

Correspondence

Dear Sir, Editorial *Behavioural Psychotherapy* July 1981

I have just read the Editorial in the July 1981 issue of *Behavioural Psychotherapy*. Surely it is no part of the function of a scientific publication to present an over-simplified and incomplete account of a complex area such as the behaviourist position on the role of private events? Of course no one would argue that John B. Watson and the operationists and logical positivists of the 1930s and 1940s had a viable position (*cf.* Skinner, 1964), so who exactly are the present-day psychologists who hold these views?

The Editorial refers to the “radical behaviourist position with its abhorrence of mediating variables and hypothetical constructs”. The over-simplification notwithstanding, I presume that what is being referred to is *methodological* behaviourism. The term *radical* behaviourism is reserved for the philosophy espoused by those such as Skinner, Ferster, Day, Cantania, etc. It is galling and frustrating to find oneself constantly accused of holding views which have *never* been in the radical behaviourist repertoire.

To put the record straight, Skinner’s first major discussion of the role of private events such as thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc., was published in 1945. Since that time, he has devoted considerable space to the topic, and in 1974 wrote that understanding the role of private events is “the heart of radical behaviourism”. (Skinner, 1974, p. 212). For those who still will not read what Skinner has to say on the place of private events in a science of behaviour, then Moore (1980) has presented a good summary.

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References

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- SKINNER, B. F. (1964). *Behaviourism at fifty*. In *Behaviorism and Phenomenology*, T. W. Wann (Ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- SKINNER, B. F. (1974). *About Behaviourism*, London: Jonathan Cape.