

P R O C E E D I N G S

MONTHLY SEMINAR

OF THE

PSYCHOSYNTHESIS FOUNDATION, INC.

"Contrasting Models of Man in
Skinner's Behaviorism and
Humanistic Psychology."

March 17, 1972
The Mezzanine
Park Sheraton Hotel
New York, New York

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Some editing performed based on original notes.

FRIDAY EVENING

2

March 17, 1972

INTRODUCTION:

DR. HARONIAN:

Last fall, when B. F. Skinner's book was making a splurge and getting so much attention, it came to my mind that it would be valuable and useful for us to present not only Dr. Skinner's point of view about his conceptions of man as set forth in his book, "Beyond Freedom and Dignity," but a contrasting and opposing

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I'm happy to say, however, that Mr. Michael Commons from Columbia University and NYU, who has been active in the field of behavior analysis, and who is familiar with Dr. Skinner's work, agreed to present his point of view.

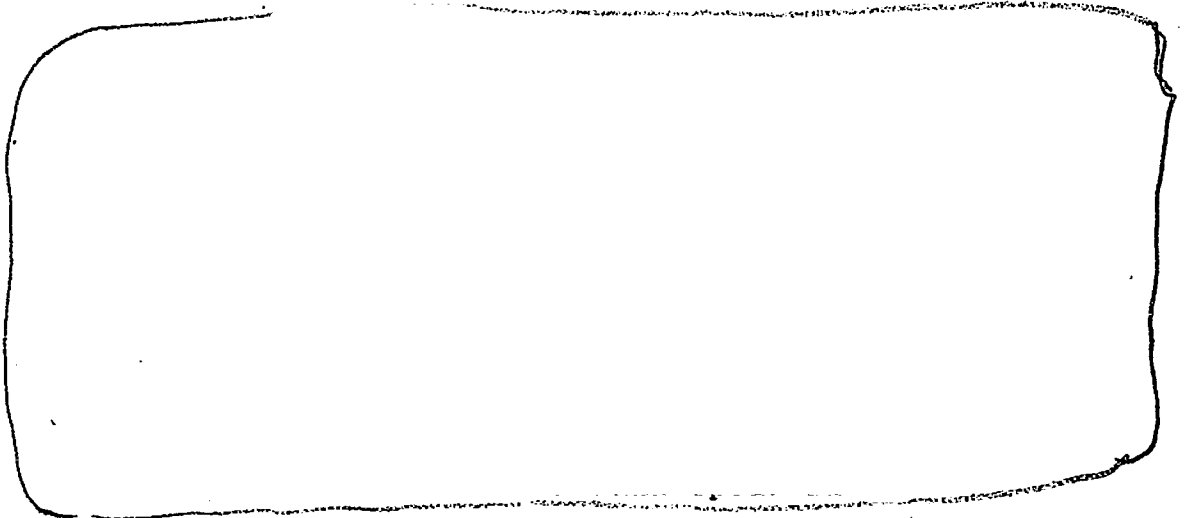
As I understand it, it's not going to be a Skinnerian view, it's going to be Skinner as seen by Commons.

On the other hand, Dr. Ira Progoff will, I think, present the humanistic and the transpersonal view of man's nature in contrast with the Skinnerian view. *Ira needs etc*

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← Ira needs very little introduction, if any, to you. I think most of you know him; many of you have been in his Intensive Journal Workshops or Process Meditation Workshops, or read one of his six books. I think we're particularly grateful to both of these gentlemen to take time from their busy schedules to be here tonight.



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DR. HARONIAN: With that, I will turn the meeting over to Dr. Progoff. ~~Thank you.~~ [Applause]

DR. PROGOFF: In talking on the phone with Dr. Commons he made a suggestion very interesting to me. He said that he thought that we ought not to base our

evening on a juxtaposition of abstract points of view, but rather to let ourselves compare what we do on specific issues. We haven't actually worked out what specific issues we're dealing with, but I thought that from the point of view from which I work, I can give the basics of the orientation and then apply it in some of the major areas as briefly as I can, and then Dr. Commons will make his statements and relate them to that, and we can possibly dialogue back and forth.

