

BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY

BRUCE A. THYER

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This chapter provides a review of the application of elementary principles of operant behavior (more accurately, rule-governed behavior), toward the conceptualization, design, and evaluation of social welfare policy. All social policy is intended to influence human behavior, and it does this most often through the contrived manipulation of contingencies of punishment and, sometimes, reinforcement. Policy examples that use contingency management are provided in this chapter to support this thesis.

The interdisciplinary field of behavior analysis takes as its purview the empirical investigation of how environmental events affect the actions of organisms. No activity in the realm of human comportment is excluded from this definition. Within our field, behavior has been defined for the past 50 years as the actions of a person—whether externally observable or private. (Private actions occur within the skin and are not obviously detectable to a second party.) The silent movements of one's lips, the spoken word, and the thoughts that occur prior to speech are all grist for the

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analytic mill of the behaviorist. Contrary to the common view, behavior analysts have long been concerned with the scientific investigation of thinking, feeling, insight, motivation, and attitudes in addition to overt actions. In fact, the entire domain of what may be called psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, political science, and all those academic fields relevant to understanding the human condition are of interest to the behavior analyst.

Simply speaking, the dependent variables of the behavior analyst are all of what human beings do and experience. The independent variables consist of environmental events and how they affect us. Through the use of such a broad brush, it is easy to see how the field of social welfare policy could be contended to be a part of the purview of behavior analysis. Take, for instance, several convenient definitions of social policy:

Established social policy is a settled course of action [italics added] with respect to selected social phenomena that govern social relationships and the distribution of resources in a society. (Baumheier & Schorr, 1977, p. 1453)

Policy is (1) an idea that is embodied in (2) a written document, which is (3) ratified by legitimate authority and serves as (4) a guide to action [italics added] and is (5) the result of the policy process. (Tropman, 1984, p. 5)

[G]overnment and private social agencies respond . . . to social welfare problems and that those responses result in . . . regulation of behavior of persons and groups. (Heffernan, 1992, p. 17)

There is no doubt that a wider variety of definitions of social welfare policy could be cited. It is also equally certain that virtually all such conceptions contain the common element that policy is intended to influence behavior. Because social welfare policies form a part of the environment in which we live, the segue into the domain of behavior analysis seems quite natural. Indeed, it is reflected in the writings of many behaviorists. B. F. Skinner authored books, articles, and chapters devoted to topics such as *Reflections on Behaviorism and Society* (1978), *The Design of Experimental Communities: The Design of Cultures, Freedom and the Control of Men* (in Skinner, 1972) and *Utopia as an Experimental Culture* (in Skinner, 1969). Dinsmoor (1992) prepared an excellent overview of the progressive nature of Skinner's social views, and other behavior analysts have prepared conceptual works relating their field to social policy, including public welfare and other areas (e.g., Fawcett et al., 1988; Kunkel, 1983; Lamm, 1984; Task Force on Public Policy, 1988). With the evolution of the journal *Behavior Analysis and Social Action into Behavior and Social Issues* (now published by the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies), the association of these two fields seems assured for the foreseeable future.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY?

The common view seems to be that a major function of social welfare policy is to influence attitudes or knowledge, or both, of the citizenry. It is believed that changes in behavior will follow the exposure to appropriate information or the experience of an attitudinal change. This logic follows the current zeitgeist that a person's thoughts, knowledge, and attitudes cause behavior. Behavior analysts dispute this notion on both empirical and philosophical grounds. From our perspective, attitudes, beliefs, and philosophical grounds, and private events are themselves a function of environmental experiences undergone by an individual, and all are worthy of scientific inquiry. Simply put, a person behaves *and* thinks in a particular manner because of his or her prior learning experiences. The thoughts (feelings, attitudes, etc.) are correlates of one's prior learning, but are not held to be the source of new behavior itself. In fact, the view that the function of welfare policy is to alter attitudes could be destructive to the design of more effective policies that ignore these mental waypoints and focus primarily on altering the environmental contingencies in which people spend their lives.

