**Determinism**

**Definition of Determinism: the general thesis which states that for everything that ever happens there are conditions such that, given these conditions, nothing else could happen.**

**Given the precise conditions of a student’s life, the student had to select JMU.**

**Indeterminism: the general thesis which states that in human conscious behavior for everything that ever happens there are conditions such that, given these conditions, something else could happen.**

**Given the precise conditions of a student’s life, the student could have selected another college than JMU.**

**Both Determinism and Indeterminism agree that if the conditions of an event were to change, that something else could have happened.**

**For example, if JMU’s campus had turned out to be neglected and ugly, that change in condition could have affected the selection of which campus to attend. When conditions change, the choices can change. That is not where Determinism and Indeterminism disagree.**

**They disagree about what can happen when the conditions of an event or selection are exactly the same. The determinist holds that given the precise conditions of a student’s life, the student had to select JMU. The indeterminist holds that given the same precise conditions of a student’s life, the student could have selected another college than JMU.**

**Skinner is searching for the necessary and sufficient conditions of human behavior:**

**A necessary condition is a factor without which an event cannot occur, for example, being a woman is a necessary condition for the event of becoming a mother to occur. Without the factor of being a woman, a person cannot be a mother (if we exclude cloning). Skinner in the example above would be interested in what conditions are necessary for one to become a criminal. If one of those conditions could be removed, then we could reduce the occurrence of criminal behavior.**

**A sufficient condition is a factor or set of factors which suffices tomake an event occur, which forces an event or result to occur. For example, being a birth parent suffices for us to know that one has had a child. A sufficient condition necessitates that an event occur, determines with necessity that an event will occur. Skinner, in the example above, would also be interested in the sufficient conditions required to try to change criminal behavior into normal, law-abiding behavior.**

**The best knowledge one can strive for would be a knowledge of both the necessary and sufficient condition for a behavior. Such knowledge would give one complete control over the event whose necessary and sufficient condition one could control.**

**Skinner’s Argument Summarized:**

**1. If human behavior is not free but rather determined then a behavioral science should be possible and psychologists can learn to determine and control human behaviors.**

**2. But, behavioral science is becoming more and more a reality and psychologists are learning to determine and control human behaviors.**

**3. Therefore, it is more and more probable that human behavior is not free but rather determined.**

**At this point, we will assume that the first two premises are true and examine the logical structure of the argument. The argument has a logical structure comparable to the following example:**

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| **1. If it rains today, then my car will get wet.** | **If p, then q.**  |
| **2. My car did get wet today.** | **q did occur.**  |
| **3. Therefore, it is probable that it rained today.** | **Therefore, p.** |

**Notice, that we cannot conclude in this last example that it is necessarily true that it did rain today. We can only be sure of that conclusion if rain is the only possible cause of the car's getting wet. However, the car could get wet in many ways--from a car wash, from snow, from a student prank even. Since both arguments have the same logical form (If p, then q. But q did occur. Therefore, p.), the first example cannot conclude with necessity but only with probability. Only if Skinner can eliminate every other possible cause of the predicted effects, then can we conclude with necessity. But the scientific method never assumes that the present hypothesis in any field will ever be stated with finality. Hypotheses only become more and more verified, the more that other possible hypotheses are eliminated as unable to predict the observed effects and the more that new and varied effects can be predicted from the hypothesis in question. Since the use of the scientific method forbids concluding with absolute necessity, Skinner does not affirm determinism as absolutely true, but only as more and more verified. It is important to realixe that Sinner's use of scientific method here is in accord with the overall practice of scientific method:**

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| **If the scientific hypothesis is correct, then the predictions deduced from it will be observed experimentally.** |
| **The predictions are observed under experimental conditions.** |
| **Therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed as a scientific theory always open to further refinement because of new observations that may be made in the future.** |

**Skinner's argument against freedom is more and more verified to the extent that his premises are true and to the extent that no other hypothesis affirming human freedom could explain the predicted consequences. Skinner, of course, would argue that his two premises are true:**

**Sentence 1 is true for Skinner because if human behavior is determined, then it seems logical that science should become aware of how behavior is determined, and that this knowledge should lead to control of human behavior. The statement is hypothetical. If we were to hypothesize that human behavior is free and not determined, then we would reasonably predict that human behavior in its free choices would never be able to be completely predicted.**

**Sentence 2 is becoming more and more true. For example, Skinner's theory of positive reinforcement is enabling behaviorists to improve the behaviors of psychotics who have for a long time befuddled psychologists with their inexplicable behaviors. See, for example, Eysenck, *Experiments in Behavior Therapy,* pp.207-212, and throughout. Call no. 616.891 E98e.**