

# John Broadus Watson 1878-1958



Behaviorist

"Give me a dozen healthy infants, well informed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist: I might select doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors. I am going beyond my facts and I admit it, but so have the advocates of the contrary and they have been doing it for many thousands of years" (1930).

## EARLY LIFE

- John Broadus Watson was born Jan. 8, 1878 in Greenville, South Carolina.
- His mother, Emma Kesiah Roe-Watson was a very religious woman and named John after a local preacher. His father Pickens Butler Watson is described as a lazy delinquent who contributed nothing to the families material, social, or emotional well being. The couple separated while John was still a youngster.
- John was the fourth out of six children and was well known for being a precocious student.
- John's mother wanted him to be a preacher when he grew up.
- However, John grew up to reject religion as an outdated form of social control, believing in his behaviorist approach would prove more efficient.
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## Academic Training

- Watson began his training at Furman Univ. in 1894 at the age of sixteen.
- He left Furman in 1899 at the age of 21 with a master's degree in psychology.
- After working for a year as an elementary school principal Watson decided to enter Chicago University's PhD program.
- At Chicago Watson took philosophy courses with the noted philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer John Dewey.
- Claiming that he was unable to understand Dewey, Watson pursued a degree in the field of experimental psychology under the guidance of physiologist Henry Donaldson and functional psychologist James Rowland Angell, who later became the President of Yale University. Watson also considered working on the physiology of a dog's brain with the famous U.S. biologist Jacques Loeb who argued that life and the behavior of living things can be explained entirely by chemistry and physics. Loeb also taught that all behavior was dictated by instinct and learned responses to stimuli.
- The combined influences of these distinguished men of science led Watson to develop a highly descriptive, objective approach of behavior that would evolve into behaviorism. In 1903 Watson graduated Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Chicago.
- At that time he was the youngest person to earn a PhD at the University of Chicago.
- Watson's dissertation "Animal Education": An experimental Study on the Psychical Development of the White Rat, Correlated with the Growth of its Nervous System," is described as the first modern scientific book on rat behavior.

## Academic Training Cont'd

- In "Animal Education" Watson described the relationship between myelination (a whitish material made up of protein and fats that surrounds some nerve cells in concentric sheaths, insulating adjacent nerve fibers and enabling transmission of nerve impulses) and learning ability in rats at different ages. Watson showed that the degree was largely unrelated to learning ability.
- Watson stayed on at Chicago Univ. doing research on the relationship between sensory input and learning and bird behavior.
- In 1904 Watson married Mary Ickes who was also a former student at Chicago Univ. The couple had two children John and Mary.
- Watson is probably best known for the controversial experiment dubbed "Little Albert."
- The goal of the experiment was to show how principles of, at the time recently discovered, classical conditioning could be applied to condition fear of a white rat into "Little Albert", a 9 month old baby.
- With Behaviorism Watson put emphasis on external behavior of people and their reactions to given situations rather than the internal mental state of those people. In his opinion, the analysis of behaviors and reactions was the only objective method to get insight into human actions.
- Watson proposed four basic assumptions regarding behavioral radicalism: evolutionary continuism, reductionism, determinism, empiricism.
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## Professional Career

- In 1908 at the age of 29 Watson took a position as professor and director of the psychological laboratory at John Hopkins Univ.
- In 1913 Watson published "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It" sometimes called "The Behaviorist Manifesto."
- In this article, Watson outlines the major features of his new philosophy of psychology, called "behaviorism" The first paragraph of the article describes Watson's behaviorist position. "Psychology as the behaviorist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goals is the prediction and control of behavior. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness. The behaviorist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal response, recognizes no dividing line between man and brute. The behavior of man, with all of its refinement and complexity, forms only a part of the behaviorist total scheme of investigation."
- Watson's academic career was cut short by an affair he had with one of his research assistants.
- Watson was able to make a smooth transition into the field of advertising rising to a position of vice-presidency at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency where he remained until he retired.

## Books/Publications

- Psychological Care of Infant Child (1928)
- Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It (1913)
- Watson edited Psychological Review
- Founding editor, Journal of Experimental Psychology
- President American Psychological Association (1915)

## External links/Sources

- <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Watson/Views.htm>
- <http://alpha.turman.edu/~einstein/watson/watson1.htm>
- <http://ru.edu/~burnag0400/web/35.html>
- <http://robotnik.blogspot.com/2005/09/long-dark-night-of-behaviorism.html>
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_B.\\_Watson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_B._Watson)