For the behavior analyst, the purpose of social welfare policy is not primarily to influence attitudes, change minds, or inculcate a certain point of view per se, but rather to predict and control the behavior of the citizenry. For example, the purpose of social welfare legislation related to birth control is not only to promote favorable attitudes toward the use of condoms or oral contraceptives but also to get men and women to engage in responsible birth control practices. The purpose of legislation intended to reduce the incidence of domestic violence is not necessarily to induce more respectful attitudes of men toward women but primarily to prevent men from beating women. Rather than establish commissions to promote self-esteem (as the state of California recently did), government should promote policies and practices that establish appropriately reinforcing environments that give rise to both self-esteem and effective behavior. For the behavior analyst, the focus is not on the feeling. Rather, the focus is on what is felt by the individual that gives rise to the feeling (and to comportment). What is felt are the effects of environments. We know a great deal about altering environments—changing the circumstances in which people live. The prospect for an effective welfare policy is considerably enhanced when the focus is on establishing appropriately reinforcing environments in which people work, live and love, rather than on amorphous efforts to alter feeling states directly, about which we know very little.

The perspective that the actions of men and women are of overriding importance was laid out nicely by political scientist John Wahlke in his

1979 presidential address to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association. In this speech, Wahlke advocated that researchers devote more attention to the analysis of the behavior of *individuals*, as opposed to the aggregated actions of large numbers of people. He noted that refined concepts such as roles, groups, cultures, institutions, and other purported entities are *theoretical constructs* and that their very existence is only derived from the aggregated data obtained from individual persons. He also criticized political scientists' overreliance on citizens' self-reports of past actions or of future intended behavior as dependent variables, claiming that "inadvertently, political behavior research has become steadily more preoccupied with explaining the variance in attitudinal dependent variables and has progressively lost sight of the more genuinely behavioral variations which constitute the material essence of politics and government." (Wahlke, 1979, p. 24). Even more forcefully, Wahlke suggested that political scientists "should abandon the notion that verbal self-reports about attitudes are isomorphic surrogates for supportive or nonsupportive attitudes, and should stop using verbal self-reports as dependent variables. To understand obedience or rebellion against political authority requires taking a more realistic look at such *behavior*" (p. 29). Wahlke's reference list contains numerous citations to articles that exemplify the type of behaviorally oriented research in political science that he advocates (see also the earlier article by Karel, 1967).

Similar perspectives about the value of a truly behaviorally oriented approach to understanding large-scale social behavior can be found in the disciplines of sociology (Burgess & Bushnell, 1969), anthropology (Malot, 1988), public administration (Presthus, 1965), and economics (Hirsch, 1984; Kagel & Winkler, 1972). The following paraphrase of a statement usually attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., illustrates this pragmatic approach: "I don't care if the government cannot eliminate racist attitudes among White men, as long as it can pass laws to prevent them from beating us up." I believe that a clear case can be made in support of the behavior analysts' position that the function of social welfare policy is to alter the behavior of citizens. In a nutshell, the dependent variables of research into social problems and of the effects of social welfare policy involve what people actually *do*.

HOW DOES SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY REALLY WORK?

From the viewpoint of a behavior analyst, the purpose of social policy is the establishment of contingencies of reinforcement or punishment, or both, toward the furtherance of some social end, presumably related to the survival of the culture. These ends are decided upon by the community's lawmakers, not by experts in behavior analysis. This is not without its

problems. As Skinner (1979, p. 51) pointed out, "Today the average congressman and senator is controlled mainly by political contingencies . . . If the contingencies which govern political behavior are more powerful than the contingencies that govern statesman-like behavior, then it is difficult to see how congressmen and senators can effectively deliberate on matters of state." Skinner went on to say:

In each case, a group of people is given the power to control the behavior of others. But the behavior of the controlling group itself is controlled by other contingencies. And because none of these contingencies are carefully and explicitly designed to induce people to behave for the good of the whole group, it is difficult to prevent the reinforcement of selfish partisan behaviors . . . Those who get into power are no better than those they have thrown out. The reason is that both behave under the same contingencies of reinforcement. (Skinner, 1979, p. 48)

INEFFECTIVE CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT

Sometimes social welfare policies seemingly ignore the science of behavior analysis and contingencies of reinforcement. The following quote from *The New York Times* provides an example:

The court official who supervises child support in Grand Rapids, Mich., described a 26-year-old local man who had fathered eight children with five mothers. "Before you condemn him for moral laxity," said the official, William D. Camden, "look what he did for these women . . . He gave each one of them a safety net." Mr. Camden said, referring to the welfare the women and children can receive, "They will have a steady income and full medical coverage until their kids are 18 . . . The system seems designed to encourage this kind of dependency." (Eckholm, 1992, p. 1)

Martha Orawa's (1988) multistate analysis of the effects of the contingencies associated with Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments found that illegitimacy was inadvertently encouraged by the policies in force. It was not that the numbers of out-of-wedlock births were increased by the prospect of welfare payments, but rather that single mothers were effectively deterred from getting married to the fathers of their children because of the threatened loss of benefits (Orawa, 1988).

