

Dissemination and deprivation: Who is missing out on the Behavioral Enlightenment?

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A very good morning to one and all. Thank you for being here and for your participation in the 7th Conference of the European Association for Behaviour Analysis.

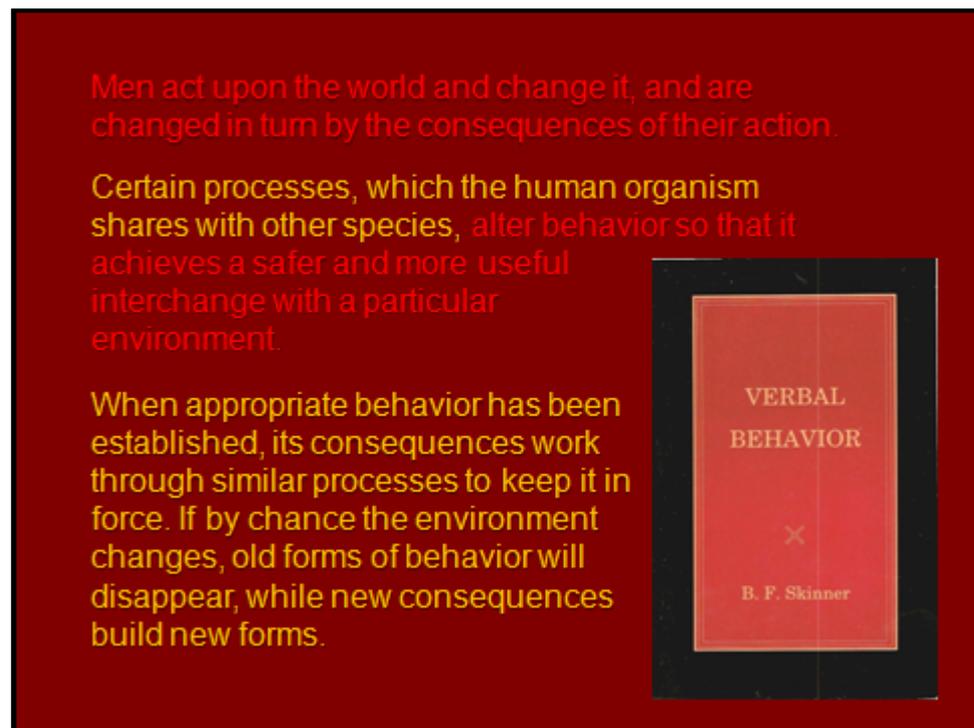


This cover slide, you may well know, features an etching by Francisco Goya which is sometimes used to represent the essence of the 17th and 18th century Enlightenment movement, with which its production was contemporaneous. The inscription in the lower left translates to English as *“The sleep of reason brings forth monsters,”* and the image is meant to illustrate the dangers of imagination without validation, that is, without engaging in the practices now known to us as the scientific method in evaluating and developing our understanding of the world.

We are met here in Stockholm in an unfortunately rare community of understanding that the *world that is best understood by reason and empirical validation* includes *everything about us*, including reason itself.

My concern today is with how we might act to make that understanding more widespread. The difficult task that I have assigned myself is to tell you some things that you already know, but in such a manner that they affect you in a different way.

For this I will ask your help. First please consider the following statement:



Isn't that just one of the prettiest things you have ever read?

These happen to be the opening lines from B. F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*, but this very powerful concept has, of course, been expressed in many different ways, in his works and in the written and spoken word of legions of behavior analysts, including the authors and the teachers who introduced each one of *us* here today, to behaviorism.

What I ask you please to do for me now is to think back to that introduction, to the time that the concept of the discriminated operant first substantially affected your behavior.

(For some of you this may be an easy task, something may have occurred last year or the year before. For others the relevant events might be considerably more remote, but I wager that they were so life-altering that if you try, you will have no difficulty in regenerating them).

