

War, Peace, and Behavior Analysis: Some Comments

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Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian poet, once said "What can I do at 71 but plagiarize myself." At 83, I can say the same thing. The first chapter in my latest book, *Upon Further Reflections*, (1987) called "Why we are not acting to save the world", begins with the three contingencies of selection that Killeen has mentioned, but adds an important point. Selection prepares only for a future which resembles the past. Natural selection prepares a species only for a future that resembles its past, but that was to some extent corrected by the evolution of other mechanisms, first of all imitation, through which an organism could learn from what other organisms had done or were doing. With the advent of operant conditioning, behavior was selected by the environment of the individual, but again that prepared the individual only for a similar environment. Moreover, very little behavior can be acquired through operant reinforcement in one lifetime. With the evolution of verbal behavior, however, it became possible for individuals to profit from what other individuals had learned through the evolution of cultural processes. Language is a cultural practice and it makes it possible to correct the limitation of operant conditioning, as operant conditioning corrected the fault in natural selection.

But, what is going to correct the fault in the evolution of cultures? Our culture prepares us only for a world which resembles the selecting past. There may be a possible solution in analyzing selection and replacing it with design. We have done so for thousands of years in a small way. People have bred cows which gave more milk, chickens which laid more eggs. With genetic engineering, of course, it is possible to introduce variations to be selected. That has been done all along with operant conditioning. We introduce variations by telling people what to do and arrange contingencies of selection through reinforcement as in education. We also introduce variations in the design of cultures. They work first for the individual but when adopted by the culture, they help the culture survive. Is it not possible, then, that we can predict the future which our culture now faces and design practices which will enable us to meet it successfully?

I think that is what we've all been talking about here today. What can we do to change human behavior so that it takes the future into account. When I wrote *Beyond Freedom*

and *Dignity* (1971) I thought a science was aborning that would enable us to solve our problems. That was perhaps too optimistic. I was recently asked by the Penguin people in England to write a special preface and an epilogue for their edition of that book, and in it I changed my views of the promise of science in overriding and intervening in selection. I gave a copy to a friend, Sherman Roberts, and he came back in two or three days to persuade me not to publish it. Whether or not I was right, the Preface would discourage operant conditioners. I couldn't agree. I myself haven't given up, even though I no longer feel that we are able to do what I thought we could do.

As scientists, scholars, teachers, and writers, we belong to what used to be called the Fourth Estate. Government, religion, and capital were the first three. Only a fourth could design a better world, because it was free of some of the more immediate consequences which control government, religion, and capital. The problem, however, is to get those great institutions to change their practices. Can we expect governments which are at war with one another, or potentially at war, or so very close to war, that they scare Tony Nevin, to relax if their own security is at stake. Any senator who proposed a bill to abandon all nuclear weapons, would not be a senator for very long. You can't expect General Motors to make only a car which goes 100 miles on a gallon if it goes only 25 miles an hour. General Motors would go out of business. Religion is a little different. Religions which count on a future life in another world regard this world as expendable. I have talked to religious leaders about that and they usually agree: you can't ask religions to do much about this world when their eyes are on another one.

Trying to change religions, government, and capital takes me back to something that has been mentioned earlier today, the face-to-face control of people. I tried to describe how that might be done in *Walden Two* (1962). *Walden Two* has no institutions of government, religion, or capital. Instead, daily life is designed in such a way that everyone does, for good immediate reasons, the kinds of things which must be done if the community is to function properly. The question always asked about a community is "Will it work?" If we only thought that way about the United States, we might be in better shape.

In a recent issue of the *London Times Literary Supplement*, Stuart Sutherland reviews a book by J. Z. Young called *Philosophy and the Nervous System*. Young is a great biologist but he has very old fashioned ideas about philosophy. Sutherland criticizes him, for example, because he doesn't think that Young can tell us how we are to get people to accept free will. Actually, it would be very much simpler to ask how contingencies of reinforcement could be arranged to govern people. Sutherland says *Walden Two* describes "a world in which in which a ruling class manipulates the rest of society by psychological means." It was designed precisely to avoid doing anything of the kind. It was not designed for the benefit of the designer, and there is no one in the community who can do anything for his or her own aggrandizement.

Government, religion, and capital have immediate consequences which are absolutely overwhelming, and so

long as they are acting at their present level, there is not very much we can do to change them. We can at least educate people. Get them to do more, contribute more, protest, march, and so on. That is important, but where do they go when they protest? Must it be to governments, religions, or capital? I think *Walden Two* is a very good way to get away from the immediate consequences which work for the aggrandizement of institutions in such a way that remoter consequences can be taken into account.

References

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