

## The Inheritance and Transcendence of Watson's Classical Behaviorism on Functionalism

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### Abstract

Watson's classical behaviorism mainly focused on studying cognition and psychological phenomena, and was one of the important representatives of the functionalist psychology school. Watson's classical behaviorism is characterized by its inheritance and transcendence of functionalist psychology, which was a fierce and profound theoretical collision between the "rationalist" and "empiricist" schools. Many aspects, ranging from the psychological phenomenon itself, the relationship between researchers, the self-awareness of psychologists, to the subjective and objective, theory and practice, were systematically expounded. In summarizing these, it can be seen that Watson's classical behaviorism has a clear tendency to surpass the functionalist psychology school, but at the same time, it also reveals that it still faces some important problems in constructing modern psychological processes.

### Keywords

Watson; Functionalism; Psychologists.

### 1. The Nature of Psychology

As a rationalist psychologist, Watsonian behaviorism advocates that psychology should have its own nature. He believes that psychology should be based on its own nature while maintaining its characteristics as an independent school (Rilling, 2000a). Therefore, he summarizes the nature of psychology into two aspects: the study of psychological phenomena and the activity of promoting the improvement of human life, which is how psychology incorporates social life into the scientific system. Regarding the question of "why study psychological phenomena," Watson's classical behaviorism believes that psychological phenomena (and itself) have objectivity and uncertainty (existence and non-existence, cognition and experience). It has also been suggested that "a person becomes an expert because he understands the environment in which he lives and all the activities that occur behind the scenes (cognition and experience), and can understand and perceive the hidden or changing sources behind those indescribable phenomena" (Todd & Morris, 1994). Watsonian behaviorism believes that any science has its inherent characteristics and limitations! This determines its maximum understanding and analysis of psychological phenomena, reflected living standards, and their changes. At the same time, it will continue to improve various viewpoints proposed in its research process; and its overall viewpoint is either positive and optimistic or negative and pessimistic (Shields, 1975).

## 2. Objects and Methods of Psychological Research

In psychological research, objects of study are divided into cognitive and psychological phenomena. Watson proposed that cognitive phenomena include language and mentation, while psychological phenomena consist of thinking, emotion, and consciousness. Watson suggests that these three forms constitute the forms of cognition, which is essentially a collection with unified properties and functions, and a concept with abstract properties and functions. He emphasizes that only by analyzing the combination relationships and related structural forms of different levels of cognition through inductive methods can a systematic cognitive system be established. Thus, Watson's classical behaviorism inherited and surpassed functionalism in terms of research objects and methods (Moore, 2017).

## 3. Theory and Practice of Psychological Processes

Watson's classical behaviorism theory of psychological processes is not only an analysis of the functionalist viewpoint, but also a study of Watson's classical concepts. Moreover, it is a systematic and complete theory of psychological behavior that can categorize different psychological processes into different units such as personality structure theory, personality structural system analysis, psychological process system analysis, and decomposition of unique psychological concepts (Moore, 2011). We can see that Watson has provided rich interpretations of the theory of psychological processes and has strived for richness and completeness in his theory of psychological processes. Furthermore, Watson's classical behaviorism inherited and surpassed its original viewpoints, indicating that his research in this area is more systematic and comprehensive, and from the beginning, he conducted a profound analysis of psychological processes. At the same time, there are some innovative expansions in his research field (such as his theoretical explanations of the relationships between the cognitive system, learning system, and perceptual system). This article will further sort out and analyze some of his research results (Leary, 1987).

## 4. Conclusion: Inheritance and Transcendence of Watsonian Behaviorism

Functionalism explores various psychological phenomena from the viewpoint of adaptive functions in psychology, using the transformation theory to investigate the fascination of the senses (Rilling, 2000b). Although functionalism does not conduct comprehensive research on specific psychological phenomena like other schools of psychology, its broad research scope and open research methods provide references and guidance for future psychological research. Therefore, Watson believed that learning is the formation of conditioned responses by replacing one stimulus with another (Todd, 1994). He believed that humans are born with some instinctive reflexes, such as blinking, sucking, knee-jerk, grasping reflex, orienting reflex, etc. In addition, it also includes crying when hungry, showing a satisfied smile when hungry is satiated, and stretching out when hearing a loud explosion. No innate behavior requires postnatal learning. All actions are formed by conditioning new stimulus-response connections. For example, when a child sees an adult crying, he will actively attract his attention by crying, and then pick him up. This is the psychology and behavior of a person (Green, 2009).

In summary, Watson opposes both the constructivist research on the elements of consciousness and the functionalist research on the functions of consciousness. He believes that the object of psychological research is observable behavior. In his view, the essence of behavior is the adaptation of humans and animals to the external environment, and stimuli and responses are the common elements of all behavior (Carpintero, 2004).

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