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Behaviorism and Behavior Analysis in Britain - An Historical Overview

Ullin T. Place

University of Wales, Bangor

Behaviorism shares with Pragmatism in Philosophy, and perhaps with Cognitivism, the distinction of being one of the few major intellectual movements to have originated in the United States. It is therefore not altogether surprising that it has not flourished with the same vigor in other parts of the English-speaking world, particularly in Britain where it tends to be regarded as the epitome of American brashness and insensitivity to the finer points of the European cultural tradition. Some of behaviorism's most vociferous opponents have been British. One thinks in particular of the psychologist William MacDougall and his debate with Watson, of the writer Aldous Huxley and his *Brave New World* (1932) with its satire of a society run on Pavlovian conditioning principles and more recently Anthony Burgess's (1972) *A Clockwork Orange* with its similar satire of behavior therapy and behavior modification.

The Roots of Behaviorism in British Biology

On the other hand, British scientists and thinkers have also played a constructive role in the development of Behaviorism. The story starts with Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Expression of the Emotions in Animals and Men* (1872) followed in 1882 by the mentalistic excesses of G.J. Romanes' *Animal Intelligence*. The counterblast to Romanes was provided by the Welsh biologist Conwy Lloyd Morgan whose 'Canon' of 1894 was the first decisive step along the road which led through Thorndike's 1898 monograph and 1911 book to Watson's (1913) paper in *Psychological Review*.

Behaviorism in British Philosophy

British philosophers and philosophers of continental extraction working in Britain have also contributed. Although never a behaviorist himself, Russell's sympathetic account of the behaviorist position in *The Analysis of Mind* (1921) influenced Skinner. Another Cambridge philosopher, C. D. Broad, introduced the familiar molar/molecular distinction in the course of an exposition of behaviorism in his *Mind and its Place in Nature* (1925). Wittgenstein who settled in Cambridge in 1929, though he would never have described his position in these terms, moved significantly in a behaviorist direction in his later writings (see particularly his 1958 and 1953). Wittgenstein's influence, though unacknowledged, is apparent in Ryle's unashamedly behaviorist analysis of the psychological concepts of ordinary language in *The Concept of Mind* (1949). The writer is one of a handful of psychologists whose behaviorism was inspired by Ryle and the Oxford school of ordinary language philosophy of which Ryle was the prime mover. Two others were Tim Miles and the late George Westby. With the help of Peter Harzem and more recently Fergus Lowe who has succeeded him as Head of Department, Miles was responsible for establishing the Bangor laboratory and making it the most important center in the United Kingdom for the experimental analysis of behavior, both pure and applied. With the connivance of the Rylean philosopher, the late Alan White, Westby succeeded for a time during the nineteen sixties in making the Department of Psychology at Hull a center for a distinctive amalgam of ordinary language philosophy and behavioral psychology.

Broadbent and Eysenck

The period following the end of World War II which saw the rise of ordinary language philosophy also saw an independent development of behaviorism within psychology represented by the work of Hans Eysenck at the Maudsley Hospital in London and Donald Broadbent at the Applied Psychology Unit at

Cambridge. Unlike American behaviorists who have always had their roots in the study of animal behavior, both Eysenck and Broadbent were students of human behavior. Eysenck belongs to the tradition which descends from Galton, Karl Pearson, Spearman and Burt and uses sophisticated statistics, such as Spearman's factor analysis, to study individual differences. Broadbent comes from the rigorously experimental tradition which subsequently acquired the title of 'ergonomics' and was pioneered by psychologists working for the British Ministry of Defence during the war. The behaviorism that inspired both Eysenck and Broadbent was Hull's rather than Skinner's. Before he was seduced by the rising tide of cognitivism, Broadbent wrote his *Behaviour* (1961) in which he recommends Hull's hypothetico-deductive method, but regards the systematisation as premature, and looks towards a tie up with physiology as the way forward. Eysenck having demonstrated the therapeutic ineffectiveness of psychotherapy, launched the behavior therapy movement with the book *Behaviour Therapy and the Neuroses* (1960) which he edited.

Having been effectively excluded by the medical establishment from the practice of psychotherapy within the National Health Service, British clinical psychologists embraced behavior therapy with the enthusiasm. Its roots in experimental psychology in which they were trained, as the psychiatrists were not, gave them a right to practise the new therapy which the psychiatrists could not gainsay.

The Experimental Analysis of Behaviour Group

As a consequence of these developments, the nineteen sixties was a period when the influence of behaviorism in Britain was at its peak. It was also the period which saw the formation of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior Group, which was and remains the only organisation in Britain catering for those with an interest in behavior analysis. The EABG has always been an informal group with a list of correspondents who are notified of its meetings, but no members, no constitution and no legal status as an organisation. That is perhaps one reason why despite being one of, if not actually *the* oldest organization in the world devoted to the advancement of behavior analysis, it has never been affiliated with ABA. Another possible reason is that alongside behavior analysts properly so-called it also caters for those interested in the experimental analysis of animal behavior from the standpoint of associative learning theory.

The Waste Land

In the wake of the so-called 'cognitive revolution' behaviorism in general and behavior analysis in particular have probably lost more ground in Britain than anywhere else. Because of the deep anti-scientific bias with which they are, in my view, quite unnecessarily associated, the Wittgensteinian and ordinary language philosophies have lost ground to the American concept of the philosopher as the indispensable 'top-down' theorist of cognitive science. Broadbent no longer thinks of himself as a behaviorist. Eysenckianism is a spent force. Behavior therapy now calls itself "behavioural psychotherapy". Behavior analysis, like Christianity in the Dark Ages, survives at isolated centers in the "Celtic Fringe," in Wales (Bangor), in Ireland (at both campuses of the University of Ulster, Trinity College Dublin and Cork) and, with Chris Cullen's appointment to a chair in Learning Difficulties in the Department of Psychology at St. Andrews, in Scotland. Elsewhere isolated individuals keep the flag flying within British Universities: Stephen Lea at Exeter, Bob Remington at Southampton, Graham Davey in London, Derek Blackman at Cardiff, John Wearden and Chris Bradshaw at Manchester, Richard Bentall and David Dickins at Liverpool and Jim Wright (an American from Maryland) at Leeds. Within the applied field, only clinical psychology still preserves a significant behavioral orientation. Behavior therapy, though now much diluted by the fashionable rhetoric of cognitivism, is still widely practised and applied behavior analysis has a significant representation, particularly amongst those working with the developmentally retarded. In the educational field there are a few interested individuals, but little or no

practical application. I may be maligning someone, but as far as I am aware, organisational behavior analysis does not exist in Britain.

A depressing picture, you may think, but there are signs, still only straws in the wind, that things may be changing once again. This time, let us hope, for the better.

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