

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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Mindless Men: Behaviorism and Christianity

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Behaviorism is an anti-Christian theory that widely permeates secular colleges. It found expression in one of my classes when, in answer to something I said, a girl replied, "Well, after all, I am only an animal." This view is also currently infiltrating colleges that profess to be Christian institutions. If they succumb to this infiltration, these colleges will descend the path by which earlier Christian colleges became secular. Furthermore, behaviorism also influences popular social and political movements. For these reasons, Bible-believing Christians should pay some attention to it.

What Is Behaviorism?

Behaviorism denies the existence of any immaterial soul or spirit; and if it uses the word *mind*, it means only the functioning of the bodily parts. To establish the truth of this assertion, so as to avoid any charge of erecting a straw man, I shall first quote some authors who state the theory in wide generality, and then add some of their particular applications.

One of the most general statements ever made is that of Ernest Nagel in his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association. He said, "The occurrence of events...and the characteristic behavior of various individuals are contingent on the organization of spatio-temporally located bodies.... That this is so, is one of the best-attested conclusions of experience.... There is no place for an immortal spirit, no place for the survival of

personality after the corruption of the body which exhibits it."

An earlier and one of the most popular and influential among psychologists was John B. Watson. Here are some of his phrases: The behaviorist has "dropped from his scientific vocabulary all subjective terms such as sensation, perception, image, purpose, and even thinking and emotion as they were subjectively defined.... Speaking overtly or to ourselves (thinking) is just as objective a type of behavior as baseball." Again, "Our studies of conditioned reflexes make it easy for us to account for a child's fear of the dog on a thoroughly natural science basis without lugging in consciousness or any other so-called mental process."

Before further documentation of behaviorism's rejection of soul, mind, and consciousness, I wish to show that it has political implications as well. Watson says, "The behaviorist...wants to control man's reactions as physical scientists want to control and manipulate other natural phenomena. It is the business of behavioristic psychology...to control human activity." He further says, "I would like to point out there that sometime we will have a behavioristic ethics, experimental in type, which will tell us whether it is advisable...to have one wife or many wives, to have capital punishment or punishment of any kind." Although on this page he looks to future experimentation to decide these questions, on a later page he says point-blank that

"Punishment is a word which ought never to have crept into our language." Watson wrote this in 1924. Today socialistic, secularist Sweden has made it illegal for parents to spank their children or even scold them.

Watson was a psychologist. The same year he published his book, *Behaviorism*, a philosopher, Edgar A. Singer, published a book entitled *Mind as Behavior*. Singer is far more profound than Watson, or any other of the psychologists for that matter. Singer's intellectual penetration makes it extremely difficult, and indeed impossible, to summarize his position in an hour's popular lecture. But here is a sample. Singer accepts the mechanistic view of the universe. Every motion of every atom is caused mechanically. No phenomenon ever violates a law of physics. There are no exceptions to its mathematical equations. This includes every motion of every human body.

However, Singer also wants to preserve for man something called freedom, and to do so he must classify some mechanical objects teleologically. This he does by the device of cross-classification. His favorite example is chronometers. Each and every grandfather's clock, too tall for the shelf, is a functioning mechanism. A sundial has no wheels, but it could not sit on the lawn without the law of gravitation. Electric clocks differ from sundials and from grandfather clocks, too. There is no single mechanical description, no one blueprint, which describes all timepieces. Timepieces or chronometers cannot be described or classified mechanically. The concept is teleological. They have a common purpose, not a common mechanism. From the concept of purpose in inanimate things Singer goes on to define life, sensation, and mind. Including mathematical formulas for measuring the intensity of sensation, this series of interlocking definitions is a philosophic triumph. The psychologists, on the other hand, have few definitions and only infrequently tell us what their words mean.