Think of what issued from the realization, from the recognition, that our thoughts, our perceptions, our movements and expressions, the characteristics that compose our identity as well as those that we ourselves are unaware of, emerge in an ongoing, dynamic, temporally-extended interaction between the organism and the physical events that precede and follow upon its actions.

Think of what issued for you, personally, from the comprehension, from the generalized discrimination, that these most fundamental aspects of the human condition are explicable by the same sort of scientific investigation that has "*achieved safer and more useful interchanges*" with other aspects of the world we live in, such as the flash of lightning, the flow of water and the growth of plants.

Think what issued from the recognition that nothing is preternatural, that everything that can affect our behavior has the familiar properties of things, and that while all things that affect our behavior are physical, most of them occurred in the past, rendering their causal efficacy difficult to detect in the absence of scientific inquiry, and giving rise to a multicolored, pernicious, and persistent mythology of autonomous control over behavior by spectral non-entities and by parts of the behaving organism itself, such as its dna or its central nervous system.

Think about this because it is worth remembering that each of us here once had a very different perspective on the provenance of our own behavior than we have now.

It is a very rare person who was not initially taught that the human being (or a spirit that inhabits it) is somehow capable of acting independently of its organic condition and the physical interactions that gave rise to its behavior and give rise to it still.

We are more or less *all* taught that as regards our own comportment, each of us either is (or plays host to) something like a minor God; not a perfect or infallible God, not the Creator of all things, but still an *unseen* and *autonomous* source from which our thoughts and actions inevitably if inexplicably issue, the Unmoved Mover of a single human body, the Undirected Director of the things we do and imagine doing.

Now of course, not being composed of matter, there is not and cannot be any form of verification of the independent control over thought and action attributed to this ghostly agent, who is often called “mind” or “will” or “character” and whom B.F. Skinner called “Autonomous Man.”

Yet in the world in which we now live, Autonomous Man’s unobservable ability to rise above his experiences and *will the flow of neurotransmitter substances in the body that he inhabits* is very nearly unquestioned, and provides the moral justification for the marginalization, imprisonment, torture and execution of persons who do not behave well.

It provides the moral justification for cruel and ineffective systems of education based on punishment for students’ freely-chosen failures to learn as demanded.

And it provides the moral justification for telling mistruths to children and other innocents about the horrific eternal consequences of failures to will their own behavior in accordance with the revealed wishes of their otherwise Benevolent Creator, whom they cannot see but who can see everything that they do (and even think about doing) with a sort of celestial one-way mirror.

Autonomous man has lately appeared to put on weight, in the form of vague references to the self-sufficient power of the brain, or to the executive authority of the twisted strands of proteins in our cells, but in his traditional and as yet more popular guise, Autonomous Man has no tissue, no muscle or bone, no mass at all.

He is nonetheless the great defender of oppressive systems of behavior control; for man, in absolute charge of his own comportment, freely chooses to be punished when he could do otherwise by the simple exercise of volition.

Since man determines himself, when we punish failures to conform, we are just giving people what they deserve; *they asked for it*. Free will is the instrument and the bodyguard of tyrants, great and small; political, interpersonal and intrapersonal.

It protects the purveyor of punishment from counter-aversive control by providing an irrefutable interpretation of bad behavior, an interpretation that resolves the tyrant of any role in the origin of misconduct, and licenses his use of brutal reprisal when misconduct occurs.

Please, think for a moment about how your own effective contact with the concept of the operant class liberated you from this ancient and destructive superstition; think of the impact that the discrimination of the temporally-extended relation between environment and behavior, has had on the course of your life.

Here I don't mean just your studies and professional work, but how you understand your own behavior and that of your friends, your parents and your children, your colleagues and even complete strangers, and how you accordingly order your affairs.

When you, the enlightened, detect a problem in behavior, you don't shrug your shoulders and attribute the problem to a lack of will or interest, to a defect in personality or intelligence or character, to a misguided mind or a renegade brain or to any one of the myriad proxies of Autonomous Man.

