guides.

Another small *concept tableau* to leave you with, the components taken from real life in England at the turn of the century.[4] A well-intentioned middle class philanthropist proposing to his friends the endowment of classes in art and music appreciation for labourers; notice of a local inquest recording the death by starvation of a baby belonging to a labourer earning 12 shillings a week; one labourer to another: 'the trouble with eddicated people is that they're so demmed ignorant'.

1 Edward Kienholz, Tableaux 1961-1979. *Douglas Hyde Gallery Exhibition Catalogue*, p 27.
2 Vol I p ix
3 Vol I p 97
4 Cf. *The Simple Life*, by Fiona McCarthy. Lund Humphries, 1981.

# An Ethics for Behaviour Modification


## Hugo Meynell


To assure ourselves of the benefits of the theory and practice of behaviour modification, and to avoid the dangers, which are obviously immense, we urgently need a comprehensively critical ethical theory, on the basis of which what is good for individuals and for society may be reasonably determined on the evidence, and not depend simply on arbitrary *fiat* or the whim of the majority or any powerful group. Once such a theory is outlined, it will, I am afraid, be found to be incompatible at first sight with the theoretical basis usually taken to underlie the most sophisticated techniques of behaviour modification. However, I shall argue that an appropriately restricted and modified behaviourism will be quite consistent with the required ethical theory.

In reading the literature on this and related topics, one is made most painfully aware of the yawning gap which there is in the place where a rational ethics ought to be. (If anyone is to be blamed for this, it is the moral philosophers rather than the psychologists.) One can hardly wonder at the fear expressed by some mem-




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bers of the public that, the more efficient our techniques of behaviour modification become, the less notion we have of what ends we ought to aim at, what states of affairs we ought to avoid, in our employment of such techniques. That value-judgments cannot in the last resort be settled by any rational or empirical method, though increasingly doubted by professional philosophers[1], is a proposition held with remarkable tenacity by our *intelligensia*. So, inevitably, since we have to act for some end or other, resort is had either to dogma or to head-counting.

For example, the moral problems involved in dealing with patients in mental hospitals may be seen as amounting simply to the fact that 'the general public' – an entity vague enough to be worth putting in inverted commas – might object to some things that are done to these patients.[2] So, to forestall such objection, it may be suggested that as many different types of expert as reasonably possible ought to be consulted at each stage of dealing with the patient. But what price 'the general public' as the ultimate arbiter of what is right or wrong? Couldn't 'the general public' be wrong, at least occasionally? If it wanted the death penalty back, as I understand the majority of adults in this country would say that they did, would this of itself make its revival morally right? Is it not conceivable – unless one persuasively defines[3] 'the general public' as that which, like the monarch, can do no wrong – that resistance to the behests of the general public might be the most morally commendable course of action in some instances? Skinner speaks of the function of ethical considerations as that of bringing into view the long-range consequences of actions.[4] But if this principle were taken seriously, its consistent application would not necessarily lead to the slightest 'improvement', as this term would generally be understood, in the treatment of the inmates of prisons or mental hospitals. The most obvious corollary of the principle for those conducting such institutions would be the eleventh commandment, 'Thou shalt not be found out.' Suppose the patients or the convicts are being hurt or insulted for the fun or the convenience of the staff. Isn't the best way of preventing untoward long-term consequences for the staff an efficient withholding of information from those who might object?

The practice of treating political dissidents as psychiatric patients, said to be customary in the Soviet Union, is generally deplored here. On what principles do we deplore it, assuming for a moment that we do so? Do 'the general public' in the Soviet Union object? Apparently not – only a few other dissidents. We in the West object; or rather, a few people who bother to inform themselves about the matter do so: But what business is it of ours? We would not countenance such practices over here; but what follows



