STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE OF COMPLEX HUMAN BEHAVIOR: A RESPONSE TO RIBES-IÑESTA'S RESPONSE

Denis O'Hora
Dermot Barnes-Holmes
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Ribes-Iñesta's (2001) response does not clarify his (2000) position on how rules or instructions affect behavior. Ribes-Iñesta (2001) states that rules may be considered as "synonyms for behavioral and/or environmental consistencies," as "prescriptions" (p. 27), as "verbal *discriminative stimuli*" (p. 28), and "contrary to what O'Hora and Barnes-Holmes advocate, . . . *not descriptions*" (p. 27). These statements appear to contradict, at least in part, his original (i.e., 2000) position that rules are "verbal *descriptions* of functional contingencies" (p. 46), "verbal *descriptions* of previously experienced contingencies" (p. 49), and that conceiving of rules as *discriminative stimuli* was evidence of "defective logic" (footnote, p. 43). Moreover, Ribes-Iñesta's (2001) response does not address the central concern of our response with regard to rules or instructions. That is, he does not provide an account of the referential nature of such stimuli. Indeed, there appears to be significant lack of clarity in this area.

Perhaps it is this lack of clarity that led Ribes-Iñesta (2001) to suggest that "the concept of 'rule' is not adequate to refer to behavioral or environmental events from a psychological perspective" (p. 27). Ribes-Iñesta also argues that we should revisit the assumptions and principles upon which research on human behavior is based, and we certainly agree with him (Barnes & Holmes, 1991; Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, & Cullinan, 2000; Hayes, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001; O'Hora & Barnes-Holmes, 2001). In fact, this very idea formed the basis for our response to the original article—that we should revisit the concept of specification or reference in the context of rules and instructions. However, our research agenda does not simply involve *revisiting*, it also requires that we attempt to extend, develop, and build upon the early work of Skinner and those who followed him.

A fundamental distinction between Ribes-Iñesta's (2001) position and ours, therefore, is that we see considerable value in Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* (1957), while also recognizing that this work must be developed substantively in order to address the richness and complexity of human language and cognition (e.g., Barnes-Holmes et al., 2000). It is our position that a functional-analytic account of the specifying or referential properties of verbal stimuli, including rules and instructions, is perhaps the most crucial aspect of this extension of Skinner's work. Indeed, we are working to refine just such an account (*Relational Frame Theory*, Hayes et al., 2001) and to develop a conceptual and empirical model of instructional control (O'Hora, Barnes-Holmes, & Roche, 2001). This model marries the seminal work of Skinner (1957, 1969) to recent work on equivalence classes and derived stimulus relations and has identified a possible functional class within which instructions participate. We have found this to be a constructive and progressive strategy that takes advantage of the many years of research on verbal behavior, rule governance, and derived stimulus relations.

References

Barnes, D., & Holmes, Y. (1991). Radical behaviorism, stimulus equivalence, and human cognition. *The Psychological Record, 41,* 19-31.

Barnes-Holmes, D., Barnes-Holmes, Y., & Cullinan, V. (2000). Relational frame theory and Skinner's *Verbal behavior*: A possible synthesis. *The Behavior Analyst, 23*, 69-84

Hayes, S. C., Barnes-Holmes, D., & Roche, B. T. (2001). *Relational frame theory: A post-Skinnerian account of human language and cognition*. New York: Plenum.

O'Hora, D., & Barnes-Holmes, D. (2001). The referential nature of rules and instructions: A response to instructions, rules, and abstraction: A misconstrued relation by Emilio Ribes-Iñesta. *Behavior and Philosophy, 29*, 21-25

O'Hora, D., Barnes-Holmes, D., & Roche, B. (2001). Developing a procedure to model the establishment of instructional control. *Experimental Analysis of Human Behavior Bulletin, 19,* 13-15.

Ribes-Iñesta, E. (2000). Instructions, rules and abstraction: A misconstrued relation. *Behavior and Philosophy, 28,* 41-55.

Ribes-Iñesta, E. (2001). About persistent conceptual confusion: A response to O'Hora and Barnes-Holmes. *Behavior and Philosophy, 29*, 27-29.

Skinner, B. F. (1957). *Verbal Behavior.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Skinner, B. F. (1969). *Contingencies of reinforcement: A theoretical analysis.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.