

## **Behaviorism as the praxist views it**

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Zuriff has missed the forest for the trees. His thorough reexamination of dozens of variations and repetitions of Watson's manifesto is everything it appears to be: yet another variation and repetition of the manifesto. He does more than explicate and organize. He *defends*: Information-processing concepts are

inadequate *because*. . . . Determinism is a necessary "working assumption" *because*. . . . The self is a faulty concept *because*. . . . The postulation of internal representations, transformations, and conscious contents is unnecessary *because*. . . . Stimulus-response formulations of language are adequate *because*. . . .

Zuriff's is not the first exercise of this kind; it is merely the first exercise of this kind to contain so many references. Why has it been necessary, again and again and again for 70 years, to repeat and explicate Watson's position? Could it be, as Zuriff would have us believe, that the message is so incredibly profound?

In a series of recent papers (e.g., Epstein 1984, 1985a, 1985b; in press a; in press b), I have offered a different solution to this vexing problem. As Zuriff correctly notes, these days the word "behaviorism" refers to a school of philosophy. But the referent was different in 1913. Behaviorism was *a movement for the reform of psychology* – specifically, a movement to replace psychology's traditional and etymological subject matter, mind, with a new subject matter, the behavior of organisms.

The psychology that emerged in the mid-1800s was an exciting enterprise – the attempt to apply scientific methods to the understanding of age-old philosophical subject matters: mind, feelings, volition, and so on. "From the most ancient subject," declared Ebbinghaus (1885), "we shall produce the newest science."

In the 1800s and early 1900s, another new science was in the making, a science of behavior. J. S. Mill proposed such a science in 1843; the zoologists Parker and Haswell did so in 1897; London physician Charles Mercier called for such a science in 1911, and his call was echoed by Dunlap (1916), Hunter (1925), and others. But in 1905, the new science was effectively derailed. William McDougall, in his *Primer of Physiological Psychology*, defined psychology as "the science of conduct." "What was needed," he later wrote, "was not a new science of behaviour under a new Greek name, but rather a reform of psychology; consisting of greater attention to the facts of behaviour" (Watson & McDougall 1928, p. 57).

Watson (1913) turned this curious suggestion into a conspicuous, though not entirely effectual, movement, and to McDougall's innocuous program he added a prohibition against the study of mind. Watson's program was outrageous; declaring another field your own does not make it so. The existing field was bound to resist, and it did so successfully.

Undaunted, Watson and his followers continued to wave the flag and to repeat and elaborate the original manifesto. The science of behavior hobbled along, isolated from biology, in departments where, for the most part, it was not welcome. As its proponents struggled valiantly for floor space and journal pages, they continued to elaborate Watson's message, until behaviorism emerged as a vast set of interrelated assumptions and assertions, as exemplified by Zuriff's book. Modern behaviorism is, in effect, *the rationale for why students of behavior should be allowed to take over psychology departments*.

Zing Yang Kuo, in a brilliant paper (not cited by Zuriff) published in the *Journal of Psychology* in 1937, saw the futility of the behaviorist movement and argued strongly for the creation of a biologically based science of behavior. Psychology, said Kuo, should be left to the psychologists. It is not an "ism" we need, he said, but a true empirical science.

The time has come to clear the air. For one thing, we must stop telling psychologists how to do good science. The studies of cognition of which I am aware are rigorous, empirical, and objective, almost to a fault. As Bergmann (1956) pointed out, behaviorism's major impact on psychology was to make it empirical and objective, contrary to Zuriff's assertions. What the movement failed to secure was the new *subject matter*.

Psychology must be set free of its intruders, and the intruders must somehow find a way to establish a comprehensive, biologically based science of behavior – a *praxis*, if you will – along the lines suggested by Kuo and others early in the century.

Finally, the new science must be set free of the 70 years of philosophical baggage that has accumulated while praxists struggled, unsuccessfully, to appropriate a field that was not theirs.

If that science had gotten off the ground when it was first proposed, behaviorism would not have to be reconstructed today; it would never have come into existence in the first place.