

EDITORIAL: THE FUNCTION OF PHILOSOPHY TO BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS

I had two main goals when I started the Ph.D. program in Experimental Psychology (Behavior Analysis) at the Institute of Psychology of University of São Paulo more than ten years ago: the first, obviously, was to complete the requirements to receive the Doctoral degree. The second was to explore the treasures hidden at the Institute's library. Among those were all the volumes of *Behavior and Philosophy* published to the date. For a researcher on theoretical issues in behavior analysis, that was the holy grail. Naturally, I started to make copies (we did not have digital subscriptions back then) and read everything, no matter the subject, from volume 1 to the last available there. I hoped someday to myself publish a paper in *Behavior and Philosophy*. A few years passed and I did publish in *Behavior and Philosophy*. Mission accomplished.

I'm sure there are others who share a similar history. This biographical reminiscence is to show how *Behavior and Philosophy* is important to me. So, it was a real honor to be considered for taking in the Editorship of the journal. A task I'm not taking lightly.

This is the first volume of *B&P* published during my editorship. However, Volume 48 is more properly described as a transitional volume because it contains two sections, one organized by the previous editor, J. E. Burgos, and one organized by me.

Pressing theoretical issues in Behavior Analysis

One the first things I did as Editor was to ask the editorial board of *Behavior and Philosophy* what they think are the most important theoretical (epistemological, ontological, methodological, conceptual) issues in behavior analysis. A lot of things came out, of course. But the ones in *Figure 1* were the most frequent. As you can see, there is a lot to be done in the field of theoretical research. I hope these data encourage the readers.

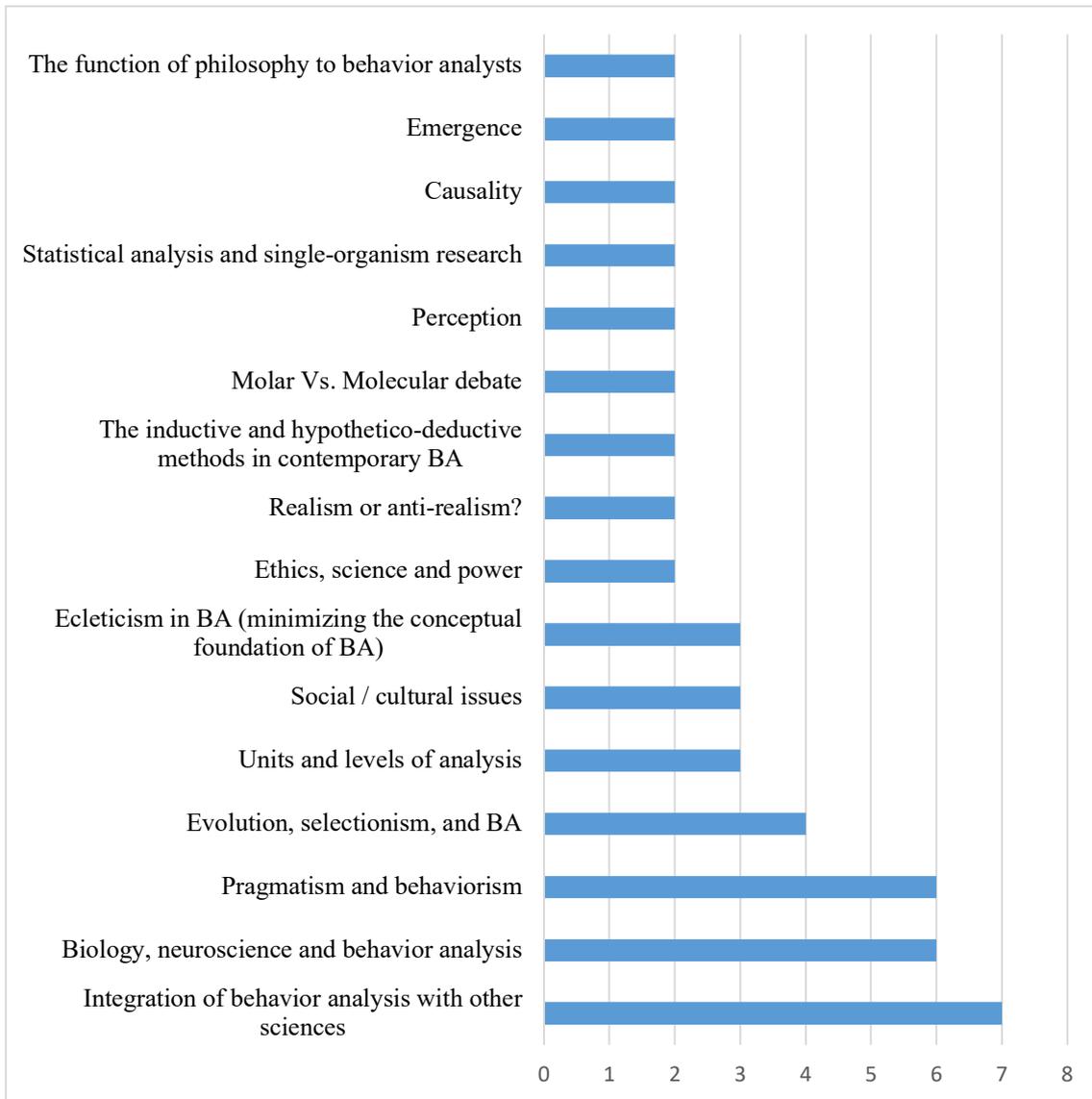


Figure 1. Pressing issues in Behavior Analysis

Selection at the ontogeny level and the problem of first instance

The first section of Volume 48 contains commentaries on Terry Smith’s paper, “Selection by consequences in the ontogeny of behavior: The problem of the first instance,” published in *Behavior and Philosophy*, Volume 47. Burgos invited several authors to comment on it, and Smith to reply the commentaries. The commentators who submitted papers are Billy Baum, W. David Stahlman and Charlie Catania, Elliott Sober, Jack McDowell and Steven Riley, and Francois Tonneau. The commentaries and Smith's replies are now published in Volume 48. It is interesting to note that the topic under discussion here (selection process at the ontogeny level and the problem of first instance) is among the topics in Figure 1 (“evolution, selectionism, and BA”).