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from that? I concede that they are deplorable on general humanitarian principles; but the question before us is precisely how such principles are to be spelt out and justified, and how far, if at all, they are consonant with the theory underlying contemporary behaviour modification. Our society regards one kind of behaviour as being such as ought to be modified theirs so regards another; and that ends the matter. If one takes the other way out, and extends charity to the Soviets, the question would arise again with regard to Nazi treatment of the Jews; and so on and so on. Of course it is by no means true that people who cannot articulate or justify their moral principles live down to their lack of moral principles; they tend to be like the Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edgestow, whose ethical principles were consistent with any amount of political and social frightfulness, but who was himself punctilious in such small matters as always promptly returning any book which he had borrowed.[5] Decency and humanity will keep inconsistently breaking in, in spite of principle – just so long as, for whatever reason, they happen to remain alive and kicking within a society. No reflective person who lived in the second half of the twentieth century could take for granted their doing so without a remarkable capacity for self-deception.

If radical behaviourism cannot itself provide the ethics which is needed for the appropriate application of its principles, where are we to get this? Is it not notorious that there are a number of competing moral standards within our society, incommensurable with one another – liberal humanist, Marxist, and those of the various religions and denominations? However, I shall argue that not only *ought* such a basis for a rational ethics to be sought out; but that it can be found quite easily by students of human behaviour if they shift their customary perspective a little. Instead of thinking of the patient or the criminal, or man in general, as *object* of scientific investigation, let us attend for the moment to the psychologist or the psychiatrist, the *subject* who is working out what the principles are according to which human beings behave, or how to apply these principles to the treatment of actual cases. Why do we find the behaviour, verbal or otherwise, of the psychologist or psychiatrist, reasonable or commendable? On what principles, for example, would we justify the paying-out of public money positively to reinforce this behaviour of theirs? (It should be noted that this is not a polemical point; I am assuming that we do regard their behaviour as on the whole reasonable and commendable, and are right in doing so.) Do we say, in *justifying* their behaviour, 'Well, the kind of behaviour which they emit has been positively reinforced, and relevantly different behaviour has been, in the technical sense, punished'? Of course we do not, realizing,



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as we do, that this kind of explanation will do just as well for the behaviour of witch-doctors, torturers or arsonists; what we were looking for was the kind of explanation which was relevant to their justification. Nor does it help really if, following some recent sociologists of knowledge, we say that their behaviour has been shaped by the proper authorities in their disciplines;[6] since the problem simply comes up again, by virtue of what are the proper authorities, the proper authorities? The witch-doctors and the torturers are at least as publicly accredited in some societies as the psychologists and psychiatrists are in ours.

I conclude that the fact that we regard the professional behaviour of psychologists and psychiatrists are on the whole reasonable and commendable implies that we cannot regard the sort of explanation given of their behaviour by the behaviourist as a complete or exhaustive account of the matter. On the contrary – and here we come to the nub of the matter – on human behaviour and how it is to be modified, we regard the psychologist as expert on the ground that he, or at least the scientific community which recognizes and accredits him, has attended to the sensory evidence bearing on the subject; has considered a range of ways in which that evidence *might* be accounted for; and has preferred as most likely the way which in fact *does* seem best to account for it; and has published results and instructed students accordingly.[7] Something similar applies to the psychiatrist, whose job it is to cure patients by using the methods best adapted to the purpose; on which methods the psychologist will plainly be the best authority. Can we really say that it is an adequate account of the matter that he just treats the patient in the manner which has been positively reinforced in the course of his training? Of course not – or rather, of course it is to be hoped not;[8] since just the same could be said of the most abominable of the warders in a Nazi concentration camp. He attends to the evidence constituted by his patient's observable behaviour, the things he does and the words he utters; he considers various ways in which this might be accounted for; he judges that the patient is actually in the state which accords best with the evidence; and he decides to apply some approved therapeutic technique.

