

So This Is Behaviorism?

BEHAVIORISM. By JOHN B. WATSON. New York: The People's Institute Publishing Co. 1925.

Reviewed by JOSEPH JASTRONS,
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MR. WATSON began his psychological career as a student of animal behavior. In the complete isolation of the Dry Tortugas, he noted the responses of terns in a natural uncontaminated habitat. Returning to civilization, he decided to study humans as a complicated order of terns. After a series of important contributions to animal behavior, ingenious and rigid in method, he launched his "Psychology from a Behaviorist's point of view." The substance of his doctrine is now presented in a course of twelve lectures addressed to a popular audience. The formulation must be accepted as authoritative for the Watsonian brand of behaviorism. Cavalierly in the treatment of other positions that clog the acceptance of behaviorism, he is occasionally papal in manner. He claims a proprietary interest in the system and warns against other psychologies bearing a similar label.

"In 1912 the behaviorists reached the conclusion that they could no longer be content to work with intangibles and unapproachables. They decided either to give up psychology or to make it a natural science." Despite this modest decision the triumph of behaviorism remains incomplete. "Indeed we should point out that behaviorism has not as yet by any means replaced the older psychology—called *introspective psychology*—of James, Wundt, Külpe, Titchener, Angell, Judd, and McDougall." But in due course the reader is furnished with a contrasted ledger, showing that all that is of value in present-day psychology and will influence the future, is to be credited to the behaviorist. The debt side shows other psychologies as survivals from an obscurantist past, "dominated by a kind of subtle religious philosophy." Apart from the central salvation promised by behaviorism, there are such incidental assurances as that all educational difficulties in rearing the human young will vanish as parents are properly behaviorized; and yet more casually, that mental disorders are a myth, for which a will-o'-the-wisp of the psychiatrists is responsible. The folly of accredited views of consciousness, imagery, memory, attention, emotion, and the futility of the stock of psychological tools exhibited in unregenerate laboratories and lecture-rooms is freely and gleefully exposed,—with what effect upon an indiscriminate audience, may be surmised.

While acknowledging the merit within its zone of application, of the behaviorist's position, if such is its temper, one fairly sympathetic with its findings and with no claim to authority to administer the benign chastisement, feels that it deserves a sharp rapping on the knuckles. Others have been sufficiently provoked by this attitude to dub Behaviorism an *enfant terrible*, or even a miserable bastard. Nor does this movement present a more harmonious attitude within its own camp. There are behaviorists who respect one or another of the fundamental Watsonian tenets; they find themselves—few as they are—differing aggressively among themselves. Whether Dr. Watson would read them out of the party, we have yet to learn. If this keeps on, he may soon find himself in the superior position of the Irish processionist surveying the rank and file of his marching companions with the comment: "Everybody is out of step but myself."

One must be content to illustrate by selected features what the Watsonian behaviorism asserts and denies, accepts and rejects. Its great resource is the "conditioned reflex" or response. If you ring a bell whenever you feed a dog, and keep up the process until you "condition" the animal to this stimulus, the same action of the salivary glands which makes the small boy's mouth water when he looks in at the bakeshop window, will bring it about that you get a measurable flow of the dog's saliva when you ring the bell alone. Now the nature and scope of this interesting fact is far from determined; it has obvious and narrow limitations. But all the laws and prophecies of behaviorism flow from that slight salivary stream. Under its dominion "association of ideas" becomes an obsolete misnomer; there is only conditioning. Hence you can condition any process and anybody anyhow. Training exceeds heredity; as soon as the world discards its obstructing traditions and taboos, and takes to behaviorist conditioning of the individual, the programme will be

simple. There is "no real evidence for the inheritance of traits. I would feel perfectly confident in the ultimately favorable outcome of careful upbringing of a *healthy, well-formed baby* born of a long line of crooks, murderers and thieves, and prostitutes." Of such babies, anyone at random could be trained to "become any type of specialist I might select—into a doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even into beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, *penchants*, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors."

