

Week 9
Chapter 9
Essay 6

Edwin Burket Twitmyer based his doctoral dissertation on the knee-jerk reflex. He noticed that his subjects began to respond to stimuli other than the original stimulus, which was the tap of the hammer just below the knee. The Zeitgeist in American psychology may not have been ready to accept the notion of a conditioned reflex. Twitmyer may have been too young and inexperienced, or he may have lacked the skills and economic resources to persevere and publicize his ideas. In the decade before Watson formally founded behaviorism, the intellectual climate in the United States favored the idea of an objective psychology. The overall movement of American psychology was in a behavioristic direction. Robert Woodworth at Columbia University wrote that American psychologists were “slowly coming down with behaviorism...as more of them, from 1904 on, expressed a preference for defining psychology as the science of behavior rather than an attempt to describe consciousness” J.R. Angell, a functional psychologist, predicted American psychology was ready for greater objectivity. In 1910, he commented that it seemed possible that the term consciousness would disappear from psychology, much as the term soul had disappeared. Three years later, shortly before the publication of Watson’s behaviorist manifesto, Angell (1913) suggested that it would be profitable if consciousness were forgotten, and animal and human behavior described objectively instead. Pavlov’s condition techniques provided psychology with a basic element of behavior, a workable concrete unit to which complex human behavior could be reduced and experimented under laboratory conditions. An unknown precursor of Pavlov’s work was Alois Kreidl, a physiologist, who demonstrated the basic principles of conditioning in 1896. He found goldfish learned to anticipate feedings from the stimuli associated with the laboratory attendant walking toward the tank. Vladimir Bekhterev was also instrumental in the development of animal psychology and behaviorism. He helped lead the field away from subjective ideas toward objectively overt behavior. Whereas Pavlov’s research focused on glandular secretions, Bekhterev’s interest was the motor conditioning response. By the early 20th century, animal psychology was completely objective in subject matters and methods. Glandular secretions, conditional responses, acts behavior- left no doubt that animal psychology had discarded its subjective ways. Animal psychology was to become a model for behaviorism. Watson preferred animal subjects to human subjects for his psychological research. In 1911 Walter Pillsbury defined psychology as the science of behavior. He argued it was possible to treat human beings as objectively as any other aspect of the physical universe. In 1912, William Montague spoke of moving to discard the “concept of mind or consciousness and to substitute the concept of behavior as the sufficient object of psychological study. “ The notion that psychology should be the science of behavior was rapidly gaining popularity.