One of the comments that he made in this phone conversation that was particularly interesting to me was that he said that what Skinner was was a methodologist. And, of course, in the book, "Beyond Freedom and Dignity," one major point that he's making is that what modern man requires is a human technology, by which he means a technology that gives man a method for changing himself, and by changing himself changing society.

After we hung up after our conversation, I thought that actually to say "methodologist" is exactly where my own work is placed, because where, over the years, it's been involved in working out a structure by which a view of man, and a way of seeing man in his place

in the universe, that actually what that was all working toward was method; methods by which a person could work to change himself and change his society.

I think I would say of myself, also, that I'm a methodologist from the point of view of having practical methods by which individuals can work in their lives. Now in a certain sense, after all, that also is what the major religions have been engaged in. Yoga is a methodology in that sense, and Zen is a methodology; it's a way or a means of enabling the individual to change or develop himself.

There would be, however I think, this one difference which perhaps is crucial; perhaps is secondary, and I think our discussions may have a lot to do with this, that the question would be: To which area of human experience is the methodology applied?

From Skinner's point of view, he is saying that we need such a method by which we can control-- and that's a very important word for Skinner--the development of the person, and that if we do this we not only control what the person does, but what he wants to do. And of course, he's basically correct, here, that if you want to change man, you have to change not only

his actions but you have to change what he desires, so that you have to be able to change man at the point where he sets up his goals.

And of course, Skinner's way is to do that essentially by changing the environment, or by changing various aspects of the impact of the environment on the person, so that you are changing or influencing the person from within himself.

From the side in which you would change the person and you would change society, in that sense I think it's important to note that Skinner is really writing out of the point of a view of a Utopian person. That is to say he's writing as a materialist from a metaphysical point of view; he's actually approaching life in terms of a kind of ideal vision that he feels in some part of himself, and we may perhaps later want to go into what that represents in Skinner's own nature; what that represents as a view of life, but there's an ideal underlying his mechanism or his materialist way.

That ideal has to do with changing society.

For myself, it seems to me that the real balance of that is right in the base of the symbolic in

the base of the "Symbolic in the Real" book, where I state as my own goal the building of a new atmosphere in society, saying that really what is essential is not just a conscious idea that individuals have, but that the culture--the society--provides a certain atmosphere which people live in, like the water that the fish live in, and that that atmosphere is not merely the consensus of beliefs or the various attitudes, but the atmosphere of a culture is a certain quality of being.

It's a spiritual atmosphere. It's an atmosphere, in a sense, that it is felt, and it sort of provides the material for the person it sustains. It provides a kind of energy; it provides a way of seeing, a way of approaching life, and in that sense, you see, when a culture has an atmosphere, for example, of competitiveness; when it has an atmosphere of intense individuality in which individual is pitted against individual, and the life goal for each person is to develop in such a way that he will develop his individual capacity over against the other.

When a culture has that atmosphere, then in modern language there's a certain kind of vibration

going around it. On the other hand, if you have the kind of culture in which the atmosphere carries a sense of unity, or an atmosphere in which the feeling is that the realities of life are not on the surface, but that the realities of life are the inner connections among persons, then something of what is meant by the word love comes into the behavior of persons, because something else is present which has this sustaining force.

Actually, the underlying question for me in my work has been to develop a methodology by which the atmosphere or culture can be developed in such a way that it would provide this continuum of connection among persons; this feeling of unity, rather than competitiveness, in such a way that the atmosphere of the culture would provide a quality of love, and I think a quality of healing, a quality of sustenance, so that people could draw from the world in which they are certain-powers, but that would have to be present in the culture.

The question of how one would do that is my basic methodology; to have the techniques and the ways of doing that--

The question would be how to bring into a

culture a quality, an atmosphere, in which persons would feel their center in a way that is connected. And that has meant for me that you had to go, somehow, to a level that we would speak of possibly in a metaphor, that if you look at your hand, and you think of your fingers as the individuals, the individuality of persons is all separated, and as you come down sort of deeper into the person, you come further away from-separateness and closer toward a unity, and you come into a unity of being and a connectedness, which is the source, if you like, out of which the fingers come.

