

FRALEY'S BEHAVIOROLOGICAL CORRECTIONS: THROWING THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATH WATER

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ABSTRACT: Fraley's (1994) comprehensive behavioral corrections proposal is discussed. While there are many thought-provoking and challenging ideas, this bold model is criticized in terms of its (1) central but arbitrary philosophical tenet that human worth is a function of a person's behavioral repertoire, (2) deliberate use of mechanistic language and conceptualizations that at best are socially unpalatable and at worst echo historical instances of oppression, and (3) reliance on questionable technological assumptions. These problems could be avoided with a more sensitive portrayal of the human organism and a more modest representation of the potency of behavioral engineering, both of which would likely increase the social influence of the overall proposal by permitting its many merits to be appreciated.

Few doubt that our corrections system needs a major overhaul. From the behavioral perspective, the contingencies governing the behavior of the direct and indirect participants require drastic modification (Ellis, 1991). Thus, Fraley's (1994) revolutionary proposal is a welcome prompt for discussion and analysis. It is filled with thought-provoking ideas, conceptualizations, analogies, and metaphors that are clearly intended to confront and challenge the reader's conventional beliefs. Unfortunately, I suspect that Fraley's wheat will be tossed aside with his chaff. Most readers, even behavior analysts, will not buy into the package.

Fraley makes the core of his package "behaviorology," which he views as an epistemological advance over radical behaviorism. His comprehensive environmental engineering is impressive in its thoroughness and attention to detail. But the numerous meritorious insights and suggestions cannot escape the serious taint of excessive behavioral zeal.

Fraley significantly undermines his arguments through his advocacy of an alleged "fundamental principle" of behaviorology and then through a deliberate use of language that is doubtless related to that principle. Fraley's fifth principle is stated as follows:

Both the essence and worth of human beings as persons are concepts of their *behaviors*, not of their bodies (Skinner, 1974, Ch. 13). The worth of a human being pertains to that person's behaviors and to the implications of those behaviors. Human worth does not accrue merely because a live body is involved. (Fraley, 1994, p.4-5)

Later, he contends that "the notion that there is something intrinsically worthwhile

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about any human being merely because it is alive is arbitrary". Really? According to whom?

I reviewed the Skinner (1974) citation and others, and I did not find that Skinner said human worth is a function of the individual's behavioral repertoire. In fact, Skinner (1971) implicitly argues otherwise by contending that human dignity (i.e., worth) is illusory, that all behavior is a function of environmental contingencies. By implication, all human organisms (and many would argue all organisms) have intrinsic worth (or at least equal or even neutral worth), though their economic value to or impact on society may differ. Fraley's extreme example of "behavior as worth"—whom to sacrifice in a forced choice among Einstein, Moses, Washington, King, and Hitler—is therefore meaningless for two reasons. First, the "presumed" answer (Hitler) ignores the central behavior analytic tenet that an organism's behavior is a reflection only of its current and past environments. Second, extreme examples that seem intuitively obvious are easy to counter with other extreme scenarios. For example, if "behavior is worth," then the sacrificial lamb among the following should be easy to recognize: You are coach of a high school baseball team formed completely of honor students who have never received a school detention. Just before the championship game, while on a field trip in the Caribbean, your boat capsizes and one of the following five players must be tossed to the sharks: John (batting average .333), Jim (.345), Jack (.349), Joe (.327), or Bozo (.164). By Fraley's criteria, this decision should be as easy as tossing out Hitler. But, of course, it is not—Bozo is a youngster just like the others, only with a baseball-hitting skill deficit. Bozo obviously has the same (intrinsic) worth as the others.

In fact, one could argue that the arbitrary criterion is Fraley's assertion that "behavior is worth." Actually, neither intrinsic worth nor traditional "worth based on externals" is arbitrary: Human history has a long, bloody, and shameful past of ascribing worth to externals. And substituting "behavior" for skin color, religious affiliation, gender, social class, ethnicity, or any other physical or social attribute is a spurious advance in human understanding. On the contrary, over two decades ago, Skinner (1971) saw that environmental determinism rendered ascribed worth an illusory concept; we are all worthy though our environmentally selected behavior may be evaluated negatively by the social milieu.

Fraley compounds this erroneous assessment of human worth by describing the human criminal as a broken machine of some sort. Is this the way we will convince society to consider behavior analysis as a serious intellectual force? Haven't we learned from our strident use of language in the turf battles of the sixties that such language introduces aversive stimuli that prompt "antibehavioral" countercontrolling responses?

