

James G Taylor M.A., DSc

James Garden Taylor was born on the 13th January 1897 in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Born with a club foot, his leg was placed in a metal brace, causing him considerable pain throughout his childhood. He gained an MA degree (First Class) in Psychology and Philosophy at Aberdeen University, and in 1924 was offered a Senior Lectureship at Cape Town University, a position he held until 1963.

He wrote numerous articles which were published in *Trek* magazine, in the *British Journal of Psychology*, the *Scientific American*, as well as a number of other publications. He gained an enthusiastic following amongst psychologists in the United States, in Europe and in Britain.

He formulated the hypothesis that perception is a function of learned behaviour, concluding that for this theory to be verified a subject wearing distorting spectacles would see the world the right way round only when he had learned to adjust his behaviour to the distorted images. Taylor conducted a series of such experiments, in one of which the spectacles reversed left and right. When the subject had been wearing them for eight days he began to see objects, including his own hands and feet, where they actually were, and moving in the right direction. In this experiment the subject wore the spectacles for only half of each day and, as predicted by Taylor, the speed with which he adjusted was several days faster than in a previous experiment in which the spectacles were worn continuously.

At the conclusion of this experiment the subject was filmed riding a bicycle while wearing the distorting spectacles, then taking them off without even wobbling. He had learned to adjust instantly. This and other similar experiments were described by Taylor in his third book, "The Behavioral Basis of Perception" which was published by Yale University Press in 1962.

Before retiring from the University of Cape Town, Taylor was awarded a Doctor of Science degree ([D.Sc](#)) from Aberdeen University, in recognition of his contribution to behaviorism. He was then invited in 1963 to lecture for one year at Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. His wife Dora, who had been writing using pseudonyms criticising the injustices of the apartheid system, in particular education, joined him at Harvard, and while they were there they learned of the worsening political situation in South Africa, and were warned that it would not be safe for Dora to return. They were forced with deep regret to give up their home in Cape Town.

In 1964 Taylor took up a research post at the Defence Research Medical Laboratories at Toronto University, to head a research project concerning the effects of weightlessness in space travel. In 1965 he and his wife moved to England where they lived first in Oxford, and then in Bovingdon, Hertfordshire.

Until his death in Bovingdon from a heart attack in 1974, Dr Taylor continued to write prolifically for all the above mentioned publications, carrying on a lively correspondence with psychologists and behaviourists all over the world, and giving lectures at various universities. He and Dora never returned to Cape Town.