Your problem is not so easily solved, but it is far more effectively solved. For you recognize that the problem behavior is part of a pattern of comportment, shaped and maintained in dynamic interaction with other physical events.

You the enlightened are aware that no matter how undesirable and, in the long run, destructive the pattern of behavior is for the person in question, it has emerged *inevitably* because in a particular environment, the act in question either produces or terminates events with reinforcing power.

Moreover, you know how that very reinforcing power is established and diminished. When you know how operant discriminations are generated in general, you *understand* the absence of interest, liking, preference or partiality for particular events; you understand how things that are inherently *beneficial* can be feared and hated; and you also know how, in principle, to render these events important, desirable—positively reinforcing.

Having acquired this most powerful discriminative repertoire, the enlightened have no need to resort to violence or to the threat of harm towards themselves or others in order to achieve changes in behavior.

Indeed, due to the hard work of many behavior analysts such as Nathan Azrin, whose life and contributions we celebrate at these meetings, *you the enlightened* know that aversive intervention is self-defeating in the long term; among its sequelae are counter-aggression, social withdrawal, and the key component processes of the patterns of behavior described as psychopathological.

Your contact with our science has reduced the reinforcing potency of the immediate effects of coercive acts. Sure you get mad and you strike out in anger; you are a human being with a human history, but an (unfortunately) rare form of experience has endowed you with an understanding that leads you, far more often, to forgo the instantaneous relief from annoyance so often produced by aggression, in favor of efforts to build incompatible and beneficial repertoires with positive reinforcement.

You reduce the frequency of emission of undesirable behavior not by making its automatic consequences *aversive*, but by making the consequences immediately produced by desirable forms of behavior pleasurable, cool--*desirable*.

I will wager that the characteristics that you like most about yourself, and that are most appreciated by others, emerged or were enhanced as you acquired a scientific interpretation of the determination of behavior in the temporally-extended interaction between the organism and its circumstances—that is, in the course of your own personal *Behavioral Enlightenment*.

If this is true, then I am sure that you will agree with me that the provision of such a repertoire to others should rank among the *most valuable of all human activities*.

Of course, your very presence here in Stockholm, and the forfeit of time and resources required for you to be here, is ample evidence that you do agree, for we are met here in this beautiful capitol to extend and enhance the Behavioral Enlightenment, in ourselves and in others.

This is to be celebrated; as our scientific organization's verifiable success in spreading this enlightenment in Europe is to be celebrated.

But today I want to say a few words about the people who are missing out on the behavioral enlightenment, and how we might act to more effectively share our good fortune with them.

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As a person who has devoted a substantial proportion of his professional activities to the dissemination of behavioral philosophy and its experimental and applied sciences, it pains me to admit that the answer to the question: "Who is missing out on the behavioral enlightenment?" is: "*Almost everybody.*"

Four decades have passed since B. F. Skinner's valiant effort to break Autonomous Man's stranglehold on the design of public policy and education with the publication of *Beyond freedom and dignity*, yet a natural science perspective on the provenance of human thought and action seems to be now no more commonly expressed or applied for the pass of time.

Indeed, the popular view, on university campuses as well as on the World Wide Web, is that such an analysis was once attempted and found to be ineffective.

There was a time when Psychology Departments of any size and status felt the need to have a token behaviorist on staff; now they more often appear to be embarrassed to have one.

Some brave behaviorists have organized attempts to escape the hostile academic environs of psychological essentialism, but departments of *praxis* or *behaviorology* or *behavior analysis* are rare indeed.

The truly remarkable and increasingly professionalized applications of behavior principles in intervention with persons characterized as *developmentally delayed* would appear to have had but little effect on how people with a *typical* course of development think about the provenance of their own behavior.

I'm sure you have heard it said that behaviorism has, in time, found its fitting clientele: relatively small organisms; *furry, feathered or autistic*.

It pains me, as I am sure it troubles you, the fact that we do not seem to be fairing any better off campus, with the general public.

