FOREWORD TO FEATURED SPECIAL TOPIC
PHILOSOPHICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES
IN BEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Over the last few years there has been an often lively debate concerning the appropriate philosophical and conceptual foundations for behavioral psychology. This debate has involved, amongst other things, discussion about how we should conceptualize our subject matter, how we might best define an explanation, and how we can communicate most effectively with related disciplines. The following seven articles form part of this ongoing discussion.

Each of the articles is based on an oral paper presented at a symposium, entitled *Philosophical and Conceptual Issues in Behavioural Psychology*, that formed part of the annual conference of the *Experimental Analysis of Behaviour Group*, in London, England during the Spring of 1996. The articles cover a broad range of topics, but are bound together by their concern with those very basic assumptions that help to characterize behavioral psychology as a distinct and coherent form of scientific inquiry.

In the first article, Edward Morris reflects upon the ongoing debate concerning the very nature of behavioral psychology itself. Is it a mechanistic psychology that assumes, for example, that psychological events and processes are independently existing regularities waiting "out there" in an ontologically real universe to be discovered by the behavioral scientist? Or, is it a contextualistic psychology that views psychological events and processes as acts in context that emerge, in part, out of the analytic behavior of the behavioral scientist? Morris's paper provides an overview of this debate, and he also reminds us that ontological assumptions are behavioral events, and will therefore evolve or change as a function of the scientist's behavioral interactions.

The contextualistic notion that the behavior of the behavioral scientist, in a sense, creates or constructs a scientific reality is also addressed in my own paper coauthored with Bryan Roche. Our examination of this issue brings us to the very edge of conventional, scientific language, and leads us to consider, if only briefly, the "mystical experience" from a behavioral perspective. In the next article, Linda Hayes examines mysticism as a philosophical tradition and considers some important points of contact between this tradition and modern science, focusing in particular on behavioral psychology and physics. The article identifies areas of overlap between science and the mystical, but at the same time makes clear where the two remain distinct.

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Having examined some of the rather abstract philosophical issues concerning behavioral perspectives on the nature of truth, reality, and the mystical, the next two articles focus on specific questions concerning the subject matter of behavioral psychology. In the first of these articles, Bryan Roche and I argue against the implicit assumption that behavior is of, or emanates from an organism. In essence, we suggest that our subject matter is behavior *per se*, not the behavior *of* organisms. The next article, by Emilio Ribes, focuses on some of the basic assumptions surrounding the concepts of causality and contingency. Ribes argues that the concept of operant behavior breaks with the traditional view of causality, and he then goes on to examine the way in which causality in relation to contingency is normally defined in behavioral psychology. A number of ambiguities are seen to emerge from this definition, and thus Ribes offers a revised interpretation of contingency.

The two final articles shift attention away from philosophical and conceptual matters that are largely internal for behavioral psychology, and focus on a number of implications that some of our basic assumptions might have for the relationship between behavioral psychology and the wider culture. Julian Leslie's article provides an overview of how the deterministic assumption in behavioral psychology has impacted upon public opinion of behavior modification as a therapeutic practice. Ethical issues surrounding behavior modification are also considered in the light of a recent and growing emphasis on the importance of functional analyses both in basic research and in service provision in the field of behavior therapy. Finally, the article provides an analysis of the implications of increasing the use of social validity measures and parent training programs. The final article, authored by Ullin Place, supports the assumption that a science of human behavior is desirable, and that the findings of such a science should be readily applied as a means of improving society. In order to build and to apply such a science, however, the author suggests that behavioral psychology will have to abandon the assumption that Skinner's work on verbal behavior is the only legitimate source for developing a behavioral approach to language. This article thus completes the set by calling for change both inside and outside of behavioral psychology.

In closing, I emphasize that although the current series of articles are clearly relevant to behavioral psychology, I firmly believe that they will also be of interest to the more general readership of *The Psychological Record*. In particular, the current material should seriously challenge many of the stereotypical views of behavioral psychology one so readily finds in introductory text books, and in casual conversation with one's nonbehavioral colleagues. The nonbehavioral reader will find, for example, that behavioral psychology is *not* necessarily mechanistic; it does *not* view the scientist as an objective and passive observer of an external reality; it *is* concerned with so-called metaphysical issues, such as the mystical; it *is* concerned with ethical issues; and it *does* critically evaluate the work of B. F. Skinner and question some of his ideas. In any case, no matter what your academic background might be, or what you already believe about behavioral psychology, I hope you enjoy the following examples of behavioral psychologists behaving verbally with regard to their own discipline.