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## Behaviorist Philosophies of Kant & Aristotle

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**Abstract:** Abbreviating Kantian and Aristotelian outlooks' evolution, recomposition and differentiation, this brief sketches some effects and outlines such viewpoints have had upon behaviorism, finally delineating emerging approaches on to knowledge and reality.

## Introduction

Within psychology, behaviorism focuses on measurable experiences and scientific methods. It's origin dates back to empiricism, and how it was applicable to human behavior. Such behaviorist prism is currently projected in cognitive-behavioral psychological approaches to therapy. But the paradigm started from a basis, as posted

by Valdivieso (2012), stating that human beings and their behaviors are intimately linked and influenced, directly and indirectly, by environments, and learned experiences each one obtains while relating (p. 56).

Behaviorism found part of its origins in positivist views of science. Such viewpoints based themselves upon observables, with some degree of acceptance regarding rationality. Thus, they push in the direction of what is likely to be observed and measured: specially behavior.

Behaviorism has also some of its roots in a particular shade of kantianism. Kant considered that our minds were both necessary and active, that knowledge came from rational processing, rather than empirical (Brennan, 1999). However, in his prominent proposal defending such ideas, he denied the possibility of scientifically approaching those mental processes since they were inaccessible, possessing an implicit axiomatic character. Kant's specific outlook regarding psychology urges us to look for an approximation that doesn't try to board consciousness itself, at least not in a direct manner.

## Measurable Studies

Behaviorism can originally be conceived as indirect heritage of the aristotelian split from dualism. A

reformulation of such line of thoughts would later enable considering that psychological studies, based uniquely on ontological or metaphysical deductions, repeatedly suffer from inescapable problems, tending to dogmatism and bias. Eventually, these ideas could get rid of the Platonic problem of soul's immateriality: but at the cost of forcedly gazing mainly over concrete human experiences.

Conflicted by such problematics, empiricism implicitly began to search ways to represent underlying models or paradigms within which empirical exercises could be inevitably framed. Thus, it moved from pristine approaches, such as those of Sir Francis Bacon, who primarily promoted mere experimental tabulation of results; on to innovative ideas, like separating knowledge from opinion, purposed by John Locke.

Later, with David Hume as pioneer, a system of subjective interpretations called associationism was developed. This began to balance an explanation regarding consciousness. Under these perspectives, consciousness needed to be considered, as Gondra (2009) puts it, as a force similar to gravity linking sensory impressions over chains of thought (p. 48). In 1781, Kant published his Critique of Pure Reason, placing once again the attention over metaphysics as scientific basis.

Kant can be thought of as if he felt uncomfortable with the purely empirical approaches that had been developing until his time. Although he accepted that all knowledge came from external stimuli, he considered that those were shaped by mental perceptions and conceptions (Brennan, 1999). He did not fully trust extreme empiricism, such as Hume's. For Kant, keeping conceptual skepticism over event causalities tended to disintegrate any body of theoretical knowledge.

In such position, Kant claimed a priori thoughts as basic preconceptions to which it was ultimately inevitable to resort when interpreting reality. However, Leahey (2005) reminds us that in doing so, he also placed thought beyond the reach of introspection, asserting that it could only be investigated indirectly (p. 359).

## Positivist Impulses

Empiricism and associationism both constitute an important pillar upon the emergence of behaviorism. The predictive success of physics at that time prompted many philosophers to try and capture the essence of those deductive methods, and extrapolate them on to other areas. These looks, though following empiricism, echoed that, for example, mathematical principles such as those of Newton, were unquestionably based upon logical deductive

processes. These, as long as attached to observations and not focusing science's interests, allowed a new positivism that better tolerated rational deductions and relationships beyond mere empirics.

With such positivism, a key baseline onto behaviorism arose. It was supported by auxiliary logicism, raised pattern observations, correlations and the scientific laws of subsequent establishments (Leahey, 2005). In this manner, added to the fact that Kant had banned scientific approaches to thought per se, the study of behavior appeared as the natural next step.

## Experimental Psychology

Years later, the methodology of Wilhelm Wundt was influenced, among others, by this same rejection Kant established upon the possibility of measuring consciousness (Fahrenberg, 2012). Wundt came to be considered the father of experimental psychology as he presented one of the first attempts to find correlations between mental experiences and neurological events. With this, psychology finally managed to configure itself as an independent discipline.

Actually, Wundt was able to show that an empirical psychology with scientific nature was possible, without any need for rational companionships. (Leahey, 2005) This,

added to a series of methodological advancements and the separation of psychology as an independent discipline, marked out a wide road along which subsequent psychological advances, aligned with behavioral concerns, would be conducted.

## Main Characteristics

As it's been pointed, behaviorism fed largely on these two philosophical ideas: empiricism, focusing on what is measurable, and the kantian viewpoint that moved away from direct self-approaches. Brennan (1999) argues that the beginning of behaviorism was actually linked to the moment when John Watson urged psychology to abandon the study of consciousness in pursuit of open and observable behaviors.

Behaviorism has been strongly marked by the idea that our environment has a significant effect on any person's behavior. One of the most notable proponents of such ideas was Burrhus Skinner. He conceived human beings as products of their own contingency, implicitly conferring certain inevitability to any psychic configurations subjects generated in order to handle. Skinner challenged the concept of free-will (Brennan, 1999) and expanded the idea of classical associations with an operant one, linked to behavior's reinforcements (Valdivieso, 2012).

In these ways, structuralist outlooks inaugurated by Wundt, over time were colored by functionalism and inspired by developments on evolutionary theories. All, projected over a psychological form of study that sought to explain functions, supplied by particular structural mind constructions. Furthermore, in America, John Dewey considered the emerging psychology of his time to be a reflection of upcoming inevitable social changes (Leahey, 2005).

Along these paths, behaviorism has had to collect and incorporate explanations about how mind interprets information. This processing can somehow be linked to consciousness, and has a direct effect on individual behavior. Beck highlights three key elements to approach the subject: behaviors, stimuli, and processing. In very general terms, processing information contained in the stimuli triggers behaviors (Valdivieso, 2012). Here you can see how mental processes have been incorporated into behavioral theory, generating a cognitive-behavioral approach.

## Conclusions

Behaviorism is a psychological school concentrated on openly observable behaviors based on multiple philosophical and scientific contributions throughout

history. It should be noted that aristotelian, empiricist, associationalist and later even positivist viewpoints exerted direct influences on its development, placing special emphasis on observable experience.

On the other hand, Kant's ideas, particularly his position regarding the study of the mind, and Wundt's interpretations, all contributed to an approach that didn't seek to elucidate internal consciousness mechanics. That is why the focus shifted to behavior.

Despite all this, behaviorist views constantly shed implicit lights on an inescapable fact: the mind somehow interprets information. This is why new reformulations of behaviorism need to emerge each and every time leading to, for example, cognitive-behavioral approaches.



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