Indeed, in the year 2014 an articulate and well-educated person is far more likely to be able to give a reasonably accurate, scientifically principled account of global warming, or of the origin of the universe, than he is of why he can't get along with his mother-in-law, or of why his teenage daughter avoids him like the ebola virus, or of why he can't seem to complete his quarterly reports in on time.

Here he will explain with that he is a *procrastinator*, and always has been; that his daughter is just going through a *stage*, as all teenagers do; and that his mother-in-law is simply a miserable *bitch*, who can be nice but chooses not to be.

He will say these things with the great assurance that so often masks deeply frightening doubt; for his explanations of these important behavior processes (not all of which issued from modern psychology) offer no guidance at all for improving his lot.

He needs our help, dear friends and colleagues, and he is not getting it.

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And then there is a large subgroup of the general population with an even greater need of the benefits of a basic understanding of the determination of behavior.

A vast number of people worldwide are sorely troubled by what clinical psychologists call "dysfunctional cognition."

They might tend to interpret or perceive everyday events as far more threatening, unacceptable, or embarrassing than most people would; they might be far more critical of themselves or of other people than is the norm, they might repeatedly imagine events or circumstances that seem only to *frighten* or *disturb* them.

Following the lead of contemporary clinical psychology, they tend to interpret these same patterns of behavior as *symptoms* of an underlying pathology, or as the result of some inherent flaw in their character or their nervous system.

As if is not enough that their own behavior frightens and disturbs them and limits their contact with the kinds of events that compose the good life; they are told by professionals and they believe that they are, in effect, *themselves* the cause of their troubles.

As a clinical behavior analyst, it is distressing to admit, as I must admit, that our efforts to provide natural science interpretations of such phenomena have been limited—exceedingly limited, if one considers the frequency of occurrence and the social significance of so-called “dysfunctional cognition.”

I have asked you to consider the practical significance of your understanding of your own tendencies of thought and action and those of your loved ones as emerging in the dynamic, continuous and wholly physical interactions that we describe as contingencies of reinforcement and punishment.

Imagine now of how important such an understanding might be to a person suffering with “dysfunctional cognition”—a person who presently views his or her own thinking and perception as alien, as inherently defective, or as issuing from the ineffable.

Imagine how it might feel, and what it might mean, to recognize in sufficient detail that such behaviors are the inevitable outcome of natural processes that, under other conditions, *“achieve safer and more useful interchanges with particular environments.”*

Imagine how the acquisition of just such a discriminative repertoire might of itself produce beneficial change in the eliciting, discriminative and reinforcing functions of the events observed.

Imagine the guidance it might offer to the person in the production of circumstances likely to offset the pernicious side-effects of an especially intense and extended history of social punishment.

We have, in our hands, the most comprehensive and practical natural-science interpretation of covert behavior, of thinking and perceptual processes, yet to emerge in the history of humanity; but it is, as yet, unknown to the persons who, arguably, have the most to gain from this form of enlightenment.

Our natural-science interpretation of thinking and perception as discriminative operant behavior can be understood in sufficient detail to be useful by anyone who is capable of understanding, say, the evolution of species by natural selection, or the relation between supply and demand, yet it is almost never provided to psychotherapy clients.

Many of us here today acquired a behavioral repertoire of interpretation as teenagers or as very young adults, while we were either explicitly confused or defensively certain of our identities and life course; in some cases like my own, I say with no false modesty, we acquired a discriminative repertoire of practical utility without being particularly bright or studious.

We were not, most of us, ideally prepared to acquire this repertoire, yet our interactions with the science of behavior helped us to sort out the sources of our difficulties, and to

experiment accordingly in ways that improved our lot; as that science is helping us yet today.

Were we then, and indeed are we now, fundamentally different from people undergoing treatment for “dysfunctional cognition”? And if so, in what way? And how then might we best prepare our troubled fellow human beings to receive the *benefits of enlightenment* that we enjoy?