I have attributed four kinds of mental operation to the psychologist and psychiatrist; these are of central importance for my subsequent argument in this paper. We regard the professional behaviour of the psychologist and the psychiatrist reasonable and responsible to the degree that it is due to attention to sensible evidence; to consideration of possibilities; to selection of some among such possibilities as accounting for the evidence; and to a decision to act accordingly.[9] (One might even define a good professional



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training as a matter of positive reinforcement of these dispositions in regard to the relevant subject matter.) To put it briefly, we value their work as due to attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility, when these terms are operationally defined in the kind of way that I have sketched.[10] Would we really trust a general medical practitioner who said and meant that he never attended to a patient's signs and symptoms; never envisaged hypothetical states of the patient which might account for these signs and symptoms; never judged on the basis of them that the patient was likely to be in one of these states; and never decided to treat him accordingly?[11]

Let us say that a person has 'effective freedom' so far as his actions are to be accounted for as due to attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility.[12] Now it would be generally agreed, I think, that effective freedom is expected, and commended when it exists, not only in professionals engaged in their specialty, but in ordinary people involved in their activities. We expect a parent to judge, on the basis of his young child's behaviour, that he is unwell, and to decide not to send him to school – having perhaps considered, and rejected on the evidence, the possibility that he is shamming. We expect a well-to-do executive to judge, on the basis of a sinister-looking document in a buff envelope which arrives through the post, that his bank account is not in credit, and accordingly to decide to defer to a more auspicious occasion the purchase of a new outboard motor for his dinghy. The severely neurotic and the psychotic differ from the rest of us at least in that the usual mental process, from evidence attended to, through judgment and decision, to action, is impaired. The neurotic, in his relation with his boss or his consort, seems to be fighting battles of long ago with his parents or siblings, rather than acting in a way which is reasonable and responsible in relation to his present situation; the psychotic seems even further removed from the normal pattern in his beliefs, moods and actions.

Now objection is liable to be made as follows. 'Talk of the acts and dispositions which you say are constitutive of effective freedom is sheer mentalism. Is not the whole object of a scientific analysis of human behaviour the elimination of such talk'? Two considerations spring to mind which may give us pause in accepting the objection. First, as I have already argued, actual denial that such acts or dispositions exist or occur, or what implies such denial, so far from being a consequence of science, is actually destructive of it. Just *how* these acts and dispositions ought to be analysed – as patterns of behaviour, as brain-processes, or as items available to introspection – is not immediately at issue. But the fact remains that if nothing is to count as attentive, intelligent,



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reasonable or responsible behaviour, the bottom is knocked out of science. We are inclined to believe what scientists tell us because we deem it to have been said or written as a result of responsible decision on the basis of rational judgment founded on wide attention to relevant evidence.[13] If it is objected that science has no place for postulates involving unobservable things or events, this is simply false. As Berkeley noted,[14] this was not even true of eighteenth century science; and it is very obviously not true of the science of the twentieth century. Admittedly, unobservables have no place in science except as explanatory of the results of observation; but the acts and dispositions constitutive of effective freedom most certainly have this warrant. The whole of observable human action, when it is action strictly speaking and not merely reflex, and *a fortiori* the observable behaviour of scientists, justify the belief that they exist.

Also, short of the existence and occurrence of such acts and dispositions, it would appear that all attempts to set up a rational and non-arbitrary ethics, and consequently rational and non-arbitrary guidelines for those who would modify human behaviour in a responsible manner, must inevitably be fruitless. Behaviour *just as* behaviour is axiologically monochrome; it is only as contributory to or expressive of happiness or fulfilment, or contrariwise suffering or frustration, that it acquires positive or negative value.[15] Effective freedom is both itself an aspect of happiness or fulfilment – it is wretched to be unable, through either internal hang-ups or external pressures, to judge and act for oneself – and a prime means to other aspects of happiness – like a synpathetic consort and a moderate-to-good income. And in fact, whether this is admitted or not, it seems clear that what I have called effective freedom is the principal aim of all psychotherapy worth the name. The mental patient is unable, due to his habits of thought and feeling, to work out and implement goals reasonably satisfying to himself and those with whom he comes into contact. To himself, or to those about him, or to both, his behaviour is a source of distress; otherwise he would never have got near the therapist. What he needs is the power to make a satisfying life for himself such as is compatible with the satisfaction of those among whom he lives; and of this the main constituent seems to be what I have called effective freedom. One might well maintain that the real significance of operant conditioning for human beings is that it provides a more efficient means by which this may be gained than has ever before been available.