Finally, Singer defines freedom, not as the ability to do either of two things under the same circumstances, but as the ability to do the same thing under many circumstances. The thing a human

being most wants to do is to survive. Now, a grain of wheat can survive only in a few circumstances—the Gospels tell us it cannot survive on a hard roadway or on stony ground; a bird is able to survive after it alights on a stone by flying away; and a man is freer than a bird because he can survive in disasters that would quickly kill a bird. This is basically the philosophy of Spinoza; it has been recently reproduced by a professedly Christian writer. One thing about it, however, we should not fail to notice. It is this: Although the class of human beings—like the class of timepieces—is defined teleologically, each and every human being—like each timepiece—is completely determined by the laws of physics and chemistry. And it is physical determinism that I wish to refute.

Unfortunately it is not enough to quote only two behaviorists. The least that suffices is two more. Therefore, Ryle and Skinner must provide further documentation. In 1949, Gilbert Ryle published *The Concept of Mind*. He ridicules the body-mind dualism as the theory of the *Ghost in the Machine*. With less ridicule, he explains it as a category mistake. His illustration is interesting. A father takes his young son to see a military parade. The boy wants to see the army. As they watch, the father points out the band, a battalion, a squadron, a battery, a brigade. Then the boy asks, But where is the army? Similarly, people see moving arms and legs and ask, But where is the soul or mind? They fail to understand that soul and mind are simply terms to designate all the bodily parts and their motions. Explicitly Ryle says, "When we describe people as exercising qualities of mind, we are not referring to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects; we are referring to those overt utterances and acts themselves." In other words, Bobby Fischer's genius in chess consists in the way he moves his hands and fingers when he picks up a piece and puts it down again on another square.

Not many pages later Ryle says, "Overt intelligent performances are not clues to the workings of the mind; they are those workings." Through several chapters, Ryle on this basis elaborates a theory of sensation and perception, and as indicated, of intelligence also. This material is a little too detailed

to summarize here. However, an article by Michael S. Gazzaniga, "The Split Brain in Man," very well shows behaviorism's view of thinking. He refers to surgeons cutting the corpus collosum in the brain to sever the two hemispheres. "When this connection between the two halves of the cerebrum was cut," Gazzaniga writes, "each hemisphere functioned independently as if it were a complete brain.... Was the corpus collosum responsible for integration of the two cerebral hemispheres in the intact brain? Did it serve to keep each hemisphere informed about what was going on in the other? ... To what extent were the two half brains actually independent when they were separated? Could they have separate thoughts and even separate emotions?"

He further describes an experiment in which "the right hemisphere saw the red light and heard the left hemisphere say 'green'. Knowing that the answer was wrong, the right hemisphere precipitated a shake of the head, which in turn cued in the left hemisphere to the fact that the answer was wrong, and that it had better correct itself." He also asserted that "the right hemisphere has a very poorly developed grammar." At this point we must ask, Can a cerebral hemisphere see red or green? Can a hemisphere know that an answer is wrong? Can it inform the other hemisphere and tell it to correct itself? But even more fundamental than these questions is the question, Which hemisphere knows the truth? Since on this theory the hemispheres are equally chemical phenomena, how can the chemistry of one be true and the chemistry of the other be false? Is the combination of sodium and chlorine into salt any more true or false than the combination of lead and oxygen into litharge?

B.F. Skinner

But before offering too many criticisms, we must consider the documentation provided by the best known and most influential behaviorist of the present time. The gentleman is B. F. Skinner, and the volume from which the quotations will be taken is entitled *About Behaviorism*.

Although Skinner repudiates a number of Watson's details, he holds to the basic position that when one refers behavior to states of mind, one founders on

the question how an immaterial mind can cause physical action. Therefore "a more explicit strategy," he says, "is to...simply describe what people do." Skinner obviously wants to avoid mentalism. Equally obvious is his desire to identify causes of human behavior and give explanations. But this leads him to use mentalistic terms. He says that a child eats because he feels hungry. He explicitly defends his use of phrases such as, "I have chosen... I have in mind, I am aware." The problem is to see whether he can use these mentalistic phrases unambiguously after he has denied their mentalistic content. In a chapter entitled "The World Within the Skin" he says, "We respond to our own body with three nervous systems." Now, if the word *body* refers unambiguously to an assemblage of arms, legs, organs, and three nervous systems, what is the "we" that responds to them? Is it not simply some bits of these physical objects? And the word *respond* itself can designate nothing other than a complex chemical change. Why then should we say *we*, *he*, or *she*, rather than *it*?