Of course, many clinical psychologists believe that psychotherapy clients are inherently *incapable* of understanding their own psychopathology; but then, most clinicians themselves have but little conception of the role of contingencies of reinforcement and punishment in the genesis and maintenance of such phenomena. It might well be their ignorance rather than their knowledge that they are unwilling to share with their clients.

Under what conditions (and thus by what right) would we say that a fellow human being, who may be engaged with demonstrable success in such complex activities as, say, running a household, holding a job, or studying for examinations, is *incapable* of learning how a history of punishment and negative reinforcement has affected the way that he or she tends to think? Even if a client *is currently* unable to benefit from the provision of a natural-science understanding of the determination of his or her problematic patterns of thinking and perceiving, it would seem that *the task at hand would be the development of a prerequisite repertoire*. If our fellow human cannot yet understand a useful, natural-science account of how his interactions with others have affected him, then we should *prepare* him to understand it.

Note however that the view that psychotherapy clients are incapable of beneficially interpreting the determination of their own thinking and perception is also prominent among the relatively few behavior analysts that intervene in non-autistic psychopathology.

In the popular treatment approach known as *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*, the basic intervention is to ask and encourage the client to suspend all efforts to evaluate or interpret his or her own patterns of thought. In contrast with all other natural phenomena, the client is told that he *cannot usefully understand* his own thinking and perceptual processes by systematic, rational analysis; behavioral or otherwise. With regard to his own troubling thoughts, he is told that the course of action known to us as the scientific method will lead *him* to no enlightenment. Indeed, the client is in effect told that his attempts at a rational analysis of these natural phenomena are in fact the very root of his problem, as...

“... verbal problem solving and reasoning is based on some of the same cognitive processes that can lead to psychopathology, and thus it is not practically viable to eliminate these processes”

Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda & Lillis, 2006

Now it may be true that psychotherapy clients are, in general, incapable of understanding *Relational Frame Theory* and applying it beneficially in the explication of their own problems. I must admit that *I* don't understand some fundamental aspects of RFT myself, and it is not for a lack of trying.

But it would surely be a remarkable reversal of the principles of the Enlightenment if weighing his impressions against the available evidence gave the psychotherapy client *no traction at all* in predicting and controlling a natural and accessible phenomenon like thinking, even his own thinking.

This can be the only possible justification for the fact that there is no explicit dissemination behavioral philosophy and of behavior-analytic explanatory principles in *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy*, which is held to be derived from this same philosophy and these same principles.



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In my view, skepticism, inquiry, debate and doubt about the functional significance of our own perception and patterns of thought is in no case, and for no person, to be discouraged or suspended; it is rather to be *refined* and *developed* in accordance with the extant discriminative repertoire of each individual.

The sleep of reason does bring forth monsters; and only a reawakening of reason dissipates them.

As is true of any behavior problem, pernicious patterns of thought and perception are not to be accepted by anybody. They are to be identified, their dimensions and functional relations with other events are to be ascertained, and the resulting analysis is to be employed

experimentally in designing contingences that alter the course of events in the direction of a richer and more satisfying existence.

The good life *depends on people being able to do this for themselves.*

I believe that access to such a discriminative repertoire should be recognized, by us at least, as a human right. People should not be denied that right just because the world has treated them more harshly than most, to predictable and undesirable effect in their interchanges with the environment.

The problem with “dysfunctional cognition” is not thinking about thinking *per se*, but thinking about thinking in an ineffective way—non-scientifically.

Some would point out here, quite correctly, that cognitive therapy is explicitly designed to teach people to analyze their problematic covert processes in accord with the methods of science. But the problem with cognitive therapy is not that it encourages reason and the evaluation of evidence to change the way that people think; the problem is that it attempts to do so without a basic understanding of why people think in a problematic fashion *in the first place*.

It lacks an understanding of key component processes such as negative reinforcement; adventitious reinforcement; the operant chain and conditional reinforcement; the conditional discrimination and equivalence relations.

