

Behavior, It's Subject Matter

What is Mind? No Matter!
What is Matter? Never Mind!

Historically speaking, the person most commonly associated with the initiation of the importance of behavior as the subject matter of psychology was J. B. Watson, an American psychologist. His first major article "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It" was published in 1913. He is given credit for being the founder of a system of psychology called Behaviorism.

15-1 Behaviorism is a system within psychology which has been very influential. What psychologist has been credited with the founding of Behaviorism? (Watson)

15-2 Behaviorism was founded by
A. a German psychologist
B. a French psychologist
C. a Viennese psychologist
D. an American psychologist (D)

The basic change suggested by J. B. Watson in his Behaviorism was to de-emphasize "mind" in psychology and substitute with observable responses. He tried to set psychology free from philosophy and set it up as an objective science. He contended that the supposed functions of the "mind" and "the unconscious" are actually drawn from observed behavior. He defined psychology as that division of natural science which takes behavior, the doings and sayings, as its subject matter.

He considered consciousness to be poor material out of which to construct a science of psychology. Prior to this time, studying supposed mental phenomena such as sensations, images, etc., was the favorite topic of interest to psychologists as a method for obtaining evidence. An individual was asked to look inward or introspect about what was happening. Watson's revolt was against this internal, covert, cognitive process; i.e., it was in opposition to this orientation of psychology which studied mental phenomena.

15-3 Behaviorists were interested primarily in:
A. cognitive processes or thought processes.
B. internal content.
C. covert behavior or thought processes.
D. overt measurable behavior. (D)

- 15-4 John B. Watson advocated:
- A. that careful studies of consciousness be collected.
 - B. that introspection be used more extensively as a method of science.
 - C. that psychologists focus on internal variables.
 - D. a system known as behaviorism.
 - E. psychology and philosophy are one in the same. (D)
- 15-5 Behaviorism:
- A. sought objectivity.
 - B. rejected behavior.
 - C. was mentalistic.
 - D. was developed by Plato in the 1200's. (A)
- 15-6 John Watson advanced the point of view that science:
- A. should utilize subjectivity.
 - B. should concern itself with unconscious motives.
 - C. should be objective.
 - D. has often made its greatest advances using the introspective method. (C)
- 15-7 Watson contended that psychology should:
- A. focus on the introspective method to study conscious experience.
 - B. be an objective science.
 - C. forget behavior. (B)

It is a truism to say that the only things to study are those things one is able to study.

Many statements about causes of behavior have no more observable evidence to support them than someone saying the behavior was caused by the Easter Bunny. When the explanation of behavior has no observable testable components, the explanation is no better than stating that the Easter Bunny is the explanation for the behavior.

A criticism that is often made about behaviorists is that their work is okay as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. Behaviorists; however, do study those "far enough" areas, but verbalize in terms that are more than attempts to make unfounded assertions in impressive sounding language. This point will be elaborated on as we progress in this text.

"I used to toy with the notion that a behavioristic epistemology was a form of intellectual suicide, but there is no suicide because there is no corpse. What perishes is the homunculus, the spontaneous, creative inner-man to whom, ironically, we once attributed the very scientific activities which led to his demise." (Boring & Lindzey, A History of Psychology in Autobiography, Appleton Century, 1967.)

BY JOHN B. WATSON

1. Human psychology has failed to make good its claim as a natural science. Due to a mistaken notion that its fields of fact are conscious phenomena and the introspection is the only direct method of ascertaining these facts, it has enmeshed itself in a series of speculative questions which, while fundamental to its present tenets, are not open to experimental treatment. In the pursuit of answers to these questions, it has become further and further divorced from contact with problems which virtually concern human interest.

2. Psychology, as behaviorist views it, is a purely objective, experimental branch of natural science which needs introspection as little as do the sciences of chemistry and physics. It is granted that the behavior of animals can be investigated without appeal to consciousness. Heretofore the viewpoint has been that such data have value only in so far as they can be interpreted by analogy in terms of consciousness. The position is taken here that the behavior of man and the behavior of animals must be considered on the same plane: as being equally essential to a general understanding of behavior. It can dispense with consciousness in a psychological sense. The separate observation of "states of consciousness" is, on this assumption, no more a part of the task of the psychologist than of the physicist. We might call this the return to a non-reflective and naive use of consciousness. In this sense consciousness may be said to be the instrument or tool with which all scientists work. Whether or not the tool is properly used at present by scientists is a problem for philosophy and not for psychology.

3. From the viewpoint here suggested the facts on the behavior of amoebae have value in and for themselves without reference to the behavior of man. In biology studies on race differentiation and inheritance in amoebae form a separate division of study which must be evaluated in terms of the laws found there. The conclusions so reached may not hold in any other form. Regardless of the possible lack of generality, such studies must be made if evolution as a whole is ever to be regulated and controlled. Similarly the laws of behavior in amoebae, the range of responses, and the determination of effective stimuli, of habit formation, persistency of habits, interference and reinforcement of habits, must be determined and evaluated in and for themselves, regardless of their generality, or of their bearing upon such laws in other forms, if the phenomena of behavior are ever to be brought within the sphere of scientific control.

4. This suggested elimination of states of consciousness as proper objects of investigation in themselves will remove the barrier from psychology which exists between it and the other sciences. The findings of psychology become the functional correlates of structure and lend themselves to explanation in physicochemical terms.

5. Psychology as behavior will, after all, have to neglect but few of the really essential problems with which psychology as an introspective science now concerns itself. In all probability even this residue of problems may be phrased in such a way that refined methods in behavior (which certainly must come) will lead to their solutions. (From Psychological Review, 1913, 20, PP. 176-177.)

S.B. 15-3