

Re: death of the mind.

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In article <40efd95a@dnews.tpgi.com.au>, John Hasenkam
<johnh@faraway.?invalid> writes

>
> "Glen M. Sizemore" <gmsizemore2@yahoo.com> wrote in message
> news:2b64cd9306d188c86ca98cd98b30b531@news.teranews.com...
>> Odd that Peter would have referred you to O'Regan and Noe, and then say
> what
>> he does about "seeing red" (but then, Peter is a complete idiot). O & N is
>> indispensable reading after Science and Human Behavior, About Behaviorsm,
>> and an undergrad text on behavior analysis. I leave out Verbal Behavior
>> because it is not really possible to read it on your own.
>
> Your recommended reading list is timely. Still haven't tracked down a copy
> of Science and Human Behavior. I'm just wrapping one period of learning and
> am heading down your way. Tonight I was browsing through an old Skinner
> classic, "Are Theories of Learning Necessary?" I'd rephrase that: "Aren't
> Theories of Learning Pretentious in their Aims?" I liked Skinner's remarks
> that some tend to create theories because they can't find data
>
> Still very much at sea on a lot of this. After listening to Bryan Kolb's
> lecture on brain plasticity I am more convinced than ever that studying
> neurophysiological changes in order to understand how learning occurs is
> just far too premature. Kolb himself made this assertion, he even stated at
> the start of the lecture something about the "hypothesis of learning" and
> when one questioner pressed him to explain these remarkable changes in the
> brain after drugs and learning he said little then remarked, "I'm just
> handwaving". Could you elaborate on his cynical remark re "hypothesis of
> learning"? Or did I misinterpret his remark???

>
> Regards,
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>
> John.
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Just a word of caution. "Are Theories of Learning Necessary" really needs to be read with some understanding of what Skinner was critically referring to. This is perhaps best seen with respect to what he also

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said in his 1950s reviews of books by Hull and by Bush & Mosteller (Hebb would have been another if he had been influential enough at the time) in the 1950s. What he was criticising was a particular type of theory which appealed to intervening variables or hypothetical constructs which were not real values of variables at all but an "appeal to events taking place somewhere else". In those days these theories came under the auspices of methodological behaviourism, today exactly the same is being done, it's just been renamed "cognitive science"). In 1984;86 "Are Theories..." was combined with the 1961 paper "The Flight from the Laboratory" under the title "Methods and theories in the experimental analysis of behavior". The 1984 BBS collection (published as a book in 1988 by Catania & Harnad) has the advantage that it not only has an updated paper by Skinner, but that it is followed by comments by others, with replies from Skinner.

The special issue of BBS and the book is also an excellent example of the egregious politics we see in a more primitive/lesser form in this newsgroup!

(Incidentally. I try to avoid the word "learning" as I think it belongs with the rest of the intensional idioms, in most uses – I prefer behavioural plasticity).

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David Longley