Plato in his dialogue *Theaetetus* responds to a similar point of view. His opponent, Protagoras, was not exactly a behaviorist, but like them he had broken up the human being into an aggregate of parts. Plato likens this to the wooden horse of Troy. It was filled with Greek soldiers. One soldier looked out a hole in the left eye, another peeped through the right ear. But, Plato insisted, the horse itself saw nothing. It had no soul or mind.

But discussions of these epistemological difficulties must be curtailed if there is to be time to mention morality. Every philosophy bears implications regarding ethics, and behaviorism's are not surreptitious. Skinner openly states his aim to alter morals and politics. Therefore we must discover the direction Skinner intends to take; we must examine his justification for that change; and we must judge of the consistency or lack of consistency between behaviorism's first principles and its derivative ethics. The matter of consistency can be highlighted by bringing together the first few words of chapter twelve in "The Question of Control" and the final sentence of its final chapter: "A scientific analysis of behavior must, I believe [Skinner speaking],

assume that a person's behavior is controlled by his genetic and environmental histories rather than by the person himself as an initiatory, creative agent." Then on the last page of the book we find, "In the behavioristic view man can now control his own destiny because he knows what must be done and how to do it."

These two sentences, at least at first sight, seem to be in stark contradiction. Can Skinner in any way explain how man can now control his own destiny when instead of being an initiating agent, he is himself controlled by his genetic and environmental histories? The explanation Skinner gives is that man himself is a part of nature and of nature's chemistry. Therefore whatever physical and chemical reactions occur in a man's body automatically control other events in nature. To quote: "Human behavior is also a form of control [and] we can no more stop controlling nature than we can stop breathing or digesting food." This certainly harmonizes the two seemingly contradictory statements; but the price is the reduction of human control to the level of control exhibited by hydrogen, sulfur, and oxygen in the production of sulfuric acid.

Satisfying himself with this, Skinner immediately proceeds to "organized agencies or institutions, such as governments, religions, and economic systems." And when he puts in a subhead on "Ethics and Compassion," we get the impression of a considerable gap between compassion and sulfuric acid.

Never mind the gap, but consider how Skinner proceeds: "We refrain from hurting others," he says, "not because we know how it feels to be hurt, but (1) because hurting other members of the species reduces the chances that the species will survive, and (2) when we have hurt others, we ourselves have been hurt."

This argument is fallacious on two counts. It is logically invalid and its premises have no empirical justification. Note that Hitler murdered five million Jews in order to ensure the survival of a better human species. Mao massacred thirty million Chinese, and instead of hurting himself thereby, he increased the food rations for the survivors.

Furthermore, even if certain conduct should decrease the species' chance of survival, what is that to me? After all, evolution guarantees the survival of the fittest, so that it is no concern of mine what species survives. Indeed, the human race has proved to be a natural disaster. Why *ought* it survive? Behaviorism can produce no reason why anything ought or ought not to be done.

Behaviorism and Baseball

If now a thought is a physical or chemical motion inside the brain, it can be illustrated by a pitched ball in Yankee Stadium. The stadium represents the brain or body; the pitched ball is the thought. Suppose the first pitch of the game is an inside curve. Now, since the pitch is a dated event, it cannot have happened previously to this game, nor can it be repeated in a later inning. Of course, a pitch in the third inning may also be an inside curve; but it cannot be identical to the first. The inside curve in the third inning comes fifteen minutes later; its speed is not precisely the same; and it breaks about a half-inch higher. That means that I can never have the same thought twice. If I think thought X at 2:21 P.M., I cannot have that thought again at 3:12 or ever after. Behaviorism makes memory impossible.