Inappropriate as it may seem in such a context as this, I would like to put in a good word for Freud. For increase in effective freedom is just the same as increasing dominance by the ego of the id



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and the superego. Instead of being tormented alternately by his anti-social impulses and his conscience, the patient undergoing psychoanalysis (or at least this is the object of the exercise) gradually develops a relatively satisfying and harmonious pattern of activity in relation to his environment. In however misleading a manner, the jargon of psychoanalysis does convey, in a way of which I do not think a consistent behaviourism can be capable, some conception of the goal to be aimed at by the process of psychotherapy. Of course, whether the *means* recommended by psychoanalysis for securing the end is the most effective available is quite another question; one might well, on the contrary, say that the technique is apt positively to reinforce the behaviour it is supposed to mitigate.[16]

It may well be complained that my concern to make room, so to speak, for the basis for a rational scheme of values, has led me to a position which is completely incompatible with what is presupposed by the great achievements of operant psychology. For example, it may be urged that it is of the essence of Skinner's position, and indeed a presupposition of a genuine science of human behaviour as such, that the superstition that man is ever 'autonomous' should be firmly rejected;[17] and I have been claiming in effect that a prime object of justifiable behaviour-modification is precisely to promote such autonomy. My principal concern in the remainder of this paper is to show that this dilemma can be rebutted; that one is not faced with such a stark choice between the principles which I have outlined and commitment to a behaviourist operant psychology.

It is said that the late distinguished philosopher Gilbert Ryle was once asked by a student what he thought were the ultimate constituents of the universe; and that Ryle replied, 'Things and chaps'. I shall make a distinction between t-explanation, which we would naturally apply to things, and c-explanation – which, unless we are animists or insane, we confine to chaps. The earlier part of my argument was to the effect that to get rid of c-explanation altogether would have some very paradoxical consequences, including consequences fatal to science, for all that many people, including the distinguished author of *Science and Human Behaviour*, appear to believe that to get rid of c- in favour of t-explanation is of the essence of science.[18] Certainly the relation between t- and c-explanation has impressed itself on philosophers as a formidable problem, at least since the seventeenth century.[19] After all, it can hardly be denied that human beings *are* physical objects, whatever else they may be, and as such presumably conform to the laws of physics and chemistry. One may well infer that it is only reasonable for operant psychology to apply further the assumption which



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dominates, for example, classical medicine; that, for a great many purposes at least, it is fruitful to study the human organism simply from the point of view of its amenability to t-explanation.

To go very far into the problem of the relating of t-explanation to c-explanation, which is among the most complex and baffling in the whole of philosophy, would take us much too far afield. But it *is* germane to our purpose to summarise some standard alleged solutions to the problem. Let us call the behaviour of human beings so far as c-explanation is applicable to it ' c-behaviour'; so far as it may be explained fully by other means, for example the conditioned reflex, 't-behaviour'. Four theses about c-behaviour and its relation to t-behaviour may be usefully distinguished:

i There is really no such thing as c-behaviour; such need as we may still have to talk in terms of it is due to the fact that the science of human behaviour is not yet very far advanced.

ii C-behaviour is just one kind of t-behaviour, exhaustively describable in principle (if not actually now, then probably in some time in the future) in terms of it.

iii C-behaviour is an epiphenomenon of t-behaviour; it does not, so to say, have a life of its own, and the explanation of it is not to be sought in terms of principles peculiar to itself. At this rate, c-behaviour would be related to t-behaviour rather as the colour red as we see it is related to the colour red as understood in terms of light-wavicles by the theoretical physicist.

iv C-behaviour involves some kind of transcendence in an organism capable of it, of the limitations intrinsic to mere t-behaviour. That is to imply that c-behaviour neither can in principle be reduced to t-behaviour, nor is an epiphenomenon of it.

