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Professor Mario Bunge
3479 Peel St
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Dear Professor Bunge:

I'm not well organized, being without a secretary (having a secretary while I was at McGill was all that kept any order in my paper work), and I have only now found your letter of Nov. 28 after having mislaid it.

As I said in my recent letter to Whalley, I have no idea what to say that would make a formal paper on cause and purpose in psychology. Philosophers seem in general to be aware only of the psychologists that they call behaviorists--meaning, Skinnerian positivists and related "learning theorists." But even they no longer deny the existence of purpose, though they prefer not to study the behavior that involves purpose. As for cause, this is not a word that one often finds used in a precise way in any field of science, is it? Neither topic is a current concern in psychological debates.

But if you recognize that for the great majority of psychologists --leaving aside that bigoted minority--the issue of purpose is not being debated because they regard the issue as settled (by Lashley, Tolman, Köhler and others, long ago), the situation looks different. Purpose obviously exists; and causal relations are taken for granted in research, though no doubt some psychologists if asked would vote for indeterminacy: inconsistently, they assume determinacy in their experiments but talk indeterminacy in the form of ESP and so on. It seems to me that philosophers are given to discussing the stance of psychologists without reading the literature. What is a behaviorist? Lashley and Tolman both called themselves behaviorists, and both spent their careers disproving Watson's and Hull's and Skinner's theoretical positions; I call myself a behaviorist, and mean by that I base my theoretical conclusions on the objective data of behavior, along with other objective evidence, in opposition to introspective data (pseudo-data).

I see in one of the two papers you sent me that "psychologists on the whole ignore evolution" and complain that "few textbooks...adopt an explicit evolutionary viewpoint"--and cite Thompson as an exception. I can't believe that you have really looked, because it is a rare textbook in psychology that does not take completely for granted an evolutionary development of behavior. I suppose you can cite the word "explicit" in that statement, and maybe the word "evolution" is not often found; but would you say that physicists don't believe in causation because the word isn't often found in physics texts? In my "Organization of behavior" the word word evolution doesn't appear in the index--but look under "Phylogenetic differences." My Textbook

*but not
incomplete!*

1 "cause"

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also lacks "evolution" in the index, but it consistently attempts to show the student how to think about behavior that is higher or lower in the scale of evolution, with a whole chapter (5) devoted to the topic. Behavior characteristic of one level--conditioned reflexes in the pigeon, language in the two-year-old child--can be studied without explicit reference to its evolutionary antecedents, just as one can study the physiology of vision without considering its genetic determinants. One still knows they exist, but for some purposes taking that aspect of the problem into consideration isn't productive.

So it's easy to be misled by the loud voices of a small minority of psychologists--their loud voices and the publicity that results --and get the impression that psychologists never heard of Darwin and Mendel, or deny the existence of thought and purpose and imagination. But it's really not so. -- It's odd that the biologists too should be so unaware of the biological basis of comparative psychology, where cognitive activity is concerned. E.O. Wilson's Sociobiology is flawed in its treatment of altruism by the tacit assumption that the ant and man have the same kind of control of behavior. Tinbergen it seems never heard of Lashley. Donald Griffin has just submitted to Behavioral and Brain Sciences a paper which he regards as speculative and venturesome, proving or suggesting that infrahuman animals may have thought and consciousness--an issue that was debated for thirty or forty years in psychology (and settled about 1950), but Griffin clearly knows none of that literature.

Anyway, I'll see you in February, but I'll hardly know what to talk about till I hear what the others have to say.

Sincerely yours,

