The nature of aggression

Aggressive behaviour is essentially directed towards an object, and a degree of destructiveness of that object is involved.

By "degree" is meant that destructiveness may result from the implementation of an act, or may be the outcome of a system of action not yet completed. Thus, a person may be considered "aggressive" even though he never brings his actions to completion. Actual destruction may not result, but the threat of it is there. Lawyers will recognize that the difficult notion of intent is involved, and it appears that it is not possible to define aggression satisfactorily without reference to intention (Bandura and Walters, 1963, p. 113), though some attempts have been made (Busc, 1961, p. 1).

By "directed" is meant not that the behaviour is always directed to a specific object, but simply that objects either inanimate, or human, are directly affected by aggressive behaviour whether it is intended or not. "Acting cut" or "letting off steam" is therefore still directed in this sense (onto others).

The term destructiveness is used even though it is popularly agreed that aggressive behaviour makes a positive contribution to society (usually more in the form of "assertiveness") so that without aggressiveness civilization could not have developed to its present point of sophistication. However, a considerable degree of destructiveness of the environment (the object) has resulted from this aggressiveness.

Aggression is essentially social behaviour and as such should never be analysed without reference to "the other". This does not mean, however, that
the decision as to whether behaviour is aggressive is completely relative to the
other, for we are able to identify certain classes of behaviour which are aggres-
sive and always have been, e.g. a husband beating his wife, killing another by
strangling or killing in battle and so on.

We may distinguish two very broad levels of aggression: interpersonal
aggression and group aggression. At the interpersonal level the object of
aggression may often be the aggressor's lover, family member or close friend
(e.g. see Wolfgang, 1958), where the roles of enemies and friends are often
blurred. On a macrocosmic scale, group aggression is always carried out against
a clearly defined enemy. In the former, the social relationship among the parti-
cipants in aggression is extremely complex. But in the latter, the perceptions
of the enemy become more stereotyped and rigid.

Although traditionally the use of physical force, especially with personal
physical involvement, has been involved in aggressive behaviour, with man this
is becoming less so, since it is now possible to kill many people hundreds of
miles away by pressing a button in the quiet confines of a laboratory-like set-
ting. Today aggression on a large scale has become considerably more "rational-
ized", in the sense that it is possible to plan and effectuate the killing of
many other people in a calculated way, without the emotional involvement of close
contact. This is in contrast to the aggression of Homeric days, when participa-
tion in the heat of the battle was the great attraction.

The apparent tendency in man to kill many of his own species in a calculated
fashion, and on a larger and larger scale, is what ethologists see as distinguish-
ing man from the animal species. Intra-species aggression to the point of de-
struction of the other occurs rarely among animals, although ritual fighting is
very common. Killing occurs mainly across species, and then it is strictly
limited for food (Lorenz, 1970) or when "survival" needs.

The learning of aggression

It is now well established by social learning theorists that children learn
about aggression by watching adult models performing aggressive acts (Mulvihill
and Tumin, 1969, p. 439). Whilst it has been generally found that a punished
aggressive model will bring about inhibition of aggressive behaviour in children
who watch the model, yet it also seems that they learn the aggressive behaviour
itself and may reproduce it at a later time.

Social institutions (e.g. the church, the party) and other powerful bodies
may lay the groundwork for group aggression by imparting, with varying degrees
of intent and awareness, specially stereotypical and "enemy" definitions of other
groups and individuals. The process of learning these stereotypes is so far
little understood, and incompletely studied.

Thus, it may not be aggressive acts themselves which it is important to
avoid learning or unlearning, but rather the channeling or object-defining. Such
a view also takes into account the possibility of the inherent aggressiveness in
man, which great thinkers have sometimes considered. Freud especially at times
felt that man's deep instinct of aggression must lead to total destruction. How-
ever, he saw civilization as curbing this instinct, whereas it is a notion of
protest groups today that modern society socializes people into becoming aggres-
sive. However, if we accept the view stated above, i.e. that it is not the
aggressive behaviour itself which is imparted, but rather the definitions of who
is an acceptable object of aggression, then the two approaches are not necessarily
contradictory.
Furthermore, such a process of definition must be inherent in any society which has a system of law, a system of religion, or a system of morality according to which members of that society must be controlled, and enemies of these systems identified and dealt with. It is impossible to conceive of a society in which everyone is "good" or "conforms", or even "likes" everyone else. Lorenz (1970) wistfully hopes that the more friendly people become the less they will agree with each other. But large, complex urban societies of today do not allow for such closeness. It follows that even if aggression is not inherent in man himself, it is inherent in the society he must develop.

The unlearning of aggression

When we come to the unlearning of aggression, a stronger contrast between these points of view arises. Skinner says, "...behaviour can be changed by changing the conditions of which it is a function" (1971, p. 150). The conditions of which it is a function are our civilization and our genetic history. One view provides for an aggressive "force" or "state" or "instinct" of man and in each individual, which needs either control or redirection. Skinner, the extreme behaviourist, treats this as irrelevant.