As a matter of fact, I believe that (iv) is correct; but what I want to emphasise is that only (i) is incompatible with what I have been arguing. To have a coherent, enlightened, and non-arbitrary view of what is worthwhile in human behaviour and why, we must presuppose only that c-behaviour is real; and a principal aim of an enlightened programme of behaviour-modification will be the encouragement of one kind of c-behaviour – that characterised by as much effective freedom as possible – rather than another – where it is exercised intermittently or hardly at all. If 'mentalism' is involved here, it is only such 'mentalism' as is involved in describing behaviour as in any degree reasonable or responsible; which is a necessary condition, as I have already argued, for taking seriously what scientists, including operant psychologists, have to tell us.

I said that I thought that fear on the part of the public of abuses of techniques of behaviour modification was not always wholly unreasonable. It is reasonable so far as the theory under-



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lying these techniques is incompatible with a clear and distinct articulation of the proper aims of their application. This need be so only in so far as that theory is interpreted in terms of thesis (i) as opposed to one of the others – as not infrequently happens. (Skinner's attacks on belief in 'autonomous' man are most readily to be understood in this sense; what could one mean by 'autonomy' in a person apart from what I have called 'effective freedom'?)[20] I do not think that lack of advertence to points like this usually causes psychologists or psychiatrists to be inhumane; but I do believe that their theory belies their practice. They behave humanely, though the theory which they profess is destructive of any good reasons they could have for doing so.

Once the real dangers are acknowledged, and it is recognised that the proper aims of behaviour modification cannot be adequately set out or defended within the limits of behaviourist theory itself, the immense potential benefits of the theory and the practices based upon it become apparent. If an outsider may judge, the outstanding contribution of the theory of operant conditioning to the potential good of mankind is the discovery of the efficiency of positive reinforcement as opposed to aversion. How many well-meaning but futile corrective establishments would have achieved some measure of success, how many vicious sadists would have lacked a pretext for the abuse of their authority, if only the simple but profound principle had been grasped – that it is far more efficient to reward the behaviour you *do* want than to punish the behaviour you *don't* want.

And if it is impossible to spell out the nature of effective freedom within the limits of the theory of operant conditioning, this by no means implies that one cannot use the techniques of operant conditioning to reinforce effective freedom. This is in fact done by teachers who applaud original ideas in their pupils, and by parents who encourage their children to think and act for themselves. A good teacher is not *simply* concerned, as Skinner appears to assume, to reinforce in his pupils his own (the teacher's) way of thinking and acting as such.[21] Even in the primary school – one might argue, indeed, especially there – it is all to the good if some attention is given to reinforcement in the pupils of the disposition to observe, think, and question for themselves. And surely, what has to be reinforced in a budding scientific researcher is not any way of speaking and acting as such – this would stifle all originality – but the disposition to modify one's speech and action in deference to observation and experiment. This would apply *a fortiori* to the teaching of creative writing, or painting pictures, or musical composition. And notoriously, what is to be encouraged in the neurotic is not an aping of the behaviour of his therapist,



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but the disposition to work out ways of behaving which will be satisfying to himself. All of these examples go to illustrate one fundamental point – that the theory of operant conditioning, which explains how human behaviour may most effectively be modified, urgently needs supplementing with an account of effective freedom, which will explain how it *ought to* be modified, if its potential benefits are to be systematically cultivated and its abuses avoided.

An interesting example which is highly germane to this issue is provided by Harzem and Miles who remark that while going on strike is often reinforced by a wage-rise, it might rather be desirable to reward workers for *not* striking.[22] This suggestion would be liable to horrify anyone with left-wing political sympathies, who would quite reasonably object to any procedure calculated to prevent striking just as such; and it may be worthwhile trying to disarm the criticism such a person would offer. Presumably it is not the behaviour of striking as such which Harzem and Miles would like to see extinguished; but striking when this is not the most reasonable and responsible course of action from the point of view of overall justice and the public interest. It is one thing to go on strike when a real injustice is to be remedied, and when striking is likely to be the most effective means of remedying it; quite another to do so in order actually to increase the state of injustice by giving oneself and one's peers an unfair economic advantage. One needs to be effectively free to judge clear-sightedly of the difference, and to act on this. At this rate, what are desirable are not schedules of reinforcement tending to extinguish the behaviours constitutive of 'going on strike' as such; but schedules of reinforcement of a related but significantly different kind.