With analytical tools like these, “dysfunctional cognition” is just more operant behavior; and we have a damn good handle on where operant behavior comes from, and how best to change its course.

I beg of you, conceptual, basic and applied scientists alike, let us redouble our efforts to employ what we know about behavior in general to better understand so-called “dysfunctional cognition,” and find ways to effectively share that knowledge with those who are deeply troubled and harshly deprived by their own behavioral processes.

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And if that humanitarian benefit is not enough to convince you to work towards this end, then I have something else up my sleeve.

I wish further to suggest that the systematic interpretation of problematic cognition would greatly enhance *the dissemination of behavioral philosophy and its experimental and applied sciences more generally.*

I say so because in the clinical, educational or industrial application of behavior analysis, as soon as we have identified the behavior that we want to generate, the next thing that we do is *identify events with extant reinforcing potency* that can be arranged as *consequences* for approximations of the desired acts.

What we want to generate is a repertoire of naturalistic interpretation of behavior, and perhaps there is no more powerful natural consequence for such behavior than the understanding of "craziness."

I ask you now: what is the most popular psychology course at every college and university throughout the world? I will give you a hint: it is not *Introduction to Behavior Analysis*. It is, of course, *Introduction to abnormal psychology*; *Introduction to psychopathology*; *Wacko 101*.

Everybody wants to know why people behave in strange and exotic ways that seem corrosive to their own self interest; that keep them out of work, out of touch—that destroy any hope of winning respect, admiration, tenderness and love.

And they want to know not just so they can understand their screwy Uncle Louie, no; they are interested because they themselves sometimes act against their own interests, and they are perhaps more than a bit nervous about this.

Of all behavioral phenomena with the possible exception of sex, nothing excites interest and reinforces inquiry like good old garden variety psychopathology: anxiety, depression, psychosis, personality disorders, substance abuse. But in our efforts to disseminate behavior analysis, we are squandering this potent reinforcer.

And that is a great pity, for through their understanding of problematic behavior, people would gain insight to the determination of the things that they *like* about themselves, and with that, an understanding of how they might replicate these effects in the lives of others; how they might more effectively spread fair and honest, creative, generous, decent and dignified action tendencies.

The understanding of psychopathology is a wonderful stepping stone to understanding behavior generally.

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This is true not only because psychopathology is almost universally intriguing, but because of its status, in large measure, as an undesirable byproduct of the aversive control of social behavior.

Garden-variety psychopathology is the predictable and indeed inevitable outcome of the widespread and unnecessary social control of behavior by the arrangement of contingencies of punishment and therefore negative reinforcement; by threat, by intimidation, by ridicule, by violence, by expressions of displeasure with unmet expectations, by response-dependent withdrawal of attention, affection or esteem—by making people miserable when they don't do what we want, and by relieving their misery when they please us.

I don't think that there can be any serious doubt about this contention.

Any effective psychotherapeutic approach can be readily interpreted as providing conditions that ameliorate the effects of long-term aversive social interactions, interactions that slowly

but surely corrode the joy, contentment and personal growth that are otherwise inherent to interpersonal experience.

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy, client-centered therapy, cbt, fap, act, cbgb—they all arrange for exposure to a non-punitive environment, and encourage some understanding of the personal effects of long-term interactions with aversive social conditions.

In Greece, where I live, parents are directly involved in their children's academic education at an unusually high level. In observational studies in our laboratory, we have asked children to describe their *parent's* educational practices in a way that gives us a valid indication of the content of aversive control, and we have asked their parents and teachers to evaluate their *childrens'* levels of behaviors characterizing a range of so-called psychological disorders, including depression, attention deficits, and six flavors of anxiety disorders.

In children as young as five years of age, the level of parental use of aversive control *just in the domain of education* is a better predictor of levels of psychopathology than any environmental variable yet identified in the literature; this relation becomes *more systematic with age* until the point that parents are no longer directly involved in their children's studies (usually because the parents do not know the material, having escaped their own tyrannical education at that level).