In a comparable way, when you think of individuals in a society, you have the question that on the outside of people's behavior they have their separate-ness and their individuality, conditionings and life, but as they move progressively deeper in this, they come to a place where their separateness is balanced out.

Then the question becomes to work out the way of relationships between the individuality that is out on the surface and the unity of man that is at the depth.

ACTually, it would seem to me in a Skinner way of seeing this, he gets caught in some very basic

old problems in the history of academic psychology. That is, he gets caught in the question of environment versus instinct, or the outer versus the indwelling forces, and then one gets caught in still older questions in psychology that really go into 18th Century philosophy, which is the point in history that Skinner is working out of. Really, Skinner is working still in questions very vital in the 18th Century; the questions of deism and materialism.

And that is not merely to minimize what he is doing, because I think that there were questions that came at that turning point in modern philosophy that were not resolved, and they do remain open--the questions of freedom of will against materialism.

Those questions never really have been resolved and Skinner comes back into them. Where we spoke of free will before he speaks of the autonomous person and freedom and dignity. I think it doesn't clarify the issue, but he comes in where that issue is.

My own feeling is that those questions--that dichotomy of freedom and determinism can be seen in another perspective, which would be a non-dualistic perspective, and then you wouldn't have that problem.

I think we could see it in this way, that when the individual is born into the world, there is, in a sense, a certain seed of potentiality. That is, we see the little child, and we sense--even at the very beginning--that that little infant has his own individuality, even before any significant environmental impact has been placed upon him, and we feel that individuality in the little child.

Gradually, as the child grows, various kinds of conditioning are placed upon him; by the people who take care of him, and the demands that are made on him, so that the child--beginning with his own seed of potential as a human being--develops a certain style that is very much, I think, in the way that Skinner analyzes.

He develops a style of personality that does derive from the environment, and it is together with the seed of his own individual being. But then, as he works his life out; as he placed himself in the environment, he works out a way that he can be in the environment.

But then, it seems to me--and this is really the essence of my experience with people and the method, that the person comes to a point in his development where as he is acting out the environmental conditioning that

has been formed upon him, he becomes aware of something else that stirs autonomously in him, and here, where Skinner uses the words "the autonomous person" to mean really the free-will in the person; freedom in an abstract sense, here what stirs autonomously is more like something in a deeper seed in the person, like something that was not really quite there when the child was small, but as the organism develops, and as the person comes toward adolescence and his physical growth is shaping out, and he is already an individual within the environment; within the society, he is in that sense an individual part of the group, but not yet really an individual.

Then, it seems to me, what starts to stir in the person is what you might think of as the second seed in a person. It's as though the first seed, the seed of physical development and of social development, as that forms, a certain balance--positive or negative--is established.

But then in a person's life, after that physical development, a further seed of potential stirs, and that is life forming itself, and the way that that is experienced is when a person finds himself feeling vaguely discontented with his life, or he finds he doesn't have

much energy, or he finds he doesn't really know what he's doing, or he finds himself sort of spread out in his life; he feels himself disconnected. Something, you see, is stirring that would be a sense of the self; that is to be one's very own, but not a self that would be derived from environment; not a self that comes from the conditioning outside.

And where a person has to be very much engaged, in the first part of his life, in working what would be called his adjustments, his adaptation to society, and to find a place for himself and to function, and in the usual sense that's what normality would mean; a person has worked out a way to be part of the community.

But when he does that, he comes then to a point where something else that has formed in himself feels as though it is missing the chance for life; that is the individuality in the person which comes from the second seed, and that second seed, if we follow the metaphor of depth, comes from something deeper in the person. This doesn't have its source in the outer world; it doesn't have its source in the environment. It has its source in something in the person that is part of life as a human being is part of the cosmos; is part of

world. I should emphasize that, perhaps, that it is part of the world; that it comes out of the natural world, and in that sense it doesn't require any of the metaphysics of idealists' free will.

It is simply that the seed comes out of the depths of the nature of life, and stirs in there, and draws itself up, and comes, then, into conflict with the style of personality that a person has had to develop as part of his conditioning and adaptation in the world.