Such countercontrolling responses may be appropriate in this case. Fraley's language is (unintendedly) reminiscent of the eugenicists and other racists who argued early in this century that the United States should be "preserved" for those who are worthy—which encompassed only Caucasians of Northern and Western European descent (Kamin, 1974). Those with different backgrounds were usually judged harshly (to say the least); For example, "select those who are worthy and reject those who are worthless" and "cost of supervision greater than value of labor. Untrainable socially or economically" (quotes from Congressional testimony on

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immigration restriction in 1923; Kamin, 1974). *But Fraley's strident approach is not necessary.* All the mechanistic language, and the dogmatic assertion that behavior is worth, is intended to convince the reader that human behavior, including criminal behavior, can be repaired (i.e., changed) and that such an undertaking is socially valuable in terms of capitalistic cost-effectiveness criteria.

Fraley constructs a corrections environment that is an elaborate capitalistic system intended to mimic, and thereby prepare the inmate for a return to, life on the outside (presumably as a behaviorally "repaired" organism). This may be an astute technological decision in terms of reducing recidivism, but I question the necessity of adopting capitalistic values, particularly judging an individual solely in terms of wealth (whether financial or behavioral), perhaps even more so than is done in the outside society. While the contingencies and metacontingencies that govern behavior under socialist arrangements have failed to produce economically effective behavior or to provide widespread satisfaction (cf. Rakos, 1991), the core socialist value of intrinsic worth will likely prove to have long term survival value for humans. Humans are rapidly learning that self-interest prompted by capitalistic contingencies is increasingly constrained by contingencies of survival: reduction of pollution, armed conflict, disease, poverty etc. The earth and its organisms will survive only if the basis for respecting life is intrinsic worth rather than irrelevant physical and behavioral characteristics.

Now, given my obvious strenuous disagreement with the philosophical basis of Fraley's proposal, I must admit that I find much to admire in it. The general parameters of a benevolently controlled corrections environment are intriguing: The institution as an educational academy rather than a punitive prison. A real insight follows from this view: "The person would simply remain in the corrections program until behavioral repairs were effected". An important part of this process is Fraley's educational system, with a core curriculum featuring basic intellectual, economic, social, and civic skills.

Of course, an elaborate detailed exposition of this sort introduces numerous specific points that could be questioned. Many of these concerns involve the implementation and ongoing operation of the system. Fraley discusses several critical ones, including practical issues such as cost and the need for an almost unimaginable bureaucracy, as well as the introduction of a fundamentally different framework of social values. For example, an essential principle upon which the corrections academy is based is that all rights are contingently based on behavior. However, established legal doctrine (Wexler, 1973) avers that the rights of institutionalized persons are absolute (noncontingent upon behavior).

Further, Fraley makes numerous technological assertions about presumed impacts, and some of these tend to be suspect due to his assumption that environmental contingencies will be so tightly controlled that the products of nonsanctioned contingencies (e.g., black market or rule-breaking behaviors) will be nonexistent. Thus, the assertion that "crime would not be frequently seen" despite an environment "full of people who are skilled at antisocial shortcuts to their reinforcers" rests on the questionable assumption that such behavior will be immediately suppressed by the planned contingencies. For this to happen, the controllers must be able to discern that a rule has been broken, identify the culprit,

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and develop evidence. But skilled criminals will recognize that behavior inside an institution, like outside, is always maintained on concurrent schedules of reinforcement, and the schedules controlling rule-breaking behaviors may not easily be neutralized by the other schedules.

Finally, Fraley recognizes that prisoners would have to be trained to return "to the less well-organized outside world" using a combination of self-management skill training, thinning of reinforcement schedules, and programmed stimulus generalization of socially adaptive skills learned in prison. Yet Fraley also stresses the prison would be "an idealized model of the outside world" with more obvious and better defined contingencies and cultural homogeneity. This suggests that the transition to the outside world will be an exceptionally difficult behavioral engineering feat.

In conclusion, Fraley's effort to describe a comprehensive behavioral corrections environment is commendable and often insightful. Behavior analysts and corrections personnel will find much of value in it. But, I am confident that its impact will be minimal and perhaps ultimately counterproductive due to the disturbing tone in which it is presented. Fraley's entire corrections system could just as easily be implemented on the basis of compassion for humans who have intrinsic worth but unfortunate learning histories: Criminals are not at fault (not to blame) and have the same worth as those with more constructive learning histories. Unless behavior analysts, and "behaviorologists," present themselves as caring and compassionate behavior specialists, rather than as "scientific" mechanistic technocrats, our impact on society will and should be minimal.

Fraley believes that "public acceptance (of his proposal) might have to await a higher level of public sophistication with respect to a science of human behavior". That is no doubt true, but an alternative version of the science of human behavior would prove less distasteful to many. The public, unsophisticated in behavioral theory as it is, also wisely understands history. Grave consequences usually follow effective environmental engineering that is grounded in a philosophy of life that arbitrarily equates worth with attributes. Fraley has tossed the baby out with the dirty bathwater, refilled the tub, and now is washing a doll.

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