The language which presupposes effective freedom on the one hand, and the language employed by psychologists to describe human behaviour in order the more effectively to modify it on the other, do and must differ from one another in significant respects, though neither is dispensable. I do not think that the differences matter, provided that each is used in its proper context for its proper purposes. Let us take an example. Suppose that a person has a horror of crowds, and an incapacity to act reasonably or responsibly in crowded places, of which he wishes to rid himself. To say that such behaviour is 'neurotic' is to say that it impugns his effective freedom; that there are things which he may acknowledge that it would be reasonable and responsible for him to do, and which he cannot do because of this incapacity of his. The behaviour with which he wishes to replace it is that of living his life and going about his business whether or not this involves mixing in crowds. Let us call the neurotic habit 'a'; the behaviour with



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which he wishes to replace it, 'b'. This can be translated by the psychologist into his own terms, '$a_1$', '$b_1$', and schedules of reinforcement or aversion can be set up accordingly. Once '$b_1$' has been attained, the description of the situation can be translated back into the other language and the case can be reviewed on this basis. Is the patient more effectively free as a result in this change of his habits of behaviour, or is he not? The same observable behaviour, I am suggesting, should be described in terms of one sort of language when one is using the latest techniques in trying to change it; in terms of the other when one is evaluating it, or the changes that have been brought about in it by means of such techniques.[23]

The type of case that we have just considered – where the therapist and patient both agree on the end to be achieved, and where there are excellent reasons of a general nature for thinking that the end is to be desired (typically, that the patient and others would be the happier for its having been achieved) are conveniently without moral ambiguity.[24] Other kinds of case, notoriously, are not so. Two immediately spring to mind – that of the potential suicide, and that of the imprisoned criminal. Thomas Szasz has roundly declared that suicide is a successful outcome of treatment. But one can easily imagine cases where, judging by the criterion of effective freedom, it would not be so. Let us suppose that a woman with acute post-natal depression deliberately takes a large overdose of sleeping tablets. She is hospitalized, and subjected contrary to her expressed wishes to various forms of therapy. A month later, she returns to her family of husband and two children. The case is reviewed after five years. The woman admits herself well and happy, and says that she is glad that her attempted suicide was not successful. Here the later opinion of the patient herself would conform both with general considerations, and with the opinion of the medical profession, in considering her own earlier decision to be mistaken. If it is arguable that some suicides, for example Cato's or Captain Oates's, are expressions of effective freedom, it is pretty clear that others, like the attempted suicide just described, are not. Against Thomas Szasz, one might suggest that if freedom to act as one may decide in the immediate instance is valuable, even supremely valuable, it does not immediately follow that it is unconditionally so.

What about the prison case? Could it be right to impose on offenders a *régime* of behaviour modification, in order that they should conform better to the standards expected by society at the end of their term of imprisonment? It is sometimes urged that to punish someone is to treat him as a responsible human being, whereas to treat him as an object for behaviour modification is



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not.[25] It is liable to be inferred from this that while society has a right to punish offenders, or to prevent them for some time from doing harm, this does not imply that it is entitled to cause them positively to behave in the way which it deems to be suitable or desirable. And it has been pointed out that punishment has limits of a kind that behaviour-modification does not; after a person has 'done his time', as meted out by due process of law, he has the right to go free; whereas if his behaviour is being modified, and the achievement of this end is the sole criterion for the length of time of his detention at Her Majesty's pleasure, he is liable to be detained indefinitely until he conforms or perishes.[26]

However, to admit the strength of this claim is by no means to concede that how society wishes the behaviour of offenders to be modified should have no influence on the *manner* of their punishment. I see no reason why, if length of sentence and consequent deprivation of liberty are assigned in accordance with principles of punitive justice (however that is to be assessed), the details of the *régime* to which offenders are subjected should not be determined entirely on principles of scientific behaviour modification. It should be allowed, I think, that a person should not be deprived of liberty except on principles of strict punitive justice; but what happens to him while he is thus deprived is another question. It is reasonably claimed that, as things are at present, the behaviour of prisoners is often in any case being modified in ways clean contrary to those thought appropriate by society. Given that behaviour modification is taking place in any case, one might reasonably plead, could not prison *régimes* be arranged so far as possible to encourage prisoners to cultivate beneficent effective freedom,[27] and so become more acceptable members of society?[28] There need be no deceit involved the prisoners could perfectly well be informed of what was being done. Neither is it at all obvious that there would need to be any more constraint imposed upon them than is in the nature of the case involved in imprisonment.

