



Nat. Sci. 114 and Billy Baum

I entered Harvard College in fall of 1957 and declared my concentration as biology, because I wanted to study animal behavior. In spring of 1958, I was flipping through the course catalog and noticed Nat. Sci. 114, the title of which was Human Behavior. The procedure for joining courses was to sit in on the first few classes and then decide whether or not to add the course. I went to hear the first few lectures by B. F. Skinner, the instructor. Skinner was not a dynamic speaker, but I found his lectures interesting and added the course. As I recall, the class was divided in half: one group read the textbook, *Science and Human Behavior*, and the other group primarily used the teaching machines. I was in the group using the machines. One would go to the teaching laboratory and check in with a graduate student staffing the lab, receive a large paper disk and sit at a machine. I recall answering questions by writing in a small box, moving a lever, and getting feedback as to whether my answer was correct or not. If incorrect, I pushed a lever, went on to the next question, and at the end the machine cycled back to any missed questions. The whole process seemed easy and, as far as mastering the basics, superior to reading a book. The course notebook in the archives includes my lecture notes and some ancillary materials that we were expected to read. I recall that I used to take cursory notes in class, and then expand on them when I returned to my room. The notebook contains the expanded notes that I used to prepare for exams. From Nat. Sci. 114, I learned that one could study animal behavior in the psychology department; I had not known that. In those days, psychology at Harvard was classified as a natural science department, dominated by the animal behavior laboratory and psychophysics laboratory; all the other parts of psychology were located in the department of social relations (in which I had little interest). The following semester, I took Psychology 141, which might have been called Psychology of Learning, with Richard Herrnstein as instructor. When I went to see him in his office, he persuaded me to switch my concentration to psychology. His argument was simple: biology required 8 whole courses, whereas psychology required only 6 whole courses; I would have room in my schedule for 4 more semester courses, allowing me to take electives, which could include biology courses, if I wished. I switched, Herrnstein became my advisor and later my mentor, graduated in 1961 with an A.B. in psychology, and later entered the department again as a doctoral student in fall, 1962. That was how I became a behavior analyst.

William M Baum

6 January 2020