

PREFACE

THE PRESENT BOOK examines certain aspects of behavioristic psychology in the context of the philosophy of science. Quite obviously the treatment must be limited. The subject matter of experimental and theoretical psychology is much too diversified to be subjected to extensive critical analysis. Here the argument is necessarily a restricted one, concentrating as it does on stimulus-response paradigms and on learning where psychologists have presumed to a theory worthy of the name.

As a science psychology presents neither the formal maturity nor the quandary which has characterized modern physics. As a result, one hears the claim that psychology is not ready for its philosophy. Or, more often, one hears that philosophical analysis has little to contribute to the skills that the behavioral scientist must bring to his experimental problems. Such reactions are reasonable ones only if the psychologist has little to question concerning first principles or concerning the basics of his language. Frequently, however, the behaviorist overlooks the fact that his scientific credo was born in philosophical ferment; that whenever he defends the data of behavior as being the proper subject matter for the language of his science, he is making a commitment which is to be defended not as a subject of science but as one of philosophy in a technical sense. The logical positivists learned long ago that anti-metaphysics, and all the protestations, lead nowhere if not to metaphysics. And the behaviorist who restricts the data language of his science to public observation, doing so out of his commitment to clarity, to communicability, and to systemic efficiency, shows his own philosophical hand as surely as the philosopher who often waits until his major work is done before he pens his prolegomena.

Experience, and the data and language of experience, become the focal issues for the psychologist who would look critically at his own science. The contemporary behaviorist frequently vacillates between a radical, naive empiricism and facile operationism. Having been encouraged to disdain philosophy, he has to a large extent been unaware of the difficulty of ana-

lyzing the language of experience itself. He has been prepared neither to recognize how unobvious, how debatable is so simple a thing as a fact, nor to articulate as first principles that one cannot divest the fact of its theoretic attribute or divorce theory of its apperceptive function.

In brief, a theme of this book is that theory is integral with all behavioral science—that, more explicitly, scientific fact cannot be rendered independent of theory. Yet beyond this, some maintain that theory is not wholly the subject of an arbitrary option as befits the taste of the practitioner. Nor is one open to just any kind of operational license. To the criteria of parsimony and comprehensiveness in selecting from among our theoretical languages, we must add and emphasize that of reduction. The questions of alternative theoretical conceptions will be resolved by reducing the terms of one science to those of a more basic science. In some such sense there is a real convergence in scientific endeavor. It is in the reduction that one finds whatever sense of scientific realism is philosophically defensible.

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