Eventually that conflict between the adaptation a person has formed in society and the second seed that moved up out of an organic process of development; that moved up naturally in the process, the conflict between that environmental self and the seed of this second self is a fundamental conflict.

Eventually, in the experience of this person, one of those must die; one of those must be overcome. That is the core struggle; the core cycle of experience of death and rebirth, and finally the struggles within a person continue until that outer self dies--that old self dies--and the second seed comes to life and forms as a new being.

The experience of that, in a word, is what

I think initiation means, in the primitive cultures, and especially in the modern world as individuals find themselves struggling toward initiation experiences of different kinds. All those initiation experiences involve the overcoming of that environmental self, in order that a new self can be formed out of the second seed.

And the experiences, the forms of this, of course, are many. Essentially, I think one additional way that I want to mention--and we can perhaps discuss it later--is that when this happens; when a person is living as a conditioned being, he really is in a position of always responding to the stimuli of the environment. That is, he is a creature of the outer world.

What is trying to happen is that he will be reformed, not as a creature of the outer, but as a creature who is so in touch with a force working from within himself that he essentially carries his own atmosphere. That would be the essential way that I would define or approach what it is to develop spiritual reality.

Spiritual reality is not any particular kind of belief or doctrine. Spiritual reality is the condition

of atmosphere; the atmosphere that is present in a person when that person's connection to the self--to the seed of the self--when the connection to that second seed is such that it sustains an atmosphere like an envelope around him.

So when he comes into a life situation he is not in the position of reacting to outer stimuli; he is in a position of responding from within his own atmosphere, from within his own quality of being; that quality of being that is the atmosphere that develops in the person; that would be autonomous.

But there's nothing arbitrary in that kind of autonomy, because that kind of autonomy means wholeness of self that the person has developed and carries. Also, in that, at any moment in the movement of his life, as the person is experiencing the movement of his life, he is not responding to conditioning outside, but he is in the position of feeling or placing himself in life; merely positioning himself in the movement of time.

That is to say he is feeling his identity, and feeling where his position is in the movement of time with respect to his past, and the movement into the future. That is to say in this sense the alternative to conditioning

would be the positioning of oneself in the time movement of one's life, where a person then may have the sense of where and how he is moving in his life experience.

I think also that the sense of time in the individual's life, the experience of the sense of time that enables a person to feel his existence now has the effect of establishing an identity of being; that in this now moment between the past and the future one can say, "I am," and in speaking "I am" in this now moment, and in placing oneself, one is affirming the fact of this existence.

This is then, you see, not an arbitrary existence, in the sense of autonomous free will, but is a very real present existence, where one feels one's being here between the past and the future.

A metaphor that I've used in some of the writings I'm engaged in, I had the sense that when a person is in the environmental phase of his life; when he is in the position of just having to respond to the stimuli of others and to the stimuli of society,--when he is in that position he is merely living in a kind of darkness, because where he is placed is really irrelevant, because he gets a shove from here and a shove from there,

and he reacts, and he's reacting to another.

At the point where he can surface and get a start, and get a sense of where he is to position himself in his life, it's really like a submarine that has come up and somebody has to go and look out and start trying to find out where he is. Actually, for that reason, one of the basic questions in our method and in our way of using our intensive journal in the Dialogue House program, one of the basic questions is to work around to the question, one way or another: Where are you in your life? Where am I in my life?

A basic part of our method is to position ourselves. It's only a coincidence that it's position as opposed to condition. It came out like that.

[Laughter]

That particular process of the person positioning himself in the time movement of his life and working out: "Where am I in the movement of my life? Where am I with respect to my past, which may be my personal past; may be the past of my childhood; may be back to infancy; may go back into history; may go back into the past as far and in whatever dimensions a person understands the past, and then where am I with respect to

the future, which would have to do with the feeling of the seed.

And this basic fact in nature, that always the process of growth is a moving forward but out of something that contains the potentialities of the future.

I think probably this question of how you move is the most basic of all questions; to understand the fact that a creature moves by a process of unfoldment that contains the future as a potentiality of form and being, and that it unfolds out of something, always, much smaller than what comes; that the seed is always much smaller than any of the parts and developments that come from it.