We do not do these studies for investigative purposes; we do them for the potential effects of such findings on the behavior of parents, teachers and clinicians. Clinical experience, indeed everyday experience, in combination with some knowledge of the experimental literature on aversive control eliminates all suspense regarding the outcome of such investigations.

[Parenthetically, the experimental literature on the effects of aversive control is, in recent decades, extremely limited in proportion to its social significance, probably due to the social *punishment* of investigations of aversive control. Those of us who do this kind of work, especially with non-human subjects, are constantly being accused of having sadistic tendencies, or worse; unfortunately, aversive control seems to be acceptable *everywhere* except in the experimental laboratory.]

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In general, then, people are not interested in acquiring a discriminative repertoire that would radically improve their existence; they *do not want* what they need. If we want to disseminate the behavior analytic repertoire more effectively, we must make better use of powerful extant reinforcers, of things that they are already interested in, and I nominate craziness, psychopathology.

The natural science interpretation of psychopathology leads us *directly* to aversive control, and aversive control is a powerful reinforcer in its own right; by definition, people dislike it—they dislike it A LOT.

But most peoples' level of discrimination of the extent of aversive control in their lives, of the behavioral processes involved, and of the undesirable side-effects of these practices, is insufficient to motivate useful experimentation with alternative practices.

We must find ways to show people to what extent their personal characteristics are shaped by punishment and the threat of punishment. They must be shown that this familiar form of social intervention is not necessary to generate any form civilized behavior, and that far more often than is generally recognized, it serves the controlling agent's interests at the expense of their own.

An illustration of the possible effect of such a strategy might be found in the rather impressive success of the so-called "New atheism" movement on the analytical repertoire of many thousands and perhaps millions of people.

Of course the term "New atheism" is a misnomer; for there can be nothing new about disbelief in the nonexistent. This is the weakness, the Achilles' heel of the movement and I will return to it in a moment, but first of all what does it have to do with us?

Like behaviorism, new atheism addresses the widespread worldview that physical events are best thought of as having immaterial causes; and instructively, new atheism is successful in *changing* superstition by showing people how their repertoires of belief in heaven and in hell fire are *generated by aversive control contingencies* arranged by religious authorities right here on earth.

In fact the "new atheism" movement began in the wake of the September 11 suicide attacks by young adults, thirteen years ago today, in that still unsettling illustration that we humans might be rendered willing to do anything to escape aversive conditions that are man-made and implicitly or explicitly designed to have such effects on our behavior.

THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF "NEW ATHEISM"



Richard
Dawkins

Daniel
Dennett

Sam
Harris

Christopher
Hitchens

Pictured here are four of the leaders of the “new atheism” movement; as a group they are sometimes referred to as the “four horsemen,” an apocalyptic reference to their striking abilities to bring forth an “end of days” to specious arguments about revealed wisdom, divine authority, faith, celestial supervision, eternal damnation, original sin and the like.

Importantly (and I will return to this in a moment) these atheists reveal the role of these constructs in the aversive control of behavior in the public forum, principally with the very men and women of the cloth who menace the faithful and the faithless alike as a professional calling. Their debates with clerics are readily available from outlets such as *Youtube*, and I might suggest that it is instructive to have a look at some of them.

Each of these “horsemen” is impressively effective in revealing the harmful sequale (political, interpersonal and personal) of attributing independent causal power to an imaginary agent in the sky; but alas, each in his own way attributes autonomous dominion to an imaginary agent residing within the bodies, minds or souls of each of us.

As civilized human beings, these New Atheists take justifiable offence at the clerics’ suggestion that without the tangible threat of eternal, excruciating punishment that they provide, we would all soon be murdering our neighbors, absconding with their property and fornicating in the streets—though not necessarily in that order. But the horsemen very tangibly have little to offer in terms of an *alternative program of generating moral behavior*. Here even good and accomplished men who wish to deliver us from the grip of superstitious tyranny each unconvincingly fall back, in one way or another, on the inherent goodness or innate wisdom of Autonomous Man.

