

PART III

INTRODUCTION TO BEHAVIOURISM

In the years following the turn of the century, psychologists became increasingly envious of the rapid growth in scientific knowledge. Subjects such as physics, chemistry and biology, and applied forms of these sciences such as engineering and medicine, were continually making startling advances. As a result of their envy some psychologists suggested that if psychology modelled itself on the objectivity of other sciences, it would achieve the same kind of success.

Watson (1913) crystallised this desire for objectivity when he suggested that since behaviour is the only aspect of an individual's psychology that is open to observation and scrutiny, behaviour alone should be the focus of study. Concepts such as 'thought', 'feeling' or 'the mind' should not be included in the science of psychology since they cannot be observed or measured. It is this emphasis on behaviour to the exclusion of what are customarily regarded as important psychological processes that lies behind the term 'behaviourism'.

The first 50 years of behaviourism had three main strands: experimental work with animals, a preoccupation with how learning takes place and the relationship between learning and reward. The first of these, work with animals, was carried out acknowledging that an animal is less complicated than a human being and is therefore a more appropriate subject with

which to start. The rat was the animal most frequently used since rats bred quickly and, as a consequence, were a ready source of new experimental subjects.

The process of learning was seen as central to understanding behaviour. Watson's view, for example, was that all behaviour was learned. The actions of a problem child or the symptoms of mental disorder were learned in the same way as more appropriate behaviour. Therefore making sense of the nature of learning, initially through animal experimentation, became extremely important.

Learning was generally regarded as taking place in response to reward, and behaviourists have a great deal to say about how rewards work. They also have a great deal to say about how rewards can be used to change problematic behaviour.

These early and dominant traditions in behaviourism, emphasising the importance of the study of behaviour alone, animal experimentation, learning and reward, are represented in the fourth chapter of this section, 'The experimental foundations of behaviourism', and to some extent in the second and third chapters on personal change and children.

Over the past 25 years behaviourists have taken an increasingly sympathetic approach to including in their brand of psychology processes that occur inside an individual, processes that are not as accessible to observation as is behaviour. Several trends have combined to produce this change, one of the most significant of which has been the discovery that a person can reproduce the behaviour of a model a long time after having witnessed what that model has done. This, of course, is proof of the presence of some kind of internal process.

This change in behaviourist thinking has provided the basis for a number of developments. One of these is cognitive therapy. This form of therapy is explained in the first chapter in this section.