How do the principles which I have sketched apply to the alleged Soviet practice of forcing political dissidents to receive treatment as mental patients? If effective freedom has the central importance for ethics which I have claimed, one will have to have very good reason indeed to curtail it in particular cases – typically, that one is very likely to foster it elsewhere by doing so. It does not seem to informed persons in the West that the detention of political dissidents in psychiatric institutions can be justified on such a basis. Nor does it seem to them that Marxism, in the form practised, if not professed, by the ruling class in the Soviet Union, is so evidently the most reasonable and responsible of all views of life that opposed views ought not to be discussed in public.



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I shall now try to sun up my argument:

i We have no good reason to believe what scientists and doctors tell us, and consequently the effectiveness of the techniques of behaviour modification and the truth of the theories underlying them, unless some people speak and otherwise behave for good reason, and not merely or exclusively due to causal influence of other kinds;

ii If scientists and therapists can sometimes act for good reason, and are to be commended for doing so, there seems no reason why the same should not apply to other human beings;

iii The enhancement of the capacity to act for good reason, which I have called 'effective freedom', can provide a norm for the application of contemporary techniques of behaviour modification;

iv No particular account of the relation of the kind of explanation of human behaviour as due to good reasons on the part of the agent on the one hand (c-explanation), and the kind of explanation of it as due to causal factors of other kinds on the other (t-explanation), is immediately presupposed or implied by the preceding claims;

v Skinner's attack on belief in 'autonomy' in human subjects, if 'autonomy' is taken in the sense of 'effective freedom', is thus mistaken. It does not directly follow that it is wrong as opposed to a more exigent conception of 'autonomy', or against any particular account of the relation of the two forms of explanation just referred to.

In conclusion, it does seem fortunate that a critical basis for an ethics of behaviour modification can quite easily be found, since there is certainly an urgent need for such a thing.

1 The change of fashion in this matter can be said to have begun with the article by Philippa Foot, 'Moral Beliefs' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1958-9.

2 This criterion was suggested by a team of psychologists and psychiatrists which studied the problem.

3 For this useful label of a common trick of argument, see C. L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language*, New Haven, 1943.

4 I cannot now find the source for this view attributed to Skinner.

5 C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, London 1955, p 243.

6 See the rather artless comments by T. S. Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, 1962, p 169.

7 For this account of knowledge, see B. J. F. Lonergan, *Insight, A Study of Human Understanding*, London 1957. It will be obvious, however, that my argument here does not depend upon the details of Lonergan's account.

8 For some rather alarming instances, see R. D. Laing and A. Esterson, *The Families of Schizophrenics*, London 1964.



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9 For a working-out of the suggestion that the patient should be regarded as analogous to a scientist, see D. Bannister and F. Fransella, *Inquiring Man. The theory of Personal Constructs*, Harmondsworth, 1977.

10 For these dispositions, and the 'transcendental precepts' to put them into operation, see Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, London 1972, Chapter I.

11 *Ibid.* pp 16-17.

12 The term is due to Lonergan *Insight*, pp 619-24. It seems worth using a special term, since 'autonomy' or merely 'freedom' have too many associations which may mislead.

13 Of those who have spelled out in detail what this amounts to, Sir Karl Popper is perhaps the best known. See Bryan Magee, *Popper*, Harmondsworth 1973.

14 George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 59, 101, 105.

15 Skinner identified the good with the positively reinforcing, B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, London 1972, p 107. P. Harzem and T. R. Miles complain that this claim is highly questionable, and that Skinner does not support it. *Conceptual Issues in Operant Psychology*, Chichester 1978, p 59. My own view is that Skinner is quite correct so far as what is positively reinforcing for a person or animal constitutes important data on what is good for him or it; *ceteris paribus*, what you like is good for you, and someone who denied this would be so far ignorant of the meaning of 'good'. It is interesting that Skinner's view on this matter seems not unlike that of Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, xciv, 2.