Mulick and Meinhold have examined at an institutional level the deleterious effects of the contingencies of reimbursement established by Medicaid and other insurance programs and by various regulatory agencies that certify mental retardation service programs (Meinhold & Mulick, 1992; Mulick & Meinhold, 1990). Here are some examples, cited in Meinhold & Mulick (1992):

More money was provided for residents who were more dependent than for residents who were independent. Partial independence, which would be the case during teaching of a skill, resulted in decreased reimbursement rates. This created an administrative disincentive for documenting adaptive-skill acquisition and the strong possibility of a disincentive for teaching those skills at all. (p. 158)

Time pressures, competing staff responsibilities, and the difficulty of maintaining adaptive skills of residents with profound mental retardation and physical handicaps sometimes resulted in the loss of functional independence. Areas often affected including feeding, mobility, and toileting. In some cases, these outcomes resulted in levels of dependency that produced higher reimbursement rates. (p. 158)

[T]ime-consuming and important interventions could not be described in the written format required for reimbursement. The agency received no money for doing them. Consequently, staffing was sometimes unavailable for real-time behavior modification and incidental teaching programs" (p. 158)

Closer to home, in my community of Athens, Georgia, the executive director of our local public housing authority has noted that the rules legislate against socially responsible behavior. "In effect, the rules make the good things people do less rewarding than the bad things, which do not draw penalties and may even result in a benefit to the offender" (Whidden, 1991, p. 1). "There's a reward now for being homeless . . . some people now purposely put themselves in that situation to enhance opportunities to admission into public housing, so we reward the very behavior that we don't want, which is what is wrong with most social welfare policy in this country . . . For example, if there are two working members in a family, the rent is going to be higher (30% of household income, regardless of income level) than if one person works, so it is to the person's benefit to conceal the number of persons working so that only one income is reported" (Parker, cf. Whidden, 1991, pp. 1, 10).

Programs known as *workfare* are currently receiving favorable publicity. Under the rules described for such programs, welfare recipients would be required to participate in some form of employment-related training, or actual employment, to obtain or retain benefits. The exception would be single mothers with children under the age of three. Now, what do you think will be the likely consequences of saying to someone, in effect, "Unless you get pregnant and have another child soon, you will have to participate in workfare?" One need not be a skilled behavior analyst to predict that such a program will likely result in greater numbers of, and more frequent, pregnancies.

THE NONEMPIRICAL NATURE OF WELFARE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Among the many problems involved in the design and evaluation of social welfare policy is the nonempirical approach that is often taken. This avoidance of empiricism may begin in (a) the identification and selection of problems for which policy is designed; (b) a lack of attention to empirically supported policies and practices; and (c) too little attention being paid to the empirical evaluation of social welfare policies once they have been implemented.

Those involved in the design of policy know that the problems that receive the most attention and resources may not be those that are the most pressing or urgent, but rather those that have the strongest advocates. For example, smoking-related illnesses, cancer, heart disease, and homicides account for far more fatalities in the United States than AIDS. Yet AIDS receives far more attention proportionately from the mass media, professional journals, and funding sources than other public health problems. This is in spite of the fact that the other problems cause greater and continuing numbers of fatalities. This situation is attributable to the laudable zeal of those advocating for increased resources devoted to the prevention and treatment of HIV disease; however, it is not necessarily the rational allocation of funding based on societal benefits.

When a social welfare goal has been established—such as developing low-cost housing for the poor or reducing child abuse—all too often, little attention is given to interventive practices that have some degree of empirical support. Rather, interventions are selected for other reasons. For example, large sums of state and federal monies are spent each year for the treatment of parents who abuse their children. Among the more empirically supported interventions for working with abusive parents are those derived from a behavior analytic model (e.g., Gambrill, 1989; Greene, Norman, Searle, Daniels, & Lubeck, 1995; Isaacs, 1982). However, the vast majority of funds dedicated to ameliorating child abuse continue to be expended upon nonbehavioral programs that the research evidence shows are largely ineffective (cf. Howing, Wodarski, Gaudin, & Kurtz, 1989). Similarly, despite the well-documented effectiveness of a behavioral intervention to help the chronically unemployed obtain well-paying and lasting jobs (e.g., Azrin, Flores, & Kaplan, 1975; Jones & Azrin, 1973), this "Job-Finding Club" approach remains poorly used.

