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The Works of J. R. Kantor: Pioneer in Scientific Psychology

Noel W. Smith

State University of New York at Plattsburg

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the importance of J.R. Kantor's Interbehavioral Psychology, emphazises the fact that Kantor's work is relatively unknown to the community of psychologists, and offers a comprehensive list of Kantor's publications, including his numerous book reviews.

RESUMEN

Este artículo señala la importancia de la Psicología Interconductual de J.R. Kantor, hace hincapié en que el trabajo de Kantor es poco conocido por la comunidad psicológica, y ofrece una lista amplia de las publicaciones de Kantor, incluyendo sus numerosas reseñas bibliográficas.

Those who are acquainted with the writings of Professor Kantor know the prodigous scholarship they encompass, involving knowledge of works in several languages and in such diverse areas as physics, logic, anthropology, genetics, mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, history, and many others as well as psychology. And the writings themselves are equally extensive. They include several books, three of which are two volumes each; papers in French and German languages; and articles in Polish, French, German, Mexican, and United States journals of physics, sciences, philosophy, ethics, sociology, anthropology, and a wide variety of specializations in psychology. Not only does one wonder at the enormity of scope and quantity of these writings but also at the creativity —the ability to break through the metaphysical assumptions of 2000 years of Western entrenchment which still plague us and to formulate new approaches and carry them out with great

thoroughness. In this his *Principles of Psychology* [36] stands as the classical work. In these two volumes he deals in an objective manner with topics that were, at the time of its publication, considered either mentalistic or not sufficiently mechanistic for the new behaviorism. Some of these topics are still ignored today while others have received only scant attention until recently.

Kantor recognized that a science is not determined by quantification or experimentation but rather by keeping postulation and hypothesizing in accord with events and interpreting results of observations in terms of those same events. Analyzing and systematizing the observations into some sort of order and relationships is an additional necessary step. Thus history, ethics, or any other domain of events may be dealt with scientifically. He has handled a variety of these in just this way (e.g. [76], [86]).

Another remarkable feature about his work is that he explicity states his basic postulates on various levels of generality from the most general –the protodefinitions and protopropositions– through metapropositions to the axioms of psychology and finally to the most specific theorems and other units. The most salient features of this analysis are presented in a number of articles (e.g. [67], [88]) but in most detail in *Interbehavioral Psychology* [81]. Few others have examined their assumptions in any but the most cursory fashion and none to this extent.[1] And failure to do so has led to psychologies that unknowingly make commerce with the most unsavory of medieval theosophic assumptions followed by the consequences of unscientific proposals and conclusions. Kantor alone has laid bare, as all scientists should, exactly what he bases his system on so that its faults or strengths may be minutely examined. There is nothing hidden, nothing to slip by unnoticed at any level. That his system proceeds from events rather than from constructs and retains its reference to these same events throughout is clear from this exposure. That most other systems lapse into metaphysical assumptions and metaphysical interpretations of research findings which are derived from historical doctrine rather than observations is equally clear from his analysis. The overriding consequences of his starting point in events is the methodical demonstration and presentation of psychological events comprising a field of interacting factors that is not reducible to any one of them, least of all to a biological organ such as the brain or a transcendental abstraction such as a mind or consciousness. The organism is viewed not as a passive creature directed by its environment nor as one governed by a man within the man, the nervous system. Rather, it is seen as one component in a field consisting of organism-object interbehavior occurring in a setting and conditioned by historical development of previous interactions. This larger picture of the irreducible field has only been dimly

[1] Limited presentations of this type that failed to consider all the important levels and resulted in unsatisfactory formulations were offered by Albert Weiss and Clark Hull.

glimpsed by a few others and fully realized by fewer yet, Kuo [94] being perhaps one of these.

A few words about some of the early works is relevant here. In his doctoral dissertation [1] of 1917 he details the historical development of philosophical categories, intellectual evaluative instruments, later to be called constructions or constructs, from early Greek times to the twentieth century. He indicates that a careful appraisal of these tools and their utilization will serve to dispel confusion and help to more clearly define and attack a problem. The relationship of experience or behavior to problems of the world is also emphasized, that is, the relativity of knowledge to the knower as well as to the known. In this unpublished but very significant work is the beginning of his emphasis on presentation of basic assumptions whether his own or others. Here too are the seeds of his system, the interactive organism-object field theory that he soon worked out. The dissertation also makes use of history as a tool of analysis that he continued to use frequently and effectively and it heralds his two volumes on the history of psychology [86] a half-century later.