16 Since patients are positively reinforced in being preoccupied with their fantasies.

17 See Skinner, *op. cit.*, *passim.*

18 New York 1953.

19 Descartes, the Occasionalists, Hume, and Kant were all preoccupied with it; and it cannot be said that contemporary philosophers have abandoned the topic. Cf. *The Philosophy of Action*, ed. A. R. White, Oxford 1968.

20 Harzem and Miles say that this kind of attack is due to failure to look at such conceptions in the language-game which is their proper home *op. cit.* p 104; to call a person 'free' is to deny that he is subject to external coercion, and plainly people are sometimes thus 'free', p 108. But, on behalf of Skinner, one might urge that certain beliefs and assumptions are often involved in the playing of such language-games; thus, when it is claimed that people are absolutely speaking free rather than unfree, it is often being implied that, even when all the circumstances are taken into account, they are yet sometimes capable of acting in another way than that in which in fact they do. In that case, there is more justification for his regarding the non-existence of human freedom as a 'hypothesis' *Science and Human Behaviour*, p 447, than Harzem and Miles seem prepared to grant, *op. cit.* 107.

21 'Stating the matter in the most selfish light, I have been trying to get the reader to behave verbally as I behave. What teacher, writer, or friend does not'? Skinner, *Verbal Behaviour*, New York 1957, p 455, cited by Harzem and Miles, *op. cit.* p 106.

22 Harzem and Miles, *op. cit.* p 51. For purposes of evaluation, one may infer, the description of behaviour would have to contain rather more 'extra-episodic words' *ibid.* pp 61-3 than it would for purposes of reinforcement or extinction.

23 If behaviour is to be valued primarily as expressive of the agent's effective freedom, and in potential causal relation to the effective freedom of others, its description will have to be characterised by a fairly high proportion of extra-episodic words.

24 On moral ambiguity, see H. Meynell, *Freud, Marx and Morals*, London 1981, chapter 6.



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25 See C. S. Lewis, *op. cit.* p 46. '. . . desert was finite: you could do so much to the criminal and no more. Remedial treatment, on the other hand, need have no limit; it could go on till it had effected a cure, and those who were carrying it out would decide when *that* was.'

26 i.e. effective freedom which is such as to foster, rather than impugn, the effective freedom of others.

27 How far the actual situation falls short of the ideal may be gathered from the Colour Supplement of *The Observer*, 14.9.1980,

# Reflections on Torture –

*Text of a sermon delivered at Westminster Abbey at the Human Rights Day Service on 10th December 1980*


## Sheila Cassidy


We have come together today as members of a Christian community because of our concern for the many thousands of men and women who are suffering persecution and torture throughout the world. Just as any divided family will forget its differences in times of crisis, so we are today united before God by that very problem.

Part of the excitement and also the difficulty of being a Christian is that it is a continuing process of exploring what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Just when we think we have got it sorted out, something happens to upset our complacency so that we are left, a little bruised, saying "where did I go wrong"? The only thing to do when that happens is to go back to the Gospels and look again to see how Jesus did it. As Paul tells us "Christ is the image of the unseen God". It is only by looking to Christ that we shall learn how to walk towards our Father.

I would like, then, to explore with you for a few minutes the stance of Jesus Christ in the face of torture – what he taught his disciples and how he faced his own torture and death. By focussing on the man Jesus we should then be able to widen our gaze, to look beyond his death on Calvary, to the continuing crucifixion in our own time.

The trouble about the gospels for many of us is that they become so familiar that they lose their impact; we cease to be rattled, unnerved, by what Jesus is saying. Take for example, Christ's assurance to his followers that they would be persecuted. "You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake" (Mk. 10:18), "Brother will betray brother to death and the father his child ... You will be hated by all men on account of my name". Perhaps we should ask ourselves not "Why are some people being



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