MUST PEOPLE BE FORCED TO USE BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS?
A Review of *Walden Three* by Ruben Ardila

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First we had *Walden Two*. Skinner (1948) imagined everyday people joining a behaviorally-engineered community because it satisfies their needs more completely than the communities they come from. This vision represents the idealism associated with radical behaviorism in its early days. Now we have *Walden Three*. Ruben Ardila (1990) imagines a military dictator imposing a behaviorally-engineered culture by force. *Walden Three* might easily be taken for anti-behaviorist satire except that Ardila is a widely respected behavior analyst from Columbia, South America. Perhaps Ardila is warning us about what he sees as disturbing or even ominous trends in behavior analysis.

THE WALDEN THREE STORY-LINE

Walden Three tells the story of a young behavior analyst who creates a scientific utopia in the nation of Panama. He does so at the invitation of a leftist dictator by the name of Martin Luther King. The novel demands that we think about the conditions under which behavior analysts work. Must we be dictators? Or can we be collaborators? This book assumes that we must be dictators.

The story is told in the first person by Dr. David Gonzalez, a recent graduate of Harvard. He accepts a position at the Central University in Panama where he meets a young military officer. Martin Luther King, "Martin" to Dr. David, is the black man who is to lead a left wing revolution. Dr. David impresses Martin during an early meeting at a party. As a result, after Martin assumes the reins of power, he calls upon Dr. David to use applied behavior analysis to create a Utopia in Panama.

The central premise of *Walden Three* is that "operant psychology has the principles and the laws to change the world, but it doesn't have the power" (p. 20). Dr. David's analysis is that "first and foremost it is necessary to attain an absolute

government..." (p. 26). Martin tells Dr. David, "this is your chance to make the behaviorist's dreams come true: by controlling the environment completely" (p. 27). Dr. David time and again argues that implementing behavior analysis requires total control. For example, he states "information is dangerous" and then suppresses some information he considers dangerous (p. 52).

Martin states the goal of such total control. "We're going to make a perfect society, Dave. We're going to modify social behavior, plan human behavior, change child raising practices, reform the delinquents and change the educational system" (p. 25). Dr. David invites the leaders of applied behavior analysis to help plan the new society. He invites them from Kansas, Rochester, and Harvard. He invites Holland, Ulrich, Staats, Azrin, Kazdin, Ayllon, Wolf, Keller, Bijou...

The experts come to Panama and draw up plans on all aspects of the new society. They plan improvements for recreation, the economy, child raising, the calendar, work, mass communications, education, family and sexuality. Dr. David and his advisors even reform Panama's approach to old age. Dr. David describes the reforms. They are a combination of liberal social policy and sketchy behavioral technology.

The social policies that form the basis for reforming early education and socialization includes a long list of liberal proposals. They include family planning, free medical and psychological services, information and training for mothers, free day care, part-time jobs for mothers, prenatal hygiene, early stimulation of newborn, involvement of fathers, and training substitutes mothers. Mothers are taught to use time out and tokens and to avoid physical punishment. The procedures are so successful that the children end up liking what they have to do. Each child grows up to "work under the unique reinforcement of his own satisfaction" (p. 36). The novel does not suggest how such a remarkable outcome was created.

That the novel is short on descriptions of behavioral technology but long on fantastic outcomes is a general characteristic of the work. For example, the chapter on education states that "the educational system of the New Era was a combination of personalized instruction, educational technology and long term planning, with an emphasis on educational environment and continuing education" (p. 60). No more detail is provided about how applied behavior analysis actually works. The book imagines students "wanting" to learn without suggesting how that might be accomplished. The chapter on education is filled primarily with the wonderful skills, attitudes and knowledge that would be taught.

Dr. David reports that most of the reforms were initially rejected by the people of Panama. But a few try them out and eventually everyone comes to accept them. The government induces people to try the reforms primarily through mass communication. After a few years the people come to support the whole array of reforms. "Our people had forgotten that they were technically living under a dictatorship. In fact, everyone did what he wanted and there was no army to back up the government or to quell subversive plans. No one revolted" (p. 142).

The novel ends on a tragic note. The socialist countries support the new government but remain skeptical. The United States is non-supportive and skeptical. In the end, the United States invades, overthrows the government and dismantles the utopian society. Martin Luther King jumps, or is pushed, to his death from the Bridge of the Americas. Dr. David is permitted to leave the country.

