

# This Week's Citation Classic

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Mowrer O H. *Learning theory and behavior*. New York: Wiley, 1960. 555 p. [University of Illinois, Champaign, IL]

This book is progressive, in both a logical and historical sense. It pushes stimulus-response (S-R) theory to its limits; then introduces emotions as secondary drives; and, to overcome remaining problems, posits such mental (cognitive) constructs as imagery and servomechanisms. [The *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (SCI<sup>®</sup>) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>™</sup> (SSCI<sup>™</sup>) indicate that this book has been cited over 380 times since 1961.]

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"The book under consideration here, and its companion,<sup>1</sup> are the only publications which I have written specifically as books. The other ten published volumes are collections of articles or unpublished lectures (with a unifying theme), or edited compendiums.

"*Learning Theory and Behavior (LT&B)* was first adumbrated in a paper published 13 years earlier<sup>2</sup> and in a book published three years after that.<sup>3</sup> Research and theory refinement continued for the next six years. The writing and publication of this book and its companion volume took the remaining four years.

"The writing of *LT&B* was like picking ripe fruit. But publication involved rather astonishing circumstances. The final version of the manuscript was mimeographed, and a copy, with a cover letter, was submitted to a publisher who had excellently handled two earlier books for me. However, to my dismay, I got no response, despite follow-up letters, over a period of about six months. At that point I sent a copy to another company, and immediately received an encouraging reply. Soon letters of evaluation were forthcoming, with comments ranging from 'entire approach is wrong' to 'will be of enduring

significance.'

"But no sooner had a contract been signed with this second company than the first publisher belatedly came to life and wrote expressing very active interest in the book. When, in reply, I explained what had transpired, a vice-president was dispatched to talk to me personally to try to get me to break this contract and let his company have the book!

"Shortly thereafter the book went into production, and I found I was dealing with a copy editor with a variety of crotchets, including a total intolerance for the word 'otherwise.' Also, the art department reworked entirely satisfactory illustrations in absolutely ludicrous ways. I protested, gently but firmly, and was invited to New York for a conference with the field editor and the vice-president in charge of production. When the editor and I entered the latter's office, he was already red-faced with anger and immediately released a volley of vituperation. I waited a few minutes for the storm to subside, but it didn't, so I picked up my briefcase and walked out.

"The story of how this seemingly hopeless impasse was eventually resolved is interesting but too complicated to be told here. Suffice it to say that when the book was published (quite handsomely, I thought), it was extensively and, on the whole, favorably reviewed and sold well for about a decade. It then was allowed to go out of print, and a reprint edition has sold very poorly. I was therefore rather amazed, but gratified, to receive a letter from ISI<sup>®</sup> announcing that this book 'has been identified as one of the most cited items in its field' and inviting me to prepare this commentary.

"Perhaps the most distinctive, and useful, feature of this highly cited book is that it turned out to be congruent with what is now called *general systems theory*, as indicated by the 24 references to 'feedback,' three to 'cybernetics,' but none to 'systems' (cf. 'integration')."

1. Mowrer O H. *Learning theory and the symbolic processes*. New York: Wiley, 1960. 473 p.

2. .... On the dual nature of learning—a reinterpretation of conditioning and problem solving. *Harvard Educ. Rev.* 42:3-32, 1947.

3. .... *Learning theory and personality dynamics: selected papers*. New York: Ronald Press, 1950. 776 p.