What does philosophy do and is it still useful?

One pressing issue, which I think is the fundamental one from which all the others follow, is the role of philosophy to behavior analysis. This issue is partially relevant if we consider the current emphasis behavior analysis posits on the applied domain in comparison to the experimental and theoretical ones (Marr, 2017). One might ask if the products of philosophers' behavior ("philosophizing"), that is, their texts, talks, lectures, and so on, influence the behavior of behavior analysts in their day-to-day jobs. Do they? Should they? Or is it philosophy an independent discipline, the importance of which has nothing to do to with behavior analysts' experimental and applied repertoires?

The importance of theoretical work can be seen, for instance, in B. F. Skinner's own publications. *Figure 2*, from Andery, Micheletto, and Serio (2004), shows a cumulative record of all Skinner's publications from 1930 to 2004 divided according to three kinds: "theoretical," "empirical," and "others." Clearly, Skinner published more theoretical works than empirical during his entire career, attesting to the importance of this endeavor for someone who was an example of self-management (Epstein, 1997). Another way of looking at this issue is to visit Skinner's Google Scholar citation index¹. One could argue that citation number can be seen, at least, as an indirect measure of the influence of one's work. Skinner's most cited books and papers are the theoretical ones in which he laid down the philosophical foundations of behavior analysis as well as his efforts to analyze behavioral process (usually via interpretation) beyond the domain of laboratory.

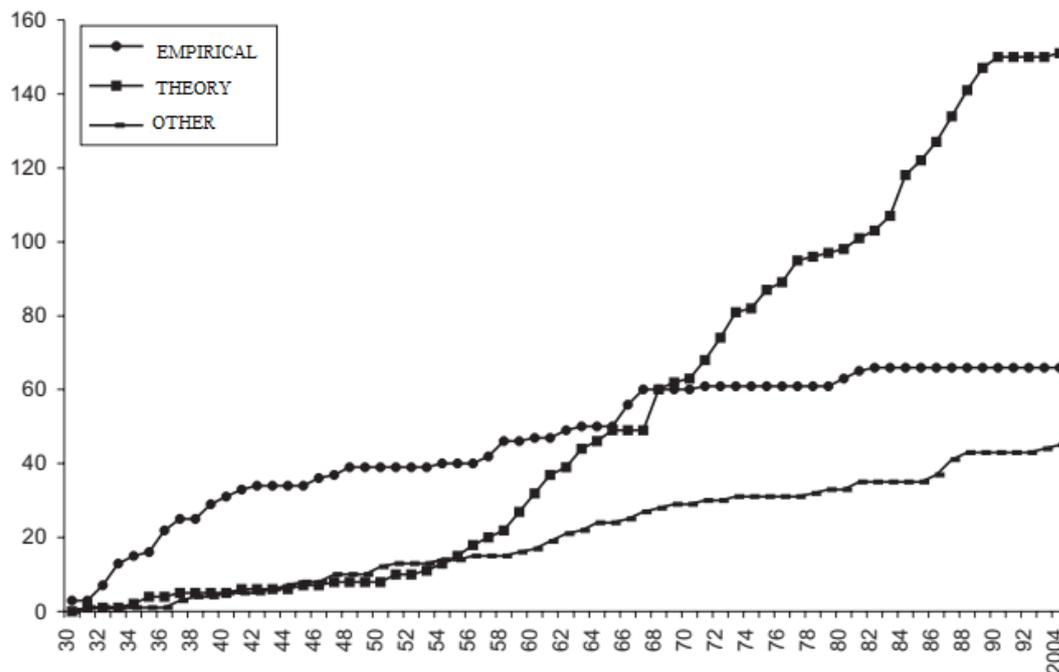


Figure 2. Cumulative number of articles published by B. F. Skinner (1930 to 2004) divided according to their nature (Andery, Micheletto and Serio, 2004, p. 96). (Reproduced with permission from the Brazilian Journal of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy, RBTCC).

¹ <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=81NhlCkAAAAJ&hl=en>

The second section of Volume 48 tackles this very issue. I've invited prominent researchers known for their theoretical work in behavior analysis to discuss the role of philosophy to our field. We have Jose E. Burgos with "A Goldilocks Approach to the Philosophy-Science Relation," M. Jackson Marr with "The Shadow of Metaphysics," Bernard Guerin with "'From what is philosophy' to 'The Behavior of Philosophers,'" and Carolina Laurenti, Carlos Lopes, and José A. D. Abib with "On the Usefulness of the Useless: Philosophy as the Consciousness of Scientific Knowledge." I'm grateful to the authors for accepting the invitations to write those articles and hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the past-editor of *Behavior and Philosophy*, Jose E. Burgos, for helping me during the transition of editorship as well as to Rebekah Pavlik, for her support in all things related to *B&P* and Sorah Stein for her careful copyediting work.

Diego Zilio

Editor

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