BOOK REVIEWS


This reviewer, at times, has taken the standpoint of interbehavioral and cybernetic psychology and informally proposed that something like a Center for Nontherapy would be a useful contribution to human welfare. The main function of such an agency would be to offer counsel aimed at minimizing counselees' requests for special assistance from professionals in the psychosocial area. The contributors to Acceptance and Change do not promote nontherapy, but with acceptance they do present an alternative to heavily interventive and change-oriented approaches. Although acceptance has a long history in the psychosocial helping professions, the strategy seems not to have been grounded in established basic principles nor to have been subject to agreed-upon procedural guidelines. Neither does the psychotherapy outcome literature support the efficacy of acceptance. Judged by this book's coverage, it is not evident that these shortcomings have been overcome. Despite all this, acceptance, in one guise or another, has a certain appeal which may lie in its promotion of a kind of nonresistance to that which we cannot change. In recommendations bordering on nontherapy at times, the counselor recommending acceptance often seeks to assist the counselee to give up a losing battle for the greater reward of not being in a battle at all. In certain instances, acceptance seems to translate into abandoning what amounts to an unhealthy self-coercive mode of existence—with concomitant disruptive reorganization—in favor of a more satisfactory noncoercive style. In other cases, one finds contemporary constructivistic cognitive therapy in operation, as when acceptance is largely a matter of indirect attempts to alter stimulus functions in the manner of George Kelly's personal construct therapy.

The contents of the book range over a variety of areas. Hayes discusses a general framework for acceptance as contextual change strategy. Dougher, like some other contributors, tries to tie acceptance to the kind of behavioral psychology associated with B. F. Skinner. Other chapters address acceptance in various contexts, including experiential therapy (Greenberg), dialectic behavior therapy (Linehan), rational-emotive therapy (Ellis & Robb), behavioral couple therapy (Koenner, Jacobson, & Christensen), the therapeutic relationship (Cordova & Kohlenberg), treatment of paraphilias (LoPiccolo), addictive disorders (Marlatt), alcohol abuse (Wulfert), family services (Griffee), caring for elderly persons (McCurry & Schmidt), and child sexual abuse (Follette).

It is safe to say that a major theme of the book is acceptance as an adjunct to contemporary behavior therapy procedures. In this way, we find a coming together of behavior therapy and approaches not typically associated, at least in the literature, with behavior therapy. Whether or not this is progress or a dilution of behavior therapy remains to be determined. (Dennis J. Delprato, Eastern Michigan University)
Over the years, the study of stimulus class formation in animals and humans has largely been conducted by two distinct fields of researchers; learning theorists and behavior analysts. This book brings together findings from the two research traditions in a well-organized and efficient manner.

In the introductory chapter, Catania discusses the defining properties of operant and higher order classes in terms of reinforcement contingencies that operate on the relations among all responses. The book is then organized according to four broad themes. The first theme, 'Functional and Equivalence Classes in Animals' is opened with a chapter by Zentall which focuses on the distinction between similarity-based and nonsimilarity-based classes, and in the next chapter Roberts discusses processes of stimulus generalization and associative linkage in the categorization performances of animals. Urcuioli then traces the challenge posed by acquired equivalence from Hull (1939) and proposes a framework based on secondary or mediated generalization. Next, Pepperberg takes a developmental perspective in outlining a series of studies on categorical class formation in an African Grey parrot.

The book's second theme, 'Functional and Equivalence Classes in Humans,' is allocated two chapters. Saunders, Williams, and Spradlin review the different procedures involved in demonstrations of derived stimulus control and suggest that species differences may be the result of different processes offset by procedural variations. Astley and Wasserman begin their chapter with an informative critique of essentialist accounts of categorization. They go on to emphasize the important role played by perceptual similarity and outline a mediational account of the categorization performance of children with some interesting, and unpublished, data.

The third theme of the book addresses 'Equivalence Classes: Stimulus Control Variables.' Dougher and Markham discuss the necessary conditions required for the acquisition of stimulus functions and raise several issues worthy of future research. The chapter by Barnes, Smeets, and Leader outlines findings from recent cooperative studies showing that conditional relations between stimuli may emerge as a function of spatial contiguity (compound stimuli) and temporal contiguity (sequential presentations of individual stimuli). Such findings have clear implications for theoretical accounts of stimulus class formation. In their chapter entitled "Stimulus Equivalence: A Class of Correlations or a Correlation of Classes?," Pilgrim and Galizio review the evidence for the combined demonstration of the three components of emergent matching (reflexivity, symmetry, and transitivity/equivalence) and the theoretical unity of stimulus equivalence as a behavioral unit. They conclude that the three components may represent independent stimulus control relations and outline findings from ongoing unpublished studies employing novel methodologies. Next, Dube and McIvane outline in detail the implications of a Stimulus Control Topography Analysis (SCT) for analyzing sources of competing stimulus control in studies of derived matching. They conclude with a series of readily testable assumptions and discuss the advantages of SCT for other previously disparate research areas such as behavioral momentum.

The final three chapters are organized according to the theme, 'Equivalence Classes: Verbal Behavior.' Stromer and Mackay review the evidence for a relationship between language ability and success on tests for equivalence, and they argue convincingly against the necessary role of naming in the formation of
stimulus classes. In his chapter, de Rose agrees with this analysis and suggests that the verbal control often seen in equivalence studies be considered a special case of rule-governed behavior. Finally, Hayes, Gifford, and Wilson outline one of the most convincing arguments thus far in favor of Relational Frame Theory (RFT). They discuss an operant-based account of the emergence of verbal behavior, or arbitrarily applicable relational responding and review the accumulating evidence for the RFT view.

Overall, this book is a timely addition to the growing literature on stimulus class formation in animals and humans. Often books such as this merely summarize the research programs of contributing authors with little, if any, new data. This book is different. With signs of high editorial standards and much cross-citation between chapters, the book represents a synthesis of terminology and of new research ideas.

One minor detail, however, merits attention. The listed price of the book is 225 Dutch Guilders ($180 approx.) which is sure to dissuade students and those interested parties outside of the research area from buying it. Whether anything can be done about the price remains to be seen. But this is perhaps a minor issue, given that in the Preface to the book the editors set out the following goal: “The goal of this book is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the current state of research and theory in stimulus class formation. If, in addition, it serves to stimulate research into how, and under what conditions, stimulus classes can form, we will consider our efforts to have been very well spent” (p. vii). It is because of their efforts and those of the contributors that this book is to be recommended unreservedly.

References


(Simon Dymond, University of Wales, Bangor)