By enthroning the conditioned response as the pattern of all behavior, you outlaw all remote and long-range as well as complex mechanisms of the psychic realm. "Don't get confused at this point by what the psychologist and the psycho-analyst sometimes tell you. If you read their statements, you are likely to believe that the stimulus can be applied to-day and produce its effect maybe next day, maybe within the next few months or years. The behaviorist doesn't believe in any such mythological conception." The notion is but part of the "demonological terminology of the Freudians" who in twenty years will be placed in the same class as phrenologists. For there is no such reality as instinct, no more than that a toy soldier, weighted and rounded at the bottom, demands "an instinct to stand erect." "No theory is required to explain it, only a systematic observation of the facts. All the elaborate junk the Freudians have written on humor and laughter is just so much chaff which will be blown aside as observation brings out the facts." "In accordance with his usual procedure, he decided before beginning work himself to consign to the waste basket the work of his predecessors and to start the problem over again." Dr. Watson's collection of waste-baskets must by this time be extensive and formidable.

As a fact behaviorism, when not rampant, has made far more significant contributions than this all too popularized and radicalized set of lectures, recounts. Its main emphasis is upon the objective phases of organic mechanisms; even in so complex a function as speech this insistence is helpful, and there is no more thorough analysis of the speech acquisitions than that of Dr. Watson, though again his insistence that "Laryngeal" is a blessed word to explain all that goes on when we think in words instead of with our fists, is a bit strained. As a further fact, this type of behaviorism becomes an electric selection of a few problems in psychology that happen to interest the author; and still further, when one of these problems, such as that of personality, is not amenable to the concepts and handling of the radical behaviorist method, there is nothing to prevent its confusion with the accredited and ridiculed presentations of the members of the same guild to which Dr. Watson by protest belongs. The lecture on personality is an admirable statement and not least so because it lacks the aggressive flavor of the rest.

No fundamental psychological position can claim significance that does not provide the problems, by which the science advances; it cannot endure by assailing and correcting other "ologies." In this respect Freudianism—and that much of it is extravagant, even unto junk, is admitted—has stimulated more real psychological interpretation than the entire behavioristic activity. Behaviorism has its fetishes as well. It has a faith that if you avoid a word, or at least use it in a new sense, you achieve salvation. So long as you taboo "consciousness," "introspection," "instinct," you are saved, and you must put your tongue in your cheek when you say "image," or "emotion," or "fear," or "rage." But when you say "conditioning," or "reconditioning," you are of the elect and have eschewed false gods completely. Another equally futile faith is that an observation when made by a behaviorist under modern conditions is a totally new product worthy of scientific respect. A fact derives its significance from its setting, its provenance, its interpretation. The worship of facts is as idolatrous as that of words or images.

Until behaviorism outgrows its iconoclastic zest and achieves a constructive responsibility, its influence will be properly under suspicion; it has been treated more considerately than its temper warrants. Not altogether unlike the "homeopaths" who insisted that those who did not believe that "like cures like," necessarily believed that "unlike" did so, and hence were "allopaths," behaviorists call the other camp "mentalists." But it is about as sensible to ask what is the opposite of a behaviorist as to ask what is

the opposite of a Presbyterian or a Christian Scientist. The difficulty with behaviorism is its adherence to a meagre eclectic stock of concepts, its working these beyond their capacity and at times mistaking the form for the substance, for it is by ignoring the real essence, (and this is the familiar administrative fallacy) that the apparent simplicity results.

Thus the "delayed response" is a favorite type of explanation, but ignores that the essential thing is not the delay but takes place during the delay. Teachers are quite familiar with the delayed response among students, but are unable to correlate the depth of the reply when it comes with the length of the delay. Rip van Winkle probably holds the record for a delayed reaction, but his sleep brought no great philosophic discoveries. And likewise for conditioning. No system of education could be based upon it. If we have music with our meals, then according to the strict behaviorist, we should either learn to be content with the music and omit the meals, or get so conditioned that the hearing of music would always make us want to eat. Or by having "jazz" during examinations, students would soon demand examinations frequently, and conditioning in the academic sense would be unknown. It is time for the behaviorist to take his performance more responsibly, and remember that throwing aside old errors does not confer new wisdom; nor are those who disagree with him so completely foolish as they deserve to be.