That, of course, that sense of how the process of nature moves, is one of the reasons that I've always found it hard to see a process of conditioning as really a basic or definitive aspect of the life process, because it would seem to me--and maybe there are other ways to see this--that insofar as the process of nature is always moving out of seeds that move beyond themselves, and that they unfold; that they enlarge themselves out of small beginnings, when the beginnings contains the potential which then has to be worked out in the environment.

Then it has seemed to be never really adequate to interpret the process of life growth in terms simply of the impact of the environment on that process, and this has very large consequences for the methodology, because it becomes then a question of shall we try to develop a methodology that works with the nature of the conditioning of society, which is actually what Skinner's human technology would be, as I understand it; that he would attempt to have means of conditioning people working from the outside, or shall we attempt to have methods by which we can evoke and draw forward--drawing forth from within the seed--more of the potential in such a way that these potentials, as they develop, will build an atmosphere of their own being.

This atmosphere, then would become the ground in which we live our life.

Maybe I should pause. [Applause]

DR. HARONIAN: I'm sure we all have a lot of questions. We're going to save some for later on.

Thank you very much, Ira.

Mike, can I turn the dais over to you?

MR. COMMONS: I would really like Ira to give us an example. I was waiting for something more

concrete than philosophy.

DR. PROGOFF: All right. Perhaps the most direct way is to describe out of my own development the way it came to me, and the kind of method that has crystallized in the Dialogue House program. Actually, the Dialogue House program is the working out of a methodology for the development of persons.

In "The Symbolic and the Real," working from that atmosphere or the purpose of developing an atmosphere of the culture, I came to a kind of general program as a methodology in which we used groups, and we worked one-to-one, and we used the journal, and that was a generalized kind of journal.

The important step was to have a means of developing the inner process in a person to a point where it could be related to. I was thinking about Skinner in relation to this, and I think the crux of this is that what Skinner experiences is that if you want to work empirically in changing people you have to have something external to work with, therefore we look at the traits and the patterns of behavior first.

When people work only in terms of inner feelings or beliefs, that becomes very elusive, and you

get into the kinds of misunderstandings that make it that people who have spiritual or religious or mystical type insights are not able to communicate what they feel to anybody else. Even if they feel they are communicating with people who seem to, quote, "agree" with them, at the point where they are communicating with people who agree with them, the agreement has to do with an idea about what is taking place inside.

So that actually, the agreement turns out not really to be agreement, because at the point where it becomes a sharing of beliefs or feelings, it has to be drawn out toward the surface, and therefore it isn't any more the basic, inner experience.

I think that's one of the reasons, in essence, why in the history of religions you always have to have this confusion. And when people come to work out any empirical way of changing people, Skinner even comes out of the spiritual history, even though it's going into its opposite in his phase, but historically it has a spiritual source.

But still, you see, there's no way that he could see to really work with, methodologically, inner experience.

The way of working with inner experience that seems essential to me and that led to the general, was taking the inner process, and without interpreting it, getting the inner process out into a form that concretized it outside and in front of the person. That was the reason for the journal.

Then I realized that the mere keeping of a diary-type journal, that is an unstructured journal, had the effect simply of letting that process roll around in a circle, and you had to have the means, then, to do two things: You had to draw the inner process outside where it would be tangible, and you had to draw it outside in a form that moved on and followed the basic organic style of the psyche, namely to move and unfold, and to unfold in the movement of time.

Then you would have something that would reflect outside the inner life process of the movement in an individual life. The person would have an instrument, as well as a basic method, for placing himself in the time movement of his life, and he would know how, then, by taking the inner and placing it outside, he would gradually develop a sensitivity to the inner process as something that was tangible.

That really is the heart of the method, to take what is this elusive, inner process, and get it into such a form that it is tangible enough to write and to read, then, the succession of writing in different aspects, so that that inner process has now become a very definite continuity where you can see the changes in the progressive movement, where you can see the dips, the depressions, and you can see the kind of rhythm by which it rises.