Apart from the negative outcomes associated with a number of massive social welfare programs, the public is rightly concerned about the infrequency with which such programs are systematically evaluated as a whole. For example, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, the U.S. Food Stamp program and the Women, Infants, and Children's Program (WIC) are all intended to improve the health and

well-being of the poor by providing access to an adequate diet. Immense sums are spent on these programs—more than \$25 billion annually for AFDC alone (cf. Eckholm, 1992). The goal is a laudable one with which few members of the general public and even fewer social workers or psychologists would argue. However, the public is frequently made aware of fraud and abuse in the system, both by the recipients of such nutritional services and occasionally by welfare workers. The occurrence of such fraud and abuse, if maintained at sufficiently low levels, may be tolerated by the Republic if it is clear that the services provided to the majority of honest recipients are truly meeting their needs. Unfortunately, this is not the case. I am not aware of any study, for example, which has demonstrated that the recipients of food stamps enjoy an improved nutritional status relative to similarly qualified poor citizens who do not receive such services. Yet such an improved nutritional status and its consequent effects on intelligence, health, and general resistance to disease is the explicit goal of these welfare programs. Behavior analysts, along with many other empirically oriented human service professionals, would contend that such outcome studies are long overdue and, in fact, should be an integral component of all welfare programs.

A few examples of social welfare program evaluations do exist that could be construed as roughly behavior analytic in methodology. That is, these evaluations employed time-series analysis (TSA) to investigate changes over time in some dependent variable, as opposed to using between-groups designs (e.g., Marsh, 1981). DiNitto (1983) provides an excellent description of the integration of the fields of TSA and the evaluation of social welfare policy that is worth consulting.

By positing the need for certain social welfare policies and programs to be derived from empirically based data and advocating that the services provided be selected from those interventions that have an adequate research base, the behavior analyst is responding not only to the moral imperative of providing necessary welfare services to those in need but also to the charge that public monies be expended in a responsible manner as effectively and efficiently as possible. That is also why behavior analysts suggest that rigorous and ongoing program evaluation be an inherent component of such programs. To suggest that existing and proposed services need to be critically scrutinized by the empiricist is not to condemn the goals of such programs. Rather, such scrutiny is the means of avoiding the all too frequent failure of such programs and achieving the goals that are so nobly conceived. Clearly, whether construed in the language of behavior analysis or not, the essence of social welfare policy consists of establishing contingencies of reinforcement and punishment to promote or deter various actions of the citizenry. That being the case, it would seem that knowledge of behavior analysis in general, and of the principles of contingency

management in particular, should inform the design, implementation and evaluation of social welfare policy. A brief sketch of these principles is presented next.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONTINGENCY MANAGEMENT

The field of behavior analysis addresses the role by which various learning processes affect our actions. The three major learning mechanisms studied include those of respondent conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning or imitation. Debate continues about the distinctions among respondent, operant and observational learning, and these processes may eventually be subsumed under a grand unified theory of behavior change, but they will likely be considered differing processes for the foreseeable future. Other mechanisms have their behavioral effects (genetics, physiology, drugs, deprivation states, etc.) but these are usually the subject matter of other disciplines.

For the purposes of this chapter, the most salient learning processes relevant to the design of social welfare policy would seem to be those of operant learning, a category which itself can be subdivided into two distinct mechanisms of behavior change—contingency-shaping and rule governance. Contingency-shaped behavior occurs when a person directly, relatively immediately, and personally experiences the consequences of his or her actions. Rule-governed behavior involves the provision of *descriptions* of contingencies that are in effect, rather than direct contact with such contingencies. Laws, social policies, regulations, instructions, and so forth are examples of such rules. As Skinner pointed out:

1. Rules can be learned much more quickly than the behavior shaped by the contingencies that the rules describe.
2. Rules make it easier to profit from similarities between contingencies.
3. Rules are particularly valuable when contingencies are complex or unclear. (1974, p. 125)

The following of rules (or policies) is itself shaped by prior contingencies associated with adherence or disobedience to rules. Most adults have a repertoire of generalized rule-following, akin to our abilities in generalized imitation. Much of the literature on rule-governed behavior has focused on the establishment of self-rules and of rule-following on an individual scale (e.g., Hayes, 1989; Riegler & Baer, 1989). I believe that extending these principles to social policy holds promise for developing a more complete understanding of policy and law as instances of rule-governance, not direct contingency-shaping.