In the early work of learning theorists, instinct became a dirty word, understandably because it meant that behaviour patterns were not learned, but inherited. However, learning theorists showed that much of what was thought to be instinctual was in fact learned. They could not, however, totally discard the idea of a "force" urging man to act. For instinct they substituted such notions as "drive state", "drive stimulus", "generalized drive", which they tried to demonstrate were learned, although resting heavily upon the basic biological nature of the body (see, for example, Cofer and Appley, 1966, pp. 137-204). Regardless of whether aggression is seen as a drive or an instinct it is nevertheless seen here as an internal state "pushing out", creating a potential for action ("reaction potential" was Hull's phrase). It follows, then, that the notions for controlling it are either (1) engineering and channelling its release, i.e., catharsis, or (2) inhibition, or the learning of inner control.

The first solution was also a very popular outcome of psychoanalysis, leading to notions such as sublimation and traditional psychologists have always worried about the notion of inhibition because the drive or instinct may "dem up" and erupt later. It is this belief which has been used to criticize behaviour therapy which treats only external forms of behaviour, considering internal states as "fictitious", and therefore unimportant to a scientific analysis of behaviour. But most learning theorists have accepted certain basic facts concerning internal states, especially as a result of research concerning the excitatory system of the brain (the reticular formation) and other important work on the biochemical nature of drive states in relationship to basic bodily needs (Cofer and Appley, 1966, pp. 107-234). Learning theorists have demonstrated to ethologists that internal states (instincts) are modifiable and the ethologists have conceded this point.

Skinner was, and continues to be, a major exception to these learning theorists. Treating the internal state as irrelevant, he argues that it is sufficient to know that certain antecedent conditions occur systematically over time in relation to the subsequent presentation of reward or punishment. Skinner insists that his position is more scientific because he avoids use of "hypothetical constructs" (see MacCorquodale and Meehl, 1948).
Consistent with the scientific attitude, the essence of Skinner's current position is control. He casts aside the importance of ideas, feelings, purpose or cognition not only as explaining factors of man, but of man in relation to his culture. Originally atheoretical, and amoral, Skinner now presents his scheme as the only one tailored for the one value he has introduced: survival of the culture. Yet, paradoxically, his theory casts aside all that has been written about politics, education, art, religion and law - the backbone of our culture - because of his refusal to consider internal state variables.

We should also note that the tenets of behaviourism have been built upon the highly controlled conditioning experiment in the laboratory. It is only under these conditions, where the experimenter has complete control, that conditioning has been shown to work. When we speak, say, of a government utilizing contingencies of reinforcement to get people to pay their taxes by rewarding them in some way, it is foolish to call this conditioning, simply because the two crucial conditions for effective conditioning cannot be fulfilled in real life: i.e. (1) the time at which the reward (operant conditioning) or conditioned stimulus (classical conditioning) is presented, and (2) the frequency with which it is presented. In real life, these practices become bribes, or the buying and selling of services. Without complete control over the conditioning there is no guarantee at all that it will work. It will even be impossible to measure if, and in what degree, it has worked. It is not surprising, therefore, that Skinner should liken the design of a culture to the design of an experiment. Behaviour therapy should, therefore, be most appropriate for use in prisons and other total institutions where the therapist can have complete control. Significantly, the more successful programmes using operant conditioning methods have been conducted inside institutions (Schwitzgebel, 1971).

Punishment, as a conditioning agent, even in animal studies, has had varying degrees of success. "Positive" reinforcers, rewards, seem to be not only more acceptable morally, but more effective (Appel, 1960, 1963; Ferster and Appel, 1968; Burchard and Tylén, 1964; Burnes and Worsley, 1970). Differences in susceptibility to behavioural therapy, linked to proneness to conditioning, complicate the issue (Eysenck, 1964).

Skinner fails to apprehend the truly subordinated rôle of the controller. Whilst recognizing that the controller does have a say, he lamely suggests that the pigeon's behaviour shapes the design of the experimenter's apparatus (1971, p. 169). Does this mean that the pigeon must be imprisoned? Tyranny, not just control, is clearly a part of Skinner's ideology. For this reason, it deserves close scrutiny, especially as its popularity would appear to be increasing greatly (McGee, 1972).

Skinner's position is extreme, however, and behaviour modification is not necessarily as tyrannical a position as this. It is considerably more open in terms of what it proposes to do with people, compared to the traditional psycho-treatment techniques, which treat external behaviour as merely symptomatic of the inner self. Such a view allows psychologists a great deal more leeway, and room for value judgement in assessing the mental patient, and may result in such persons being looked up for long periods, even though, from a behaviourist's view, the external behaviour may not warrant it. Furthermore, Skinnerian programmes strongly advocate the use of rewards, arguing upon good experimental evidence that punishment evokes "emotional responses" in the subject which interfere with the effective learning process (Skinner, 1953, p. 183 f).
Other types of conditioning, such as classical conditioning (an aversive stimulus (CS) is presented with the unconditioned response (UCR)), and aversive suppression (an aversive stimulus is presented after the unwanted response occurs - the traditional form of punishment) are less humane. Electric shocks have been used in the treatment of sexual deviance; temporary paralysis in the treatment of chronic alcoholics: apomorphine for treating alcoholics and drug addicts (see Schwitzgebel, 1971, for a summary of these studies). Lately, however, some positive stimuli have been introduced, where homosexuals are shown pictures of nude females and encouraged to masturbate after an injection of testosterone. Schwitzgebel also reports treatment using positive stimuli, of gas sniffers, voyeurs, and cheque forgers.