Richard Dawkins is a sociobiologist who claims that selective pressure in evolution has endowed us with a genetic program to “make nice,” so we don’t need the threat of hellfire to behave morally; the philosopher Daniel Dennett is an outspoken critic of behaviorism and a traditional defender of free will as an inherent attribute of human beings; Sam Harris has a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience, so he grants free reign to an executive brain. And the late lamented, razor-witted political commentator Christopher Hitchens, a tireless defender of the oppressed and a stalwart champion of the principles of the Enlightenment, nonetheless dismissed behaviorism as “rat psychology” and endorsed free will as the source of moral behavior, if with trepidation. [I say this because Hitchens appeared to be aware of the irony inherent in his attribution of god-like autonomy to a person, explaining with uncharacteristic sheepishness when pressed, “*Of course I have a free will. I have no choice in the matter*”].

And here, of course, is where we come in. *We* have useful and intellectually satisfying answers to the tough questions, such as why, if not as a function of free will or a directorial physiology, do we behave in an ethical fashion on some occasions but not on others? Do our honest genes or right-thinking neural structures take a few minutes off when we have to explain to the boss why we are late for work again, or do the bad genes or naughty neurons simply take temporary control of the body? If so, how is it that they have such impeccable timing, steering us clear of danger and then yielding control?

Properly presented, the concept of the discriminated operant provides a powerful solution to the question of how we might, *in the course of ontogeny*, generate *tendencies* to emit

productive, just and honorable behavior without the threat of hellfire or of its earthly cousins, such as low-wage, dead-end jobs; homelessness; imprisonment; ostracism; isolation; starvation, ill health and disability. But it must be presented properly, with full use of extant reinforcers and the provision of easy access to the conditions that generate the basic repertoire of discrimination.

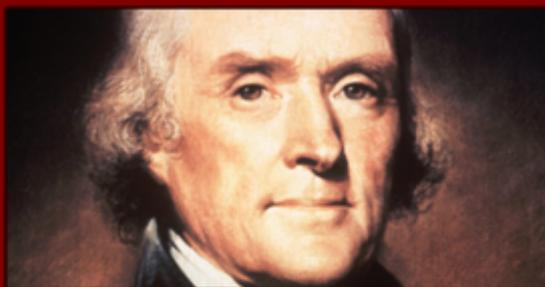
For better or worse, we are living in an age in which, when people want to say that something is really outdated, they say “*Oh, that is so 2010.*” We cannot rely on paperback books written forty or fifty years ago to do the job for us, no matter how powerfully they affected and still affect us.

We cannot rely on university-based training alone; as is true for the *weakening* of belief in supernatural powers, access to the proper conditions for the *development* of a basic behavior-analytic scientific repertoire should never be more than a mouse-click away for *anyone*. We have to get the behavioral alternative to spiritualism and psychological essentialism in the public forum, on the internet, and to the people who need it most.

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As the understanding of undesirable and strange behavioral phenomena is a universal stepping stone to recognizing the natural provenance of desirable and familiar comportment, so the understanding of aversive control is a universal stepping stone to recognizing that respect, support, friendship and love also shape our behavior, that is, determine who we are, and that these forms of control are currently underutilized.

In the words of the great champion of late 17th and early 18th century Enlightenment Thomas Jefferson:



“Enlighten the people generally,
and tyranny and oppressions
of the body and mind will vanish
like evil spirits at the dawn of day.”

Thomas Jefferson, 1816

And so, in this fine place and in this splendid company,
let us resolve to go the “new atheists” just one God further,
let us confront Autonomous Man right where he sleeps—
in the discriminative repertoires of individual human beings,
and vaporize his ghostly ass in the searing light of behavior science.

Fair and equitable access to the good life that we enjoy depends upon it.



Thank you for being here and for your kind attention. Enjoy the conference!