Positive Reinforcement

If a stimulus is presented after a particular behavior and that behavior is observed to be strengthened or to increase in the future, the operation is called positive reinforcement. Loosely speaking, positive reinforcement could be called the use of rewards. Many (but too few) social welfare policies rely on positively reinforcing contingencies in the furtherance of some social end. When I was a child growing up in Canada in the 1950s, for example, my parents received a so-called "baby-bonus" each month—a check for \$15 to \$20—from the Canadian government. The more children Canadian citizens had, the more money they received each month! At the time, the Canadian government was interested in promoting population growth, hence this policy. Because of the time lag between the act of conception and receipt of the money, it is technically incorrect to call this type of policy an instance of positive reinforcement. It does, however, represent the contrived manipulation of contingencies, removed from behavior, to promote socially desired behavior. To the extent that citizens engaged in more frequent or stronger acts of unprotected consensual relations, the baby bonus can be legitimately construed as making use of the principles of rule-governed behavior and contingencies of reinforcement.

A more contemporary example is the proposal considered by the state legislature of Kansas to offer a payment of \$500 to any mother on welfare who uses the Norplant contraceptive, a subcutaneous birth control drug that prevents pregnancy for up to 5 years. The proposal called for the state to pay for the insertion of the drug and for annual health checkups. The women would also have received an additional \$50 for every year the medication remained in place (see Lewin, 1991). Recently, the state of Rhode Island began a program of providing full scholarships at state colleges for low-income students who remain in school, pass all their courses, remain drug free and do not become pregnant or get in trouble with the law. Called the Rhode Island Children's Crusade, this program begins in the third grade. Tutors and mentors are provided and the state monitors report cards in later school years ("Full Scholarships," 1989). Charles Cantania, director of the Chicago Bureau of Community Health, enrolls parents in lotteries wherein they can win automobiles or bicycles in return for bringing their children in for immunizations ("Gimmicks Used," 1988).

Private health care providers are also joining the positive reinforcement bandwagon. One program, called the Prudential Health Care Plan, provides health care to more than 45,000 Medicaid recipients living in Baltimore. Low-income pregnant women are given an incentive to attend prenatal education and care classes—they receive \$10 every time they show up for a scheduled appointment. The program, which costs about

\$6,000 a month, has resulted in missed appointments dropping from about 60% to less than 20% (Kolara, 1994). One consequence attributed to the Prudential program is a considerable reduction in average lengths of stays in newborn intensive care units. The widespread use of state-sponsored lotteries is another example of using positive reinforcers and contingency-management techniques with great efficacy to raise funds for social programs.

Negative Reinforcement

If a stimulus is removed following the occurrence of some behavior, and the future probability of that behavior is strengthened, the operation is labeled negative reinforcement, or in lay language, as "relief." An example of a social welfare policy that uses principles of negative reinforcement would be one that exempts a portion of a wage earner's income from taxation in return for that wage earner engaging in certain desired behaviors. For example, legislation has been considered by the U. S. Congress that would allow a \$3,000 tax deduction for the expenses incurred by potential parents adopting a handicapped or older child. A related bill would reimburse federal employees an additional \$2,000 for adoption-related expenses, above and beyond the tax deduction (Devroy, 1989). As this chapter was going to press, the U.S. Congress passed legislation authorizing a tax credit of \$5,000 to couples who adopt a child. This tax credit can be seen as negatively reinforcing adoptions by providing some relief from aversive taxation. This assumes, of course that adoptions actually do increase as a result of this new social policy.

An article in *Time* magazine provided several other illustrations, such as: "For years corporations have helped meet blood shortages by rewarding employees who roll up their sleeves with extra time off" (Gorman, 1994, p. 51). Allowing time off from work (assuming work is mildly aversive) is consistent with the principle of strengthening behavior by the contingent removal of aversive states or stimuli. The use of enterprise zones—areas that attract companies to locate within inner cities by granting considerable tax concessions—or the sale of tax-free municipal bonds to raise revenue for public works are other examples of using negative reinforcement principles in the design of policy.

