

## **THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF CULTURAL ANALYSIS**

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When invited to the Campinas Think Tank, I was a little apprehensive because of the title it had been given, "Metacontingencies and Cultural Analysis." Although I had long been keen that radical behaviorists become more involved in the analysis of cultural phenomena, I was unsure about the part that the concept of "metacontingencies" might play. The Think Tank provided an opportunity for the fruitful exchange of ideas and information, on the basis of which I have come to tentative conclusions on two key questions.

First, how useful is the concept of "metacontingencies"? Whilst there was no strong opposition amongst those attending the Think Tank to the concept of "metacontingencies", there seemed to be a widely held view that it had not yet generated any innovative empirical research. Until it does so, its value for cultural analysis remains uncertain.

Second, how success has empirical research on cultural phenomena been? A number of successful empirical studies were reported at Campinas, none of which seemed to require the use of any analytical tools other than those which behavior analysts apply when studying individuals. In the discussions at Campinas, no example emerged where the introduction of the metacontingency concept might have substantially altered the outcome of the research. It is possible that, in the future, additional concepts such as "metacontingency" will seem necessary, but that would only be when existing concepts of behavior analysis have been pushed to their limit and found wanting.

There was not a great overlap in methodology in the empirical studies reported, probably because they were tackling different problems. This raises the question of whether there is a particular direction in which cultural analysis should go in the future. I have two linked suggestions: First, the concept of "cultural lineage" (Glenn, 2003) might be explored more fully, particularly to determine whether it can generate empirical research. I predict that such research would require the organization of culturally accumulated data over time, analogous to the traditional Skinnerian laboratory procedure of recording individual behavior over time. Secondly, I suggest it could prove useful if there were to be more attempts at organizing cultural data along a time line, irrespective of whether the concept of cultural lineage is employed. Such an approach has

already been shown to be fruitful, for example in Nevin's (2003) studies of retaliation to terrorism.

#### REFERENCES

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