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Evolution of our understanding on Behaviorism

Behaviorism, has long stood as a pivotal theory in philosophy, aimed at understanding observable and unobservable behaviors. (Kim, 2010, p. 61) However, despite its rise in popularity, it has faced several shortcomings whenever we are accounting for the internal mental processes of different humans and animals. In this essay, I plan to argue in favor of the inability of behaviorists to fully account for the internal mental processes of different beings along with their inability to account for similar emotions or behaviorism of other animals. Alongside these we will also be exploring the evolution of our understanding of behaviorism and examining concepts related to understanding and answering questions raised by thought experiments such as *Bettle in the box*, *Cartesian Theater* and *Philosophical Zombieism* to understand the evolution in our progression of understanding Behaviorism. By examining these ideologies and experiments, I plan to argue for a more clear and simplified understanding of behavior that incorporates both observable and unobservable mental states.

We will start off by first understanding the history and the rise and fall of behaviorism, and understanding the intimate relationship between mentality and behaviorism. This concept rose at the start of the 20th century but its idea conception according to Kim starts off in 1913 by J.B. Watson whose declaration we will compare with William James in his classic "*Principles of Psychology*". According to Watson as stated by Kim, Psychology is a purely objective experimental branch whose theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior (Kim, 2010, p. 61). What this view means is we consider psychology to be more or less an experimental study of publicly observable human and animal behavior which brings into question the importance of understanding of internal mental states for these organisms. This field of science dominated scientific psychology until the 60's and according to Kim made behavioral science a preferred name for it across multiple universities (p. 61). The author also rightly states that the rise in behaviorism popularity is no fluke and rightly states that behavior is intimately related to mentality. What the author summarizes is that what we do is inseparably connected with what we think and want as in our behavior is considered a natural expression in conveying these belief and desires. This raises a few questions in our mind such as how intimate is this relationship? In simple words, having a mind is just a matter of exhibiting appropriate patterns of behavior (p. 62). The idea however has lost its special privilege and position from 50s onwards, according to M. Braat et al. 2020, the theoretical and social factors that contributed to the shift in conceptual understandings it is generally seen that psychologist, linguists and computer scientists joined forces and developed empirical approaches to study of mind and cognition. However its influence according to Kim and a few other thought experiments that we will come across still lingers on. These ideas will provide us a better understanding of how interconnected these concepts are.

In order to understand the intimate relationship between mentality and behaviorism among organisms we come across the first of many thought experiments the *Cartesian theater*. According to ideas derived from Descartes, mind is a private inner stage on which mental actions take place. [\[kim p63\]](#) This stage concept needs actors who are represented by our thoughts, sensations, perceptual sensings, emotions and so on

where these 'actors' play ~~out~~ their role and fade away (Kim, 2010, p.63). The fade away in this concept doesn't necessarily mean disappear forever rather it means till the end of the act and it prepares itself for the next scenario. Now it brings into mind a few set of inter connected questions how many people and how do they can view the acts? The answer is simple only oneself. We can consider this person to be the owner of the theater and has a full authoritative control of it, we can also refer him to a director or a producer. From this we can infer that nothing goes on in the theatre without their knowledge. But here we come across the concept of how would others be able to view the internal states of our mind since it is only limited to the owner of the theater. We can formulate an attempt to answer this question with the help of an example similar to one by kim pain of stubbing a toe, when we stub a toe we know we are in pain due to the feelings we experience also termed as direct knowledge but the person looking at us can only infer the state we are in. Which further raises a question wisely stated by Kim, How do you know? The answer is difficult to explain unless we are an expert in biological connections which I am not so my answer follows exactly similar to Kim's "I just do" approach since it is a knowledge associated directly to me or the person experiencing the play or act at hand. This brings to rise another question... how do we know if the person has understood our feelings based on our outer signs? What this question is meant to imply is our outer signs might demonstrate the wrong behavior to the other person. Kim approaches this question explores inductive procedures which he correctly states is self correcting and depends upon the development of the context to actually help the viewer be able to understand the emotions demonstrated by the owner.