Positive Punishment

Punishment contingencies are employed far more often in the development of social welfare policy than are reinforcing ones, especially in the field of criminal justice. If a behavior is followed by a consequence that is presented, and the behavior declines in strength, this operation is called

positive punishment. If a person who is released from jail or completes some community service sentence is deterred from recommitting crimes, then criminal behavior may be said to have been positively punished. It is positive in the sense that something unpleasant—jail or imposed labor—is presented and punishment in that behavior is weakened. Punitive consequences are effective to the extent that they can be continuously enforced. But if the chances are that committing a crime has a high probability of a short-term gain (e.g., money) and a low probability of a long-term aversive outcome (e.g., prison), punishment contingencies are not likely to be extremely effective.

Negative Punishment

If a stimulus is removed following the occurrence of a behavior, and the future likelihood of that behavior decreases, the operation is called negative punishment. This concept is loosely equated with the use of the term *finer*. This operation seems to be a favored option for policymakers designing contingencies to promote some social goal. If a particular behavior is deemed undesirable, fines are imposed on those whom engage in that behavior. For example, in an effort to reduce the number of high school dropouts in Wisconsin, the state instituted the policy of cutting welfare payments to the parents of truants. This so-called "Learnfare" program directly links welfare benefits with high school attendance records (Moses, 1991). Similar policies involving what looks like negative punishment contingencies are associated with "no pass, no play" and "no pass, no drive" programs, where in the former case the failing student is not permitted to engage in extracurricular activities (e.g., football), and in the latter case high school dropouts must relinquish their driver's license.

Before its recent political dissolution, Yugoslavia attempted to lower the birthrate of its ethnic minority Albanians by eliminating state living allowances to families with more than two children ("Population," 1989). Yet, another example would be the mother on welfare who stands to lose her benefits if her boyfriend moves in with her. If, as a result of this policy, the woman does not allow her boyfriend to move in, principles of negative punishment have exerted their influence. Again, it is important to recognize that some people may not come into contact with the contingencies at all (the mother on welfare never allows a boyfriend to move in; thus, her benefits are never at risk). It is clear, then, that the operations at work here, are more those of rule-governed behavior than those of contingency-shaped behavior.

Extinction

In the use of extinction procedures, it is important to determine what consequences are maintaining a target behavior and then arrange for such

contingencies to be halted. If the consequences have been completely and correctly identified, the behavior will decline over time and, perhaps, cease entirely. For example, an individual playing a slot machine typically is reinforced to pull the lever after putting in coins, because the machine "returns" the coins on an irregular basis. If a given machine stopped providing any returns, the individual would eventually stop playing (at least at that machine). If it could be arranged that the gambler would never again win at slot machines—ever, anywhere—it is likely that he or she would give up on slot machines entirely.

The discontinuance of subsidies that results in a reduction in certain behaviors is an example of social welfare policy via extinction. If Canada stopped its baby bonus, and the birthrate declined, then extinction would have occurred. If the tax deduction currently permitted on mortgage interest was prohibited, and the purchase of homes declined, or if the federal government stopped subsidizing tobacco farmers, and the planting of tobacco declined, again extinction procedures could be said to have been in operation. The principle is simple: Determine what governmental reinforcers are maintaining a behavior that is targeted for reduction (recognizing that these policies exert their influence via rule-governance rather than direct contingency-shaping) and discontinue those reinforcers (typically subsidies or tax exemptions).

Summary

There are a number of lessons to be learned from the behavioral examination of social welfare programs. They include:

1. Social welfare policy (like all public policy) is a crude form of contingency management.
2. Effective contingency management makes optimal use of the principles of rule-governed behavior. There are similarities and differences between rule-governed behavior and behavior shaped by immediate consequences.
3. Whenever possible, effective welfare policies should use reinforcing contingencies rather than punishing ones. This is both a pragmatic and a value-based recommendation.
4. Too often, welfare policies inadvertently establish incentives for long-term dysfunctional or dependent behavior.
5. Welfare policies should be empirically evaluated in demonstration projects before being widely implemented. The design and implementation of welfare policies should be empirically based; they should not be approached solely from rational or political perspectives.

THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY: ENTITLEMENTS VERSUS CONTINGENCIES

The field of ethics may seem far removed from that of behavior analysis, yet discussions of social welfare policy often turn on what is deemed fair or ethical. In fact, behaviorism (itself a philosophy of science) has long been concerned with broader philosophical issues such as values and ethics (as well as epistemology, ontology, free will, verbal behavior, private events, etc.; see Thyer, in press). More than 20 years ago, B. F. Skinner published an essay titled "The Ethics of Helping People" (see chapter 3, this volume). The concepts of values and ethics have themselves received considerable attention in this regard (e.g., Graham, 1977; Vargas, 1975; Waller, 1982; Wortchaeter, 1980), so Skinner's treatment of the topic should not come as a surprise. Indeed, the entire field of behavior analysis is premised on the notion that it is a good thing to promote the good life for individuals in society (witness this book). Behaviorism, as a philosophical field, is constructed by living, breathing people—individuals with families and practical concerns—and the treatment of what constitutes ethical comportment can be seen as an essential element in the behavioral enterprise.

What Skinner chided society for is confusing the provision of goods to others on the basis of their needs or expressed wants, with the provision of actual assistance. In part, what we see is a clash between the entitlement perspective versus the contingency perspective. The *Social Work Dictionary* defines entitlements as "government-sponsored benefits of cash, goods, or services that are due to all people who belong to a specified class" (Barker, 1995, p. 121). By definition, the benefits of an entitlement program are allocated on a noncontingent basis. One need not engage in constructive behavior to receive such benefits. Skinner suggested that this is ill-advised. If no reinforcer for productive behavior is included in a policy or program, it is not surprising that such a policy would result in low rates of productivity. In this sense, productivity would refer to obtaining employment, earning money, or otherwise making reasonable efforts to provide for one's self and one's family to receive benefits.

Skinner cautioned that human service agencies providing noncontingent benefits (money, goods, and services) could also be producing unintended consequences: passivity and dependence. My office dictionary defines *help* as "to make things easier or better for [a person]." The noncontingent provision of entitlements may in fact not constitute true help unless things do become easier or better for the recipient. Much of this is obvious. Although few would advocate that money should be given to destitute persons who actively use drugs, most would agree that small children should be entitled in principle to noncontingent food and other conditions of a minimally acceptable life. Shouldn't free health care for the indigent (i.e., Medicaid) be given noncontingently? What should society

expect from the impoverished in return for free health insurance? These are knotty issues, and the delineation of what would constitute functional contingency arrangements between benefits and recipients' efforts should not be an armchair exercise, no matter how rational. In keeping with the overall theme of this book, what is likely to prove most useful are actual behavior analytic investigations. Pilot studies and demonstration projects (local or state) that are carefully evaluated in terms of short- and long-term effects are needed, and programs or policies should only be implemented on a larger scale (e.g., nationwide) after convincing evidence has accrued of their merits.

I highly recommend a recent book by Theodore Caplow (1994) titled *Perverse Incentives: The Neglect of Social Technology in the Public Sector* as one example of a contingency analysis of social and public policies. In that book, Caplow wrote:

Most of them [legislators] did not have accurate pictures of the behavior they were trying to change or the context in which that behavior occurred. Consequently, they had no clear idea of how a given change in the rules of the game might influence the actions of the players [W]hen they infused new federal or state money into an existing system, they seldom stopped to consider how it might effect [sic] the existing price structure, or the relative power of professionals and clients, or whether it might offer irresistible opportunities for cheating and stealing Above all, they never really tried to see the system from the standpoint of the people in the system—welfare mothers, high school teachers, drug dealers, physicians, lawyers. Flying blind as they did, they inadvertently created perverse incentives. The welfare mothers were given good reasons to bear more children, the drug dealers to recruit new customers, the physicians to double their fees, the lawyers to sue and sue It was, and is, the custom of this country to evaluate social programs by the goodness of their intentions not the goodness of their results. Because there is so little concern with results, it is not customary for legislators and reformers to set specific goals. (Caplow, 1994, pp. 2–3)

