The Historical Development of Response Psychology

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There are, I venture to say, few psychologists of the present day so thoroughly mentalistic that they do not incorporate some form of motor response in their psychological system. Where they differ is in the importance they attach to such responses and in the relation they believe exists between response and consciousness. The prevailing, and what might be considered the conservative view, is that response follows perception or ideas either as an effect or as an accompaniment and that such conscious states are only affected by response in so far as such response stimulates proprioceptors, which in turn set up an afferent impulse. According to this view, then, consciousness lies, as it were, between the afferent and efferent impulses and consequently occurs before the response. In a previous paper I have described a view which makes response an essential factor of consciousness. It follows from this position that without response there would be no consciousness. No matter how many or how strong are the stimuli and the resulting afferent impulses, without the efferent impulses and specific response, either incipient or overt, an organism would have no awareness of a world; so far as that organism is concerned there would be no experience.

This view undoubtedly seems extreme to many scientists, but it does not in the least break with the past, nor is it new in any of its essential features. It is my purpose, then, in this paper to sketch briefly its historical development and to describe some of the more recent experimental findings which seem to support it. I should say, at the outset, that many of the authors of the past, especially those who wrote before the birth of experimental psychology, made but brief reference to such a view, and no one of them develop-
Editor's Summary