Because many of these "treatments" are not, and do not pretend to be "painless" or "non-punishing", a question arises as to whether they can be imposed upon another person. Treatment as such, it seems, in the American setting can be imposed upon an offender (see Schwitzgebel, 1971, p. 37, for a summary of the legal cases Haynes v. Harris, Peek v. Clocone, Buchanan v. State). The limits to which one might go before treatment is considered "cruel or unusual" are also broad. Prisoners may be fed a restricted diet, be deprived of personal items and placed in solitary confinement (Snow v. Roche, State v. Doolittle); physical force may be used to control prisoners (Landman v. Peyton), whipping may still be allowed (Balser v. State, Camron v. State).

The role of behaviourism in the control of criminal as well as aggressive behaviour might be expected to increase in the future. Several current mass media productions have contributed to popularize it, as a viable solution - e.g. Burgess, 1972. Its position is easily definable in relation to the criminal law. It is directed towards changing clearly specifiable external forms of behaviour, and looks for clearly identifiable results. In essence the criminal law deals out aversive stimuli in response to proscribed behaviour of the offender. Though it is not necessarily concerned only with changing the offender (i.e. retribution for retribution's sake) the model is the same. As well, in its analysis of behaviour, the criminal law adopts a similar model, assuming a law of effect between antecedent and postcedent conditions, with the "black box" (mens rea) in the middle:

![Diagram]

As Goldstein (1967) has pointed out, however, the criminal law concentrates heavily upon the antecedent conditions, and postulates only a small number of internal state variables, which are used to exclude the case from the area of
criminal law, or to quantify the degree of punishment. Even when it does, it insists that these variables be tied specifically to the postcedent response - again, similar to behaviourism. In contrast, the traditional psycho-treatment schools, explain the postcedent responses almost entirely in terms of internal State phenomena. The criminal law has barely shifted its position in response to pressure from these schools. Behaviourism, however, in its present form, if it considers black box variables at all, does so only minimally and is thus closer to the legal analysis. On the other hand, the recent advocacy by Skinner for the complete elimination of black box variables would, we think, completely eliminate criminal law. And because Skinnerian ideology is gaining popularity, a close consideration of the implications in terms of human rights and legal development is advisable.
REFERENCES

APPEL, J.B.,

APPEL, J.B.,

APPEL, J.B.,
The Control of Behavior by Punishment, Paper read at AAAS-ASC Meetings, Cleveland, 1963.

APPEL, J.B.,

BANDURA, A., and WAITERS, K.H.,

BURCHARD, J.D., and TYLER, V.O.,

BURGESS, A.,

BUCKLEY, E. H., and WORLEY, J.L. (Eds.),

BUSS, A.H.,

COOPER, C.N., and APPEL, M.H.,

CREEK, H.J.,

CRESKIN, P.B., and APPEL, J.B.,

FREUD, S.,
Civilization and Its Discontents.

GOLDSTEIN, A.S.,

LORENZ, K.,
MaCORQUODALE, K., and MEIGHL, P.E.,
On a Distinction Between Hypothetical constructs and intervening variables,
Psychological Review, No. 55, 95/107, 1948.

McGEE, J.P.,
Behavior Therapy on the Move: Soft Impressions of a Conventioner, Letter to

MULVIHILL, D.J. and TUMIN, M.M. (Ed.),

SCHMITZGEREL, R.K.
Development and Legal Regulation of Coercive Behavior Modification Techniques
with Offenders, Maryland, N.I.M.H., 1971.

SKINNER, B.F.,

SKINNER, B.F.,

WOLFGANG, M.E.
Patterns in Criminal Homicide, Philadelphia, Penna., University of Pennsylvania
BALKER v. STATE

BUCHANAN v. STATE
164 N.W. 2d 253 (Wis. 1969) (dictum).

CANNON v. STATE

FORD v. BOARD of MANAGERS, N.J. STATE PRISON
407 F. 2d 937 (3rd Cir. 1969).

HAYNES v. HARRIS
334 F. 2d 463 (8th Cir. 1965).

LANDMAN v. FEYTON
370 F. 2d 135 (4th Cir. 1966).

PEEK v. CICCOONE

SNOW v. ROCHE
143 F. 2d 135 (9th Cir.), cert. denied, 323 U.S. 788 (1949).

STATE v. DOOLITTLE