A somewhat earlier and more authoritative book contained many of the same conclusions: "They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul" (Psalms, 35:12), and "that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap" (Psalms, 69:22). In Skinner's analysis,

the question is not who should have how much of what but, rather, how they are to get what they have What they are suffering from is a world in which their behavior is not positively reinforced The "good life" is not a world in which people have what they need; it is one in which the things they need figure as reinforcers in effective contingencies. (pp. 65 & 69, this volume)

It is difficult to reconcile the behavior analytic approach and the entitlement perspective when it comes to providing for basic human needs. The former is predicated upon an individualized assessment of a person's behavioral repertoire (what they are capable of) and the delineation of reinforcers specific to that person, all arranged in a contingency management system that shapes successive approximations of productive behavior. This is directed to help take an individual from his or her present capabilities to some socially desirable goal (e.g., obtaining a quality job, developing effective parenting skills, ceasing to abuse drugs, to complete an educational program, etc.). In contrast, the entitlement approach does not provide much in the way of identifying individually effective reinforcers or specificity in one's current behavioral skills. It is difficult to envision a welfare system that would employ the skilled personnel necessary to develop individualized behavioral plans for the millions of citizens currently receiving entitlements. The fact that there are individuals with severe disabilities (intellectual, physical, behavioral) who may not be able to engage in "productive" behavior complicates the issue even further. As a civilized society, we have decided that noncontingent entitlements should be provided to such persons, and the imposition of behavioral requirements to earn benefits could be seen as cruel. A third issue is the simple availability of the necessities of life. For someone to obtain gainful employment, reinforcing jobs must be available. A single mother with young children may also need low-cost day care before she can even consider the possibility of looking for work, much less accept a position. When the social infrastructure necessary for success in finding and keeping a job, buying low-cost food, or obtaining health care is not in place, it is a cruel burden to make entitlements contingent on performing certain behaviors that have little chance of success.

Skinner was correct—the noncontingent provision of benefits to many persons may not help them in the long run. Integrating behavior analytic solutions may conflict with the philosophy of entitlement. Reconciling these two perspectives will require the best from psychologists and other human service professionals concerned with finding effective responses to serious social problems.

CONCLUSION

To the extent that social welfare policy consists of the design, implementation, and evaluation of contingencies of reinforcement and punishment to promote practices that ensure the survivability of the culture, behavior analysis has much to contribute. Conceptually, psychologists can assist in designing effective policies based on the empirical knowledge base of contingency management and rule-governed behavior. Methodo-

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logically, we can conduct rigorous evaluations of welfare policies. Henningfield and Higgins (1989) provided a fine example; they described the profound influence behavior analysis had in the Surgeon General's report on the health consequences of smoking. The conclusions reached were based on behavior analytic research and consistent with a behavioral conception of drug dependence and addiction. The majority of the discussion on the nonpharmacological treatments for smoking are behavioral, and the report recommended that use of nicotine gum is supplemented by behaviorally based smoking reduction programs. It would be marvelous to see similar behavioral influences in the realm of public welfare policy. There are a number of political philosophies (e.g., liberalism, conservatism, socialism) that influence the policy development process, but social welfare policy generally seems to lack a comprehensive theory of behavior change. Behavior analysis would seem to be a viable candidate to fill this conceptual lacuna.

I'll close with prescient quote from a book published in 1928 by Robert Kelso called *The Science of Public Welfare*:

The new sciences afford us a better understanding of causes and consequences [italics added] in human affairs. It remains only to continue our research and to apply sensibly the knowledge we already have. (p. 421)

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3

THE ETHICS OF HELPING PEOPLE

B. F. SKINNER

We sometimes act for the good of others. We feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and heal the sick. We say that we care for them, provide for their needs, do good to them, help them. Our behavior often has unforeseen consequences which need to be taken into account.

We presumably help people in part for reasons that concern the survival of the species. Maternal behavior is a kind of help which is either part of an organism's genetic equipment or which is quickly acquired because of a genetic susceptibility to reinforcement; it is obviously important for survival. The human species is, presumably, more likely to survive if people generally help each other or are naturally reinforced by signs that they have done so. Something of the sort may contribute to the behavioral disposition which is part of what we call love or compassion.

It is more obvious that we learn to help or do good and that we learn because of the consequences which follow. We sometimes help because we find the helplessness of others aversive. We help those who help us in return, and we stop doing so when they stop—when, as we say, they are ungrateful. We often fail to help those who are too weak to reciprocate, or to protest effectively when we fail to help. The very young, the aged,

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