The most obvious answer to this is that these two pitches resemble each other so closely that one cannot tell the difference between them. Hence, though we can never have the exact same thought, we can nonetheless have a similar thought. But this reply complicates the situation. The thought that the curve in the third inning is similar to the curve in the first inning has to be the knuckle ball in the fourth inning. Similarity is itself a motion. It is as much a dated pitch as the other two. It came five or ten minutes after the pitch in the third inning. How then can a motion ten minutes after the second curve connect two motions that no longer exist? Behaviorism therefore cannot discover that any two motions are similar.

There is a further complication. It is all the more obvious that none of these pitches, nor any other in the Yankee Stadium, can be the motion of a different ball in San Diego. The San Diego diamond

is a different mind. Two minds can never have the same pitch. That is why no one else can have the least idea of what Skinner and Ryle mean. Nor can they themselves have any idea of what they wrote, now that the inning is over.

The Clockwork Image

That Christianity cannot tolerate behaviorism's denial of an immortal soul is a thesis distinctly stated by John Calvin. To quote: "That man consists of soul and body ought not to be controverted.... Christ commending his spirit to the Father, and Stephen his to Christ, intend no other than that, when the soul is liberated from the prison of the flesh, God is its perpetual keeper. Those who imagine that the soul is...a breath or faculty divinely infused with the body...are proved to be in gross error.... How could an affection or emotion, without any essence, penetrate to the tribunal of God? ... For the body is not affected by the fear of spiritual punishment." So says Calvin, and more that I cannot quote now.

Surprising though it be, Donald M. MacKay, a professing Christian, tries to convert Christians to behaviorism in a book entitled *The Clock-Work Image*. Since Mr. MacKay aims to combine behaviorism and Christianity, we may expect to find his material confusing and self-contradictory, for behavioristic Christianity is as impossible as Pelagian Augustinianism. Such a combination complicates analysis and discussion. A paragraph, or even a single sentence at times, will both affirm and deny a Christian doctrine. For example, he both asserts and denies creation ex nihilo.

Let it be noted that I plainly acknowledge the presence of Christian elements in his book; but for the present purpose this discussion is confined to the clockwork image of man's mind and how this behavioristic clockwork is incompatible with Christianity. First of all, Dr. MacKay views science as based on hard, observational data free from any philosophical extrapolation. He explicitly states, "In order to explain human behavior, chains of cause and effect can legitimately be sought and found in terms of physics." Note well that these chains of cause and effect are found, not invented, and are

found legitimately without any philosophic interpretation modifying the causal laws.

But this view of science is itself a philosophic interpretation. It assumes that hard, uninterpreted data can be found, and that from these data the laws of physics with their chains of causes and effects can legitimately be discovered. This philosophy is precisely what I wish to deny. There are no data, and observation never discovers any laws of physics. My refutation of this empiricist view of physics can be studied in a monograph *The Philosophy of Science and Belief in God*; and also in the last chapter of *Horizons of Science*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry. Here I wish particularly to oppose Dr. MacKay's statement, "The Christian gospel itself invites the test of daily experience in essentially the same spirit of openness to evidence that animates the enquiring scientist." This reduction of Christian doctrine to the level of allegedly uninterpreted observation is utterly anti-Christian. Christianity is not based on experience; it is based on a propositional divine revelation, the Holy Scriptures.

Now, when behaviorists come to apply their theory to what we call mental realities, they must redefine such words as *guilt*, *love*, *memory*, and *consciousness* in physical and mechanistic terms. At this point, Dr. MacKay says, "Note that I am far from suggesting that a mechanistic description of this sort is necessarily untrue." We might have expected him to say the opposite. We might suppose that a Christian behaviorist would say something like this: The mechanistic definitions of mental terms are scientifically useful, but they are not necessarily true. But Dr. MacKay said, "I am far from suggesting that they are untrue." If this is not an explicit denial of mind and consciousness, it is at the least a strong preference for physical mechanism and a disparagement of soul and spirit.