To work in that way brings a kind of conditioning, and here I'll give a specific example where we are working in a program, now, in the ghetto as part of the job-training program. Here we have the situation of working with some 300 people who have either been on welfare or have maybe two or three years of elementary school education, or who come from other undeveloped countries like Haiti, where they still speak French, primarily, or the Dominican Republic or Cuba or Puerto Rico, and so on.

We have really very directly the task of having to change people so that you make it possible for them to live within a society and to develop within a society. And the principle that we work on here is

that really the basic need for social change, and the basic answer to poverty is not merely to give people greater material means--and you have to give them jobs and places to live, and so on--but that the important thing is that you make it possible for people really to experience the reality of a process within themselves that gives them a power and reality of existence, so that they know that they exist.

Then, of course, they may feel dignity, etcetera, but I would waive all the fancy phrases and I would say that just one thing is necessary, that a person experience the fact that there is in reality a process of growth within himself that has a power, and that that process and power is present and working in his own individuality; that he is a being with capacities that may be drawn forth.

The essential of poverty- is that a person feels he is not existing; that he is a captive of the poverty; that he is just part of the ghetto and he is just a segment of that ghetto and he is a slave. And in the moment that you enable him to feel that he does have his own existence, and that he has capacities within that, and resources that may reach down deep in time; seeds

that are kept in him that are not yet open, but he realizes that he has those potentials.

Then you have given the person a connection with a resource that must overcome any external poverty, especially in a country like this, where a person who has a sense of his capacities can find a means to place himself.

Skinner refers to the midwife method of Socrates, and he thinks it's a silly thing, and he refers to the same example that I use in *The Symbolic*, actually, he refers to the same example, which is the situation where Socrates is talking to an illiterate slave-boy. He draws out of the slave-boy a very complicated mathematical principle, and he takes it that that indicates that there is a capacity of knowledge that is inherent in the depths of the person.

Apart from how Skinner sees it, which is, I think, thin, I remember one session in my ghetto group, where I used that as an example. I remember feeling, as I heard myself using the example, "Who do you think you're talking to? Why are you saying that? You'd think you were talking at Berkeley."

The strangest thing happened. All through

the following sessions of that group, the one example that they kept coming back to, and in one case a 21-year-old whom they had thought was retarded because of his attitude, kept asking me, "Would we be like that slave-boy that Socrates had, that we would have knowledge in us that could be brought out?"

That would be really the essence of the view of man, and the methodology must be the way of drawing it out. The specific way was to give a person a means of having an instrument that he can use that will enable him to recognize that what he has in the depth of himself that he has not yet lived is real and can be made tangible.

Let me give one example that perhaps will show you the kind of conditioning. In our groups in the ghetto program each of the persons has a journal, and we have each work workshop sessions in which they work in the group. Over a period of time they learn to use the journal when they are by themselves.

Coming together weekly is a kind of conditioning in that it gives a situation, gives a tool, positively reinforces it because when it works right something particular happens, as for example, in this Wednesday morning session. I'll describe it and you'll see how it

seems to you; we start the session by becoming quiet, and I say something to the effect that now this week we place ourselves in our life. And we have a section in the journal that we call the period log. The period log refers to the period or unit of time in which this present moment is described.

So we start by placing ourselves there, and we have a period of quiet in which they let themselves write, without any analysis and without any judgments, without any interpretation, they just let themselves write what comes to their minds, recapitulating this recent period; this last week since we had a session.

And then we have those who wish to read it to the group. One young woman in a New York ghetto started to read, and she said, "Wednesday morning it was a rainy, nasty morning," and she said how she awakened this morning and just wanted to be able to go back to sleep. And she said her husband wasn't feeling well and he's so nice when he doesn't feel well. And the baby was there, and she felt she wanted to stay home and take care of the baby and cook for her husband and her child. And she wanted to be able to smell the things she was cooking, and she didn't want to go to the Dialogue

House session.

At that point in the writing, something was there and she realized that she didn't really feel so bad, now. She said, "I feel kind of good that I've written all these things," and she then described how her feeling had gone through a cycle, and that in simply in a neutral way recording and describing there took place in herself the whole process turned around, naturally of itself.