The Social Surplus

ECONOMY OF HUMAN ENERGY. By THOMAS NIXON CARVER. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1924. \$2.50.

SOCIETY AND ITS SURPLUS: A Study in Social Evolution. By NEWELL LEROY SIMS. New York: D. Appleton & Co. 1925. \$3.

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THESE books should be read together. They have the same thesis, but expand it on different lines and unequally. Professor Carver, formerly of Oberlin, now of Harvard, once taught sociology but he became more occupied with political economy. Professor Sims was a preacher in Presbyterian pulpits, then a professor of economics and sociology at the University of Florida. From there he went to the Massachusetts Agricultural College as professor of sociology. He is now a professor of sociology at Oberlin.

A good while ago Professor Carver made a distinct place for himself in economic theory by cutting loose from the cults which taught successively that political economy is the science of wealth, the science of market values, the science of marginal utilities, and maintaining, as Adam Smith had done, that its theme is national prosperity. It may have taken courage to do this at the time, for the brilliant but paradoxical Simon Nelson Patten was then proclaiming the same idea; and Patten was more dreamer and seer than realist, while Carver, a realist always, must of need check up his facts and his conclusions. Patten saw in an ever-augmenting social surplus a new basis of civilization, and he attributed surplus largely if not, indeed, chiefly to changing habits of consumption, whereby natural resources are economized. Carver, hard headed, questions Patten's assumptions. He finds the adequate cause of prosperity in human energy, husbanded and wisely applied, and maintains that "economics, sociology, and ethics are all concerned with the economizing of human energy."

Professor Sims has taken up the notion of a relation of surplus to civilization, and says that the

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inspiration of his book came in a way that is not mentioned; but there is little evidence that *Parsons* actually influenced the thinking of *Sims* more than that of Carver in any definite way. What is different is an indebtedness to Professor Merrell Tenney of Columbia to whom *Sims* gave credit for "a germinal idea" found in an essay in "The Synthesis of Individual and Social Surplus," published in *The Popular Science Monthly* in 1912. The thought of Tenney runs subtly in the background of *Sims*.

Professor *Sims* has undertaken a larger and more difficult task than Professor Carver's. Carver writes simply and clearly on relatively simple themes, sometimes with a touch of homely humor, and nearly always with a trustworthy discrimination. Vital energy he sees as solar energy transformed by effort, which is an expenditure of energy. Human life alone shows an energetic profit or surplus. There is, however, a universal tendency to dissipate energy in rest, play, or reproduction, in excess of necessity or of what we can afford. The depressing factor in the refutations of Malthus is the circumstance that they are commonly regarded as refutations! Americans are called wasters, but, Carver asks, are they as wasteful as they seem? Spendthrifts in almost everything else perhaps, they are economical of labor and penurious of time. Rational morality is that conduct which economizes human energy, and immorality the conduct which dissipates it. Civilization calls for curbing of self expression by self discipline. How much civilization, then, can we stand? This question Carver does not answer. *Sims* attempts to answer it. Readers will differ as to whether he succeeds.

Starting from a provisional definition of sociology as a science of group energy manifest in social forms, Professor *Sims* gives us a detailed and comprehensive treatise on social evolution. He calls it "a new way of approach, or rather an old way newly emphasized" to sociological theory. The basic notion is that society is essentially a physical phenomenon. Carver's basic notion is seemingly identical. "The ultimate social fact," he says, "is probably not psychical but physical." There is, however, a difference if Carver means (perhaps he does not) that the psychical is not physical. One might contend that society and all social facts are psychical and at the same time as a behaviorist in psychology and a monist in philosophy might add that all psychical phenomena that are scientifically knowable are manifestations of physical energy.

Professor *Sims* acknowledges that Herbert Spencer made "the first real attempt at a systematic sociology," and that Spencer's basic notion in sociology as in psychology was the hypothesis that "every physical and psychical change is generated by certain antecedent forces, and that from given amounts of such forces neither more nor less of such physical and psychical changes can result." This is just, and Professor *Sims* has done well to remind us of our debt, but exception may be taken to his further assertion that those who since Spencer have striven to make sociology a science have shifted it to other grounds, and have delivered it into the hands of those who hold that social energy is independent of mechanical law. Too many sociologists have done this, but not all. William Graham Sumner, to name one, was not guilty.