The repudiation of a soul and the assertion of behavioristic mechanism are more explicitly indicated in his description of the brain-mind as an electric signboard. In the title of his book, he presents man under the image of clockwork. His extended illustration is that of an electric sign. The big electric sign is completely described by its

circuits, "so complete[ly]" he says, "that we understand just why and how each lamp is flashing." Now, it may be true that the circuits completely describe how the sign works; but they can say nothing about why the sign works. The why includes an electrical engineer who constructed the circuits so that they would present an intelligible message to the public. The blueprint of the circuit explains neither the engineer nor his purpose. Mechanism as such cannot initiate purposes. It requires intelligent minds to initiate a purpose.

That MacKay thinks of the engineer as God and leaves human beings utterly mindless is indicated when he says that the divine artist creates "a chain-mesh which scientifically-minded observers can discern." He speaks of "the mechanisms of the brain," and he takes pleasure in "what science has achieved so far in its mechanistic understanding of man." Very clear is his assertion that "By the scientific enterprise I want to denote all attempts to understand man as a phenomenon in causal terms: in terms of physical chemistry at one level, physiology at another." This, of course, is what Skinner depends on to manipulate people into his political and social totalitarianism. Then, in a most amazing fashion, MacKay concludes his electric sign image with the words, "If, then, our human personality is related to our bodies in anything like the way that a message or a computer program is related to its embodiment, it is clear that brain-science has absolutely nothing to say against the possibility of eternal life."

This statement is amazing because it is so obviously false. If fire or storm destroys an electric sign, no message remains. At death, the message vanishes; no life is left at all. Obviously if man is a soulless mechanism, there is nothing that remains after the body disintegrates. This is precisely what Ernest Nagel expressed so clearly in his presidential address. If mind is behavior, then when the behavior ceases, no mind continues to live. Therefore I believe that MacKay's theory is false, is nonsense in places, and is un-Scriptural.

Christianity and Behaviorism

The preceding arguments claim to expose some of Dr. MacKay's fallacies. What now follows claims that Scripture teaches the falsity of behaviorism. Scripture asserts the existence of God, angels, Satan, and demons. None of these has a body. None has brains. Nothing about them can be described by mathematical laws. Yet they all think. Of course, secular behaviorists do not believe in God or demons. This is now immaterial (!) because the present argument aims only to show that Christianity and behaviorism cannot be harmonized. Maybe a Christian (?) behaviorist would claim that he has been thinking only of human beings. But if he has been thinking of thinking, his theory of thinking should apply to all beings who think. Obviously it does not.

Without any diminution of the conclusive force of this consideration, there are other Scriptural themes that completely refute behaviorism. First, in Genesis, God fashioned a physical body, that could not think, then he breathed his spirit into the clay, and the combination made a living man. But before receiving the spirit, the physical brain could not think.

Second, Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land because of a sin he had committed. "He went up from the plains of Moab...to the top of Pisgah.... So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab...and he [the Lord] buried him...but no man knows of his sepulchre unto this day" (*Deuteronomy 34:1-6*). In the course of a century his brain decomposed, and after fourteen centuries there could have been very little left of his body. Nevertheless, Moses kept on thinking without brains or body, for on the Mount of Transfiguration Moses held a theological conversation concerning the doctrine of the Atonement with a refulgent Jesus, who may not have been using his brains, either (*Luke 9:29-31*).

The final example is that of Jesus and the thief on the cross. Jesus said, "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise." By sunset, the bodies of Jesus and the thief had been buried. They were dead. Their brains were inoperative. Yet the two persons were enjoying paradise. No doubt the thief was praising God for his unanticipated salvation. That is to say,

he was thinking, but not with his decomposing brains. Thinking is not a function of brains.

Now, finally, like the thief on the cross and like Moses, some of our friends have died; we too shall die, unless Christ returns within a year or two; then being dead, our brains and bodies being buried, we also shall engage in theological discussions with Christ and those who preceded us there. Theology does not require brains; it requires a mind or spirit; and behaviorism is a denial of the Gospel.