A little bit later, another young woman who comes from Haiti told us this: She said she wanted to read her things, and of course, she didn't read all of them, but last night she was up till two in the morning writing in her journal, and she was writing five or six hours.

She said what had happened was that she had come home from work and done her things in the house, feeling very depressed and very low. What she had done was sat down, and she did a dialogue herself. She chose the section in the journal that's dialogue with persons, and she did a dialogue between me, moi and with herself, and she read us that dialogue, and she really worked around with herself. She said in the course of that she

decided to write a period log, so she wrote her period log last night, and that's what took so long, all the things that had been happening. Then in the middle of it she decided to do an inner dialogue.

Now an inner dialogue in our journal is an exercise that you do in -which you choose some person or figure who represents wisdom to you, which may be God, which may be some live figure from the past, which may be some person who you feel is wise. You do an inner, deep dialogue with that person.

So she did those three things till two in the morning. Now she felt at one with the world; she was feeling that the whole thing had turned.

Now I take it that there is a basic process, a kind of basic cycle, that moves at deep levels of the human psyche that actually, when you read the Psalms in the Old Testament, you would observe that in many of the Psalmist was doing was writing down simply the feelings that were present in -him. He'd begin the Psalm by saying, "Lo, I am compassed about by my enemies, how long, O Lord?" And he then makes the statement that simply put down he experiences what he is feeling, and then while he is doing that, without interpreting, a very subtle kind

of turning takes place. It's as though the process, having come down to the valley, then it starts naturally to go back up. It's as though the cycle cannot go anywhere else but naturally reverse itself.

If a person becomes panic-stricken or anxious or analyzes what's happening to him, then that cycle will not be able naturally to reverse itself, because the person will not have stayed with the organic movement; he will not have stayed with the natural process that is taking place.

But if he can stay with the process as the Psalmist does, or as these two women did, working with the journal, just putting it down and letting it move, then a process, a natural process builds and reverses itself. Then without interpretation, and without analysis, a different atmosphere is established.

That's really the essence of the method that draws on power, really, and energy that is inherent in the depth level of the psyche, which I take to be something that the Psalmists understood, that the Prophets understood, and that really provides the basis for what is a western way of meditation. That would happen with what I understand as process meditation,

developing that concept and working with it in this way.

DR. HARONIAN: Thanks, Ira. You touched on a process that touches on so many different things; concentration, enantiodromia--if I may use that term-- I think you've given us a good example.

I wonder, Mike, perhaps you in your confrontation with Ira's presentation will deal with the question of enantiodromia and the possibility of when facing, within ourselves--without judgment or criticism-- in depth, what we are, can Skinner's system explain how this takes place?

MR. COMMONS: I think I should ~~should~~ explain to you why it's difficult to get a behavior ^{audience} analytically oriented person to speak before ^{a «humanistic} ~~people~~, and I think I do that as a way of introduction because I think tonight I will disturb a few people; bore a few people, communicate with a very few.

Professor Schoenfeld was my first professor at Columbia, and he taught me something about Socrates. He said, Socrates had ^a ~~one~~ way of approaching the world and life; Socrates always played very dumb, and therefore was able to convince people that he was allowed to ask a

lot of questions. If he was smart people would say, "You know the answer to that!" So Socrates played dumb until they caught him and decided that was really being a smart alec and he had to stop that. He agreed that he had played the court jester maybe to the point where the state didn't want him around any more.

Skinner occupies a similar position. If you have to characterize a behavior analyst with any single word, I think "dumb" is the proper adjective. We are incredibly dumb. We don't understand ninety per cent of what is said. If you give us an explanation of something, we'll say, "Well, what do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about." If a behavior analyst says he doesn't know that can maintaining a conversation with a humanist difficult. The thing to do when to a behavior analyst, is to state the question in simpler terms.

I got attracted to behavior analysis at the age of four, not because I knew that it existed or anything like that, but it seems that I didn't know what was going on in the world, which was a very good position to take at the age of four, and I've been able to maintain that position and still eat--not necessarily well, but enough that I'm overweight.