His first publication was a book review in which he criticized the scientific methodology of the author. His second appeared in 1918 [2] and was on abnormality. Here he was struggling to put this subject on a more objective level while being hampered by traditional mentalistic terminology. He objected to the interpretation of psychiatric data in terms of mind-body distinctions. He insisted that the data of psychology are "conscious behavior" and not consciousness or behavior and that this "brings psychology into direct contact with actually existing and transpiring phenomena" while obviating dualistic constructs. Conscious behavior "serves always as a specific adjustment to some object or condition" This entered directly into his developing interactional system. He lists as distinctive attributes of conscious behavior variability, modifiability, discrimination, inhibition, and delay. In later writings he modified these only slightly to provide six characteristics of psychological behavior that distinguish it from other types of behavior. He indicates the importance of surroundings in any interaction as a conditioning circumstance. Despite the difficulty with terminology there is progress even here, for his descriptions often circumvent or recast old terms into objective usages. In addition, the term "stimulus-object" appears as does "action components", the predecessor of "action systems" [5] an finally "reaction systems" [8]. These two terms were early and permanent parts of the growing arsenal of an objective nomenclature. In a publication of 1919 [5] he develops further the reaction components of normal and abnormal personalities. Five years later this emphasis on and analysis of the complex of actual behavior events was greatly elaborated over a wide range of psychological topics in the *Principles.* Even in dealing with the problem of abolishing international strife, his third publication [3], he observes the need to focus less on the groups themselves and more on the behaviors of individuals who comprise the groups with their

contributions and benefits or losses in the groups. A paper on instrumentalism [6] in 1919 describes his philosophy of science as one of observing concret objects and events and interrelating them in an intelligible manner consisting of categories which are subject to transformation (modification) with further discovery and analysis. The categories allow us to remove meanings from "the field of actual happenings" for further study. Kantor later gave special prominence to the field nature of all events.

Still struggling with some of the terminology, he continued to use the term "conscious behavior" [7] but points out that this differs from the abstraction "consciousness" and that any behavior which is "unconscious" is purely physiological. "Subconscious" refers to any behavior that is largely habitual. He refers to "knowledge constructs" and no longer to "categories". Memory, he argues, is not a thing resident in the organism but the completion of a larger organization of experience than that of a given moment. We should not expect psychological actions to follow the same non-organic actions of chemistry and will find prediction possible only in "the very simple anticipation of a possible uniformity in action in response to phases of experience consciously abstracted from a total situation".

The further development of the interbehavioral system could be traced through the subsequent works, but perhaps this brief account of those appearing in the three years of 1917 through 1919 will demonstrate that his orientation toward investigation and knowledge was one of tenaciously keeping his sights on the actual events, distinguishing them from constructs, and thereby avoiding the confusions that traditional constructs or categories had placed in the way. How he achieved this remarkable orientation so contrary to Western tradition only Professor Kantor himself can tell us. Kuo's work that is in such close accord can perhaps be explained by his Chinese background, and Aristotle's similarity may be related to the Greek culture which preceded the development of Western psychophysical dualism. To account for Kantor's success we would need to know his interbehavioral history prior to his writings.

By whatever means it happened, the intellectual orientation and the intellectual ability that he developed as products of his own interbehavioral history led him to further refine and develop this immensely significant but deplorably ignored system of interbehavioral psychology. As he developed it in detail he also refined it in terminology so that it came to be through and through a truly scientific approach to human behavior. The only major terminological change he made after it was well developed was in the name of the system. He originally called it organismic psychology after organismic biology. This term came to be appropriated for meanings not in consonance with his own and he then adopted "interbehaviorism". The latter term is actually a superior one because it indicates that it is not just the organism or the organism's behavior that is involved but the interrelationships of the organism with the other factors that make up a field. Even "field psychology", though apt, would not be quite so satisfactory because it

would be confused with its usage by the phenomenalists who have proposed a "mental field" (in fact Kantor is often classified with Kurt Lewin as a field theorist). Fortunately, no one else has appropriated the term "interbehaviorism" for a different meaning and so it remains an excellent appellation.

His achievements notwithstanding, Kantor is relatively unknown to the community of psychologists. Only rarely does one find his name in a review of treatments of perception, physiological psychology, language behavior, and other topics to which he has given thorough, seminal, and far reaching analysis. And this oversight results in comparing treatments with one another that usually are all entangled in the same underlying metaphysical assumptions. The beneficial opportunity of contrasting these with Kantor's, a treatment that lies outside this Western dualistic tradition, is missed. In short, psychologists have deprived themselves of an informed choice.

To help emend this situation it is important to bring together a complete list of Professor Kantor's writings. Surprisingly, the only previous attempts were informal mimeographed lists and one publication of very limited dissemination. All of these had omissions and errors and nowhere was there a compilation of his book reviews. The first of these lists was compiled by Paul Mountjoy and Irvin Wolf and dated April 20, 1955. The second, also by Mountjoy and Wolf, was dated March 1966. This second list was published in 1968 in *The Interactional Psychology of J.R. Kantor: An Introduction*[2] this book being used little beyond its place of origin and for only a short time there. For the present compilation these lists, the *Psychological Index, Psychological Abstracts,* and Kantor's works that referred to some of his own works were used. Professor Kantor had apparently never compiled a list but was able to supply a missing article from a German journal and a few omitted from the list of book reviews. All works have been checked for accuracy in the original sources. The book reviews often offer valuable insights into Kantor's steadfast event-based orientation as well as strengths and weaknesses of the books themselves from this perspective. They are a useful supplement to his own presentations. The collective works number well over 200 items and are still growing.[3]

[2] This was authored by Harry Mahan and published by Project Socrates Press, Palomar College, San Marcos, California.

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