The idea of cartesian theater can be explored quite similarly to the thought experiment "Beetle in the box" which was brought forward by Wittgenstein. The concept essentially follows the idea that each person let us say for example standing in a circle and has their own box. They are given conditions that limit them to being able to view all the contents available to them in their own box. The people will say they have a beetle in their box. But this brings about a important question, what do they mean by the term 'beetle'? It is possible to think that we all have a beetle but what if the experiment takes a twist and we are told that only one of us has a beetle and the rest have different things or items. Wittgenstein states that it is difficult to know since the word beetle can be shared by many items and may have different terms in languages which we will explore later on in this essay. This thought experiment like the cartesian theater brings out the ever mysterious cartesian concept of mind where we can only infer the mental state the specific person could possibly be in. Kim elaborates on this cartesian picture by diving into the concepts of "pain when we fall down" where we cannot see what goes on in the persons mind but we can only infer it. But this begs a question if we are groaning or feeling a different sensation to pain how would we be able to explain it to other? A simple answer is communicating the information for example stating I am in pain or visiting a doctor to get a diagnosis on your issue and explaining to the practitioner our systems. We could also say that this communication acts as a transport to convey our sensations, likes and dislike, emotions, regrets etc (Kim p65). Without this language we can only imagine how much more difficult it will be convey not our mental states which will inevitably lead to us failing to maintain or have the social interactions that we do today. However, there is a saying that goes out of necessity comes innovation so one way or another we all come a full circle but we will not be exploring this avenue in this essay.

From the above analysis of the thought experiments we are now in agreement with what Hempel stated in Kim's book that is we see these psychological languages are mainly used for abbreviating the description of certain modes of physical response. In order to get a proper understanding of it we will be looking into a bit of an evolution of our understanding of behaviorism with the introduction of Logical Behaviorism. But why accept it? Like any concept in philosophy or psychology a concept is valid if its preconditions that it aims to suffice is validated such as in the case for logical behaviorism we are brought to the 4 premises outlined by Kim with the prominent one being the first premise that is the verifiability

criterion of meaning [Kim p69]. The next challenge of our languages is for it to have shareable meaning which essentially means common grounds of understanding what the person implies. We can explore these concepts with a help of an example related to “Paul has a toothache” from Kim’s book where we see how this examples help us understand the importance of meaning in our behaviors such as Paul’s erratic gestures to pain will symbolize nothing much more than distress until we ask him “What Happened?” and he explains in a language using terms that we are familiar and easily associate his discomfort with. The best case scenario is speaking to a dentist who will quickly examine and assess his toothache and provide a swift and simple ease towards his pain. Throughout this scenario we come across various other denomination of behaviorism such as verbal behavior which overly simplifies the idea of communicating behavior demonstrated by expressions.

From the above few thought experiments we see how the privacy nature of cartesian minds affect psychological language. But throughout those ideas we were looking to try to understand the mental states of the beings but now what if there exists a situation where a being we are trying to communicate with has no internal mental states. In order to explore more about this concept we will look into another thought experiment called psychological zombieism. But what is this psychological zombieism? In short it is the idea that there is a being maybe from a alternate timeline with the exact same features as us all the way down to the tiniest molecule and since they are related to us we will bestow to them a way of them communicating with each other or a voice to atleast demonstrate some communication method, but they lack one thing that we do and that is presence of mental states or consciousness. Now we are thinking how is this related to behaviorism or the evolution of our understanding of this concept. Well this concept is indirectly related since we now are left behind with a question how do we figure out what goes on in the mind of a ‘zombie’ being since they do not have mental states or consciousness or in a more questionnaire format “How do we understand what their behavior indicates about their mental states if they do not have it?” The simplest answer is we cannot, we can only infer that they feel something if they state using their voice and languages which might be similar to ours. (add more concepts here)

Throughout our exploration starting with the introduction of behaviorism, its rise and fall and exploring various thought experiments and what they entail to help us understand the thought processes that lead to the evolution of the understanding of behaviorism to the basic version we understand and use today. From these experiments we come across the various issues and difficulties that current and old philosophers come across that is the lack of being able to understand the internal mental state of their subjects. Especially with the scenario from philosophical zombies since we can only infer what they are trying to demonstrate without ever knowing their mental states due to them lacking these mental states. As we were focused on the recurring evolution of the ideas behind behaviorism we see as to why with the current means and technology available to us it will not be possible to bridge the gap between the observable and unobservable behavior unless it is explained to the person conducting checks with the person to establish a straight flow of information. Which ultimately helps us understand behaviorism across different beings and help us understand various views that acknowledges the complex relationship between mind and behavior.

Resources:

1. [Animal Cognition - Google Books](#)
2. [What Happened to Behaviorism – Association for Psychological Science – APS](#)
3. [The New Behaviorism | Second Edition | John Staddon | Taylor & Francis \(taylorfrancis.com\)](#)
4. [Philosophy of behaviorism \(nih.gov\)](#)
5. [Behaviorism | John B. Watson | Taylor & Francis eBooks, Reference Work \(taylorfrancis.com\)](#)
6. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/lib/oculcarleton-ebooks/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=665820> (edited)
7. Bit more on the psychology side but [Behaviorism Evolves on JSTOR \(carleton.ca\)](#)
8. [Understanding Behaviorism: Behavior, Culture, and Evolution - William M. Baum - Google Books](#)
9. [1 the Rise and Fall of Behaviorism the Narrative and the Numbers - DocsLib](#) (citation: 10.1037/hop0000146)