overarching ethical question of species' survival, the difference is reduced. Humanistic is now seen to describe each group of psychologists equally well. But the adjective *humanistic* does not at present function in this egalitarian manner. To describe its present function is to contrast the uses of the word *humanistic* and the behavior of these groups of psychologists.

Psychologists whose behavior is language-oriented depend upon formal rules of language usage, upon logic systems, and upon deductive methodology. Their language behavior is, thus, dictated partly by university systems which demand publishing, by the criteria of publishers who select articles, and partly by the cultural tradition of reporting segments of a scientist's behavior structured in some formal sense in experiments, their procedures, results, and applications to previously published descriptions of experiments. Many psychologists, including objective psychologists, are caught up in the pressures of these demands to the extent that the question of how their activities relate to the goal of species' survival occupies only an occasional moment. This goal seems too far removed from the present activity for it to be of immediate concern. One might even see this goal as an idealistic statement, not a real concern.

Similarly, there seems to be too little time for a psychologist to study his own behavior, and his behavior perhaps is described indirectly at best in journals, in classroom experiences, or in technical job descriptions. A psychologist's behavior in experimentation, for instance, is a constant or an independent, random variable, and thus far, what efforts he has made to study his own behavior in an experimental sense is subject to the criticism of logical circularity or of *reductio ad absurdum*.

On the other hand, some psychologists decrease the importance of adjectives in their descriptions of behavior. Adjectives function only as topographical distinctions of behavioral qualities and are to be minimized with respect to the increased emphasis placed on the frequency of behavior having a certain observable effect. These psychologists believe that their own behavior is subject to the same laws of contingency control as that which they study. What they study, thus, is a contingency controlling their behavior, even as they themselves exert contingency control over what they study. J. R. Kan-

tor's term *interbehavior* refers to the intricacy of this interacting behavior system. Since a continuously interbehaving organism indirectly reflects any change in the aspects of the environment controlling his behavior even as he is imposing changes on those aspects, the problems of identifying those aspects and of holding them constant are practically insurmountable.

To describe as humanistic a psychologist who accounts for this complexity of human interbehavior by saying that the organism is complex is to overlook the contingency control that that very account exerts over that psychologist. Humanistic or not, the same laws of contingency control hold for the psychologist as for the organisms he studies, and objectively scientific or not, the same goal applies to the eventual outcomes of psychologists' endeavors. From this point of view, then, the function of adjectives such as *humanistic* in the language behavior of psychologists loses its apparent distinctive signification, and the objectively scientific attitude is no longer necessarily unique to those psychologists who do not describe themselves as humanistic. In the confronting of the formerly ethical, now ethical and practical issue of species' survival, psychologists are united in their humanism, and the lawfulness of contingency control is operative in what all psychologists do in their daily confrontations.

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