To speak of the expositions of *Social Power*, *Social Process*, and *Social Progress* in which Professor *Sims* develops his basic notion and searches out its implications would be to expand a brief review into an article. He advances boldly but cautiously, as the scientific mind must. Also, it must be said, he is scholarly and an admirable writer. His reading has been wide-ranging and his citations are discriminating. His appraisals of the views of other writers are intelligent and fair. Dissent from some of his positions and conclusions there will be. The classification of tradition and organization as energies will be challenged. They are mechanisms, and condition the expenditure of energies, but are they energies themselves? They do not function by emitting energies put into them when they were made and so consuming themselves, as coal does in combustion. Their functioning is a direction, a coordination, or a transformation of energies turned into them now, from outside of them, generated outside of them, and never at any time a part of themselves. But these errors, if such they are, do not invalidate the soberly presented conclusion that the equilibration of social energies selects human personalities and develops them, enlarging and individualizing them.

The BOWLING GREEN

Little Deaths

THE last few days before going away are, indeed, as the French say, a Little Death. Particularly when one is going abroad (an odd phrase, unless taken quickly)—going from a life one understands, or at least is part of, to one entirely strange. Then, as one muddles about straightening his affairs, things familiar suddenly show their savage importance. A small tousled head on a pillow, a sleeping child sprawled almost over the edge of her bed, or Mr. Edward Bear fallen stiff and forgotten over the bedside cliff, can unsettle the mind for an hour. In those final moonlit evenings small customs become as significant as everything would always be to a rightly comprehensive sense. The midnight rape of shredded wheat with cream and brown sugar (a correspondent complains that we do not write about Food nowadays; I mention this for him; but it must be real cream, and brown sugar) and the tick of dropping acorns, Donny's flap-flap tail on the porch, and the howlet's quavering cry—these things you try to fold and stow away, along with the other packing. Tonight I woke at one o'clock and found our woodland brushed with silver. The Hunter's Moon, I think they call it; I wondered how I could fit it into my mind, with so many other ends and odds, so it would keep. One does not worry about packing sunlight, for that you share with everyone; but moonlight is your own.

It is excellent medicine to remember the things that will be going on not at all embarrassed by one's absence. That gate-man at the Long Island Station will still be shouting at five o'clock every afternoon, "First Stop Jamaica, Jamaica Rexpress." There is a delightful spaced rhythm in his cry; he is a prosodist by nature. Friendly little stenographers will be saying "All-Righty" over the phone, perspiring yachtsmen cranking marine motors that don't start, and newspaper reviewers writing that Mr. So-and-So's new book is "equally as" interesting as his previous. The *Saturday Review*, moved away from its original quarters near the eight tall chimneys of Gashouse District into the intellectual élite of 45th Street, will hear the tramping feet of the Pack—the hungry throng of free-lance critics who pursue the beaten round of all magazines that give out books for comment. In the little circulating library in the Long Island Station people will be dropping in to choose a detective story in the few minutes before train-time. The thing that interests me in those books is always the card that tells who has borrowed the volume before. It fills me with vague speculation to observe that Miss E. M. Wheeler read "Definitions," and that that excellent book has earned 69 cents for the Library. Who, I say to myself, is Miss E. M. Wheeler and did she like it? I turn over the pages to see if she marked any passages. How depressing is the prohibition against writing in the margins of borrowed books. It should be compulsory; sometimes, in those anonymous comments, you find out what people really believe they think.