THE ROLE OF POWER IN DISSEMINATING BEHAVIORAL TECHNOLOGY

The novel paints a mixed picture. Most behavior analysts would probably support the social policy reforms. The new society is described as happy, productive, fair and non-punitive. Who would be against that? But the methods for getting there would raise questions for many of us. In the novel, the behavior analyst has dictatorial power. That is a less pretty picture. The justification for wielding this power seems to be that coercion is the only way to get people to sample the behavioral approach -- and once they have sampled it they will like it. Thus dictatorship is depicted as a way to get people to try something that ultimately will reinforce their behavior.

Now it is true that behavior analysts often wield dictatorial power. We certainly have total control of infra-human animal environments. We have extensive control of the institutional environments in which we most often work. We use this control to learn more about behavior and to help children, older people, people with disabilities and those who are not deemed capable of deciding for themselves. We have been extraordinarily successful at producing behavioral changes which our various audiences applaud -- although they rarely adopt the technologies that produce these changes.

And therein lies our problem. The people who implement or decide to implement our procedures are normal adults. They are caregivers, supervisors, administrators, politicians, parents -- ordinary people. We have not been granted dictatorial powers with these people. Unfortunately, these ordinary people often resist us tenaciously. We have far fewer successes to show with normal adults than with institutionalized individuals (Fawcett, 1991). Our control seems to evoke counter-control unless we have full dictatorial powers (Miller, 1991).

Behavior analysts do sometimes gain the cooperation of normal adults with whom they work. Behavior therapists working with paying clients are probably the most successful. We might guess that their success derives from helping their clients change their behavior in ways that produce natural (i.e., non-contrived) reinforcers. This approach contrasts with the widespread practice of requiring mediators to implement effortful interventions that produce reinforcers contrived by the behavior analyst. While such interventions have been amply documented to work well, they are quickly abandoned once the researcher stops supervising the mediators (e.g., Basset & Blanchard, 1977; Couch, Miller, Johnson & Welsh, 1986;

Wolf, 1982). Applied behavior analysts often maximize effort and minimize reinforcers for implementing their interventions.

If the view that behavior analysts have failed to optimize the cost-benefit ratio of our interventions is indeed incorrect, we must ask: under what conditions will behavior analysts reverse this practice so as to *minimize effort* and *maximize reinforcers* for implementing behavioral technology? One line of analysis is that behavior analysts would optimize the cost-benefit of program implementation if failure to do so invokes a contingency on their own program-design behavior (Johnson, Welsh, Miller, & Altus, 1991). To the extent that we have dictatorial powers, we can avoid such contingencies. Ensuring that the mediators have counter-controlling power would ultimately enhance the probability that we would design procedures that optimize the cost-benefit for implementing our technology.

If this analysis is accurate, then the dictatorship premise of *Walden Three*, however attractive the rest of its content, is self-defeating. Behavior analysis will likely gain acceptance by normal adults exactly proportional to the extent that those normal adults control *our* behavior. Putting democratic and voluntary control in the hands of normal adults probably creates the most productive environment within which behavior analysts can work (Johnson et al., 1991).

Ardila's dictatorship premise also is worrisome for the message it sends to our critics. Skinner came under harsh criticism for outlining a society that many saw as totalitarian (e.g., Bethlehem, 1987; Hertli, 1991). If we are to take Ardila's dictatorship premise seriously, he has given critics more ammunition. But in anticipation of the criticism, perhaps it is instructive to look at how the field measures up to the totalitarian label. Certainly, much applied behavioral research focusses on empowerment. To a large degree, behavior analysts are involved in teaching skills to disadvantaged populations that enable those populations to live more independent, self-determined lives. Along the same lines, behavior analysts have proposed the importance of extensive collaboration with participants (e.g., Fawcett, 1991) and have pioneered the use of consumer satisfaction measures that give clients influence over the design of their own treatment (e.g., Wolf, 1978). Further, researchers are currently offering evidence that the implementers of behavioral technology also must be empowered with democratic, voluntary control if programs are to outlast the tenure of the program developers (e.g., Altus, Welsh, & Miller, 1991; Johnson et al., 1991; Welsh, Johnson, Miller, Merrill, & Altus, 1989). While *Walden Three* may be decried by critics as promoting totalitarianism, the field most certainly cannot.

Holland foreshadowed much of this discussion in 1978 when he urged that "the behaviorist should listen carefully as partner and colleague in social reform" (p. 173). Ardila's novel demands that we confront Holland's recommendation. Can we be collaborators? Or must we be dictators? Ruben Ardila has cut to the core of this debate with the premise that the adoption of behavioral technology must be coerced. We would like to think that he did so knowing that behavior analysts

must reject this premise in order to move on. We would like to think that he is willing to provoke strong disagreement so that his readers will question this premise.

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