

## COMMENTARIES ON GOLDIAMOND'S "TOWARD A CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL PROBLEMS"

### THE CONSTITUTION AS SOURCE AND MODEL: THE ETHICAL CONSTRUCTION OF NEW REPERTOIRES THROUGH CONTINGENCY CONTRACTING

*Behaviorism* had been inaugurated with great effort by Willard Day based on a suggestion by B. F. Skinner that a forum was needed to discuss the conceptual and critical aspects of radical behaviorism. In the early volumes many of the manuscripts were solicited by Willard directly, or invited after he heard them in oral form at a conference. Other manuscripts had originally appeared elsewhere. One by David Wexler discussed legal constraints on token economies; it was reprinted from the *California Law Review* (Wexler, 1973). Wexler's later visit to the Reno campus was the occasion for an expanded discussion of the law and behavior analytic procedures, and conceptually more important, for a consideration of how the law functioned as a system to control behavior. These same issues were more fully addressed at a conference held at West Virginia University in June of 1975, and later published as *Behaviorism and Ethics* (Krapfl & Vargas, 1976). The papers in the book were not only an attempt to address the then current attacks on behavior modification by courts, legislatures, and ethicists, but also a discussion of the more general debates among professionals about the ethical treatment of human subjects in researches of all sorts, a matter which deeply concerned Goldiamond (1975; 1977).

I mention these events as a context for understanding Goldiamond (1974). In fact, David Wexler's paper is the second citation by Goldiamond in his text, the first is *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (Skinner, 1971). The publication of BFD was the critical event which had brought about extensive discussions of the moral and ethical aspects of Skinner's behaviorism, particularly in connection with issues of mental health (for a cumulative record displaying the increased number of publications on these themes in the early to mid-1970s, see Knapp & Downs, 1977). A full appreciation of Goldiamond's contribution requires a recollection of this period in the history of behavior analysis when so many important changes were introduced in institutional policies, and state laws governing those in total institutions.

Though I have not checked by actual count, it seems certain that Goldiamond (1974) is the longest paper (with a more generous font, and line-spacing, it could be a small book) to have appeared in the pages of then *Behaviorism* (now *Behavior and Philosophy*). Of course, this is only one of its distinguishing features, but it does tell us about the author's love of talk. And what distinguished his talk was not just quantity, (which was enormous, with never a loss of energy, as though it had all been saved up for whatever the occasion), but

its originality and complexity. These are the outstanding characteristics of his paper and analysis. The topics are familiar: the United States Constitution, social contract theory, the experimental analysis of behavior, the medical model, programmed instruction, civil liberties, signal detection theory, and so on. But how few among us was prepared to have these integrated into a formulation that is conceptual and theoretical, which directs one's therapeutic activities at the general level of problem formulation and solution generation, but which also creates an interview procedure leading to a treatment (teaching) program with accompanying clinical records (manifest in specific forms), and all of it rationalized with an integrated ethic. A small book indeed. These are big thoughts.

Consider for a moment the typical manner in which ethical principles are presented to students in psychology, social work, counseling, and related programs. This is often done as a set of principles taught in a separate course devoted to ethics in which the student is to learn how to apply the principles to the content (assessment and intervention procedures) taught in other separate courses. This is not at all how Goldiamond's analysis proceeds. It is not enough to put the ethic in the same course with the therapeutic (some departments of psychology do that); what is absolutely unique with the constructionalist formulation is the integration of the ethic into the assessment/intervention program. The forms, procedures, strategies are governed by the constructional rationale (1974, p. 30 [pp. 138-9 here]). In my more than 18 years of teaching a graduate course in ethics and professional issues, I have never seen anyone else who has even attempted what Goldiamond succeeded in doing—building a therapeutic model out of an ethical foundation.

I have never found it easy, however, to use Goldiamond (1974) as a teaching instrument. Even when accompanied by written objectives, the paper still seems too much for students. The distinctions Goldiamond makes are fine-grained, and not strongly drawn. They require study. If you compare his contribution with others of the period, his lacks any of the us-against them rhetoric. The issues are too serious to him for formulation in the simple language of confrontation. That the pathological orientation is not being rejected out of hand, (1974, p. 68 [p. 180 here]) is too easily lost by equating Goldiamond's thesis with a mere rejection of the medical model, or with his merely advocating programmed instruction as the metaphor for the development of behavioral procedures, or with his focusing on the strengths of a patient rather than the weaknesses, or with his simply focusing on the positive. The current movement in American psychology advocated by a recent APA president in the name of psychology becoming more positive and optimistic appears to be, frankly, Chamber of Commerce lunch-talk when compared to the sophisticated analysis Goldiamond advanced in the name of the constructionalist orientation. Both seem to stem from the same dissatisfaction, psychology's lengthy preoccupation with the negative features of people, but Goldiamond's analysis (partly because it is in the context of behavior analysis) provides a direct course of action.