Ruddy September will go its course; the mules from the Pennsylvania coal-pits will smell air and grass and feel as strangely uncanny as a newspaperman when he first quits his job and takes to private pondering; every Sunday a definite predictable number of people will kill themselves and others in motor cars on the highways; the papers will write solemn editorials to the effect that publishing Income Tax figures is a deplorable invasion of individual privacy, and will simultaneously attempt to break into as many other privacies as possible; there will be the statistical quota of Important Autumn Weddings and hayfever pollens will cause the annual peak in the Sealpackerchief traffic. On transatlantic steamships a certain number of late prowlers will be sampling the smokeroom steward's cognac, or listening to the hiss along her side. And, as Roy Helton's graceful poem says,

Above those gay young hearts atune
The unimportant beauty of the moon.
The Queen of Sheba will return to her own house-
keeping after her astonished visit to King Solomon

remarking—the origin of the *mot*—"The half was not told me." "Of course she hasn't got accommodations like the more modern ships," said a wealthy lady. "There aren't any private baths." But isn't the walk down the swaying corridor, in your dressing gown, with that before-breakfast puff of moist wind that catches you at the cross-alley, isn't that part of the fun? All these things will be happening; and there will be reason, I suppose, for agreeing with Newman (Frances, not Cardinal) that "The cynical spirit is the foundation of good prose." But if so, then a pox on "good prose." For, thinking of a tousled head on a pillow, I cannot assent. I prefer a saying of Harry Leon Wilson's. He was interviewed (for *The Bookman*) by Myla Jo Closser. She said to him that he gave the impression of finding life entertaining. "Anyone is lucky to have got in at all on such a preposterous adventure," he said.

While motor cars are dusting along the roads on Sunday afternoon, out on Long Island Sound there is a Chinese junk. Among the little white-triangled yachts she comes drifting out of Stamford, a queer outlandish silhouette with her gravy-dish hull, her painted eyes, her amber parallelogram sails. A wavering ripple of topaz reflection follows those tall latticed sails as they move softly down wind. All the little sloops and ketches bend on everything they have to follow her, to have a good look at her queer shape, to take photographs. But she slips away as unreachable as a dream. With the breeze aft, nothing under canvas can overhaul her. My friend the Old Mandarin, who used to write Translations from the Chinese, would have had something to say about this. But then he was a sententious fellow who could moralize anything. There are some little visions that just have no moral at all.

"I had an energetic but delightful five days in France," writes C. W. S. (an Englishman—not one of the American hasteners we hear about.) "Day 1, St. Malo, Dinard, Dinan. 2, St. Michel. 3, Le Mans. 4, Chartres. 5, Rouen. I and the friend who was on holiday with me had a high dispute in St. Malo as to what Chateaubriand, who was born there, had written. The guide books shuffled out of it with *écrivain, grand auteur*. I was for meditations, political and philosophical: my friend said 'Fenimore Cooper tales about Red Indians.' We scoured the town for a statue that would reveal the secret. The statue was in the Casino grounds, and as these were closed we could only peer from a distance over the hedge. I was delighted to find the great Chateaubriand in a pensive attitude, finger to brow: but my friend said he could see a frieze of diminutive Indians running round the pedestal—like the Peter Pan statue, I suppose. Which of us was right?"

I have a vague notion that both were right; but most of us would be stumped if asked on a dark night what Chateaubriand wrote. The only thing of his I ever read, however, was a very mild sort of chronicle of a young man who went to live among the Peau-Rouges 'dans le Far-Ouest' and found it arcadian and back-to-Natureish. Most travelers in France know Chateaubriand best as a kind of steak.

No one has yet seen large dove-colored limousines whickering past a patrolman's uplifted palm, and a P. L. tag on the radiator informing the admiring pedestrian that these are officials of the Public Library going to work.

Perhaps the Public Library is almost as important, in a big mongrel city, as the Fire Department. In my private Utopia, when a dangerously smouldering illiteracy was observed, or a sudden blaze of prejudice, the anxious citizen would turn in an alarm. Hark the siren and the jangling gong! Here comes the emergency truck from the Library, with a shell-specked interne and a shelf of aesthetics, Marcus Aurelius, Butler's Notebooks, and a sedative gazetteer or encyclopædia. In her hand the charming interne has one of those magic pencils with a rubber stamp on the end—civilization's wand against barbarism.

Half the trained workers in the New York Public Library get from \$20 to \$25 a week.

If some member of the Board of Estimate would visit the library for the blind in the big building on Fifth Avenue, or any of the children's reading rooms there or in the branches, I think he would agree that the Public Library is one of the city utilities that shouldn't be starved.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.