What has changed in clinical intervention since the appearance of Goldiamond (1974)? I am only qualified to address the narrow area of phobic

disorders. Since the mid-1970s much progress has been made that is consistent with, though I would never claim was derived from the constructionalist orientation. During the decade of the 1970s, the treatment of phobic disorders was revolutionized (beyond the earlier contributions of the behavior therapy literature) by the recognition of their complexity (especially regards agoraphobia), the development of multi-component treatment programs, the emergence of speciality clinics, the first pharmacological agents specific to phobias, and finally, the conceptualization of the phobic condition as something a patient needs to learn to do (function with fear) rather than something which is to be eliminated. Reinforced practice, often with little or no relaxation procedure, became a central and essential component of effective treatment programs (for the review of this history, see Knapp & Schumacher, 1988). In other areas, the use of contracts which explicitly (notice how often and nearly always in italics Goldiamond uses the word) describe the sought outcome and procedures to be used are now part of most mental health systems, in many states mandated by law. This is the case in Nevada, and due in no small part to psychologists who had joined the state mental health system after receiving training in the mid-1970s (or earlier) in the behavioral PhD program at Southern Illinois University. Much in mental health care has changed and is in agreement with a constructionalist formulation. In other areas, American cultural practice has become perhaps more pathological in its orientation. In the last decades we seem to prefer putting large numbers of persons in prison to eliminate their behavior by mere confinement, with little concern about constructing new behaviors when their sentences are completed.

The constructionalist approach does not remove the behavioral advocate from all charges. There are many critics who would not see any great distance from constructing repertoires to social engineering in a strongly negative sense. What does off set such charges, as Goldiamond so persuasively argued, is the checks and balances of the contractual arrangement. But legal contracts are written in the context of system for their enforcement, and more importantly, for their interpretation and legitimacy. Certain kinds of contracts are not allowed, even if both parties were to freely agree to the terms and conditions. There is a role played by the ultimate overseer, the Supreme Court in the case of the Constitution, which may be lacking in Goldiamond's formulation. Two parties to a contract always have an external appeal to the courts. Similar difficulties with Goldiamonds' analysis were discussed by Meadowcraft (1977).

The footnotes: We are fortunate that *Behaviorism* did not fully adhere to the APA Publication Manual, which while it permits footnotes, also discourages them. There are 88 footnotes in the 73 pages of Goldiamond's text. They are a joy. Consider just a few. Number 88 (on page 71 [183 here]) dismisses with a more sophisticated analysis (social contingencies versus social labeling) the dozens of articles that have appeared in the sociological literature on social labeling theory. Any graduate student looking for work is provided with the thesis, an example of its application, and from the body of the text—the implications. All that remains to do for a nice paper is place the issues in historical context, generate three more examples, and acknowledge Goldiamond. Footnote number 26 (on page 20 [128

here]) compares the positive constructionalist outcomes of the Constitution with the grievances of the Declaration of Independence. Who would take the time to classify and count the lines of the Declaration of Independence for a mere footnote? Goldiamond. Number 82 (on page 66 [178 here]) served as the basis for my answer to one of the questions during my oral examination for the PhD. There are other places to find an explanation of the relationship between individual organism methods, N=1 experiments, and analysis of variance, but none as succinct as Footnote 82. Again, the contribution from Goldiamond is in the details.

Goldiamond left us an orientation (a constructional one) which at its most abstract description solved the problems of an individual by the construction of repertoires as opposed to their elimination. No new therapy was advanced, but rather a call to make explicit what goes on in any therapeutic endeavor in terms of outcome, procedure, entering repertoires, and maintenance methods.

The Roman elder Cato regarded a rhetorician as a good man (ethically) speaking well (effectively). What Goldiamond gave us in the name of the Constructionalist was a good man (or woman) teaching well--the therapist as an ethical teacher. What we often find instead in current doctoral programs are teachers of ethics.

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