

## Obituary Notices<sup>1</sup>

From *The Interbehaviorist*, 1989, 17, p. 36

### *In Memoriam* *William Stephenson (1902-1989)*

William Stephenson's long and productive academic career was unusual in that it embraced two fields in which he held doctorates -- physics and psychology. As assistant to Charles Spearman, he became involved with factor analysis; this interest was further developed during his work as assistant to Cyril Burt, who was Spearman's successor at the University of London.

From 1939 to 1947, Stephenson was in military service. Then, in 1948, he went to the University of Chicago where he served until 1956 as Visiting Professor and Lecturer. In the late 1950s, he accepted an appointment in the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri, where he worked for the remainder of his life. Missouri gave him the freedom to follow his interests pretty much as they led him and as a result, given his great energy and enthusiasm, he was highly productive.

In 1935, Stephenson introduced the Q-methodology with  $q$  representing person correlations rather than the trait correlations expressed by Pearson's  $r$ . From the beginning, however, Q-methodology was seen as controversial. Burt and Stephenson were in disagreement, and the American factor analysis establishment led by Thurstone ignored or rejected Q. Yet for more than fifty years Stephenson nurtured, developed, and refined Q-methodology with unabated zeal. Although his sights were constantly fixed upon Q, his scholarly interests were extremely broad, ranging over practically all areas in which subjectivity might be considered important.

Stephenson and Carl Rogers were friends from the Chicago days. Rogers and some of his associates used Q-sorts, but

---

<sup>1</sup> These two obituaries are reprinted with author approval and with the approval of the journals in which they originally appeared.

did not employ the full Q-methodology of correlations and factors. It is somewhat paradoxical that most psychologists have used or at least have been familiar with Q-sorts, but very few have made use of the Q-methodology. This is not to say that Q-studies have not been conducted by people in other fields; they have been in relative abundance in such areas as political science, communication, advertising, and education.

It was Stephenson's ambition to establish a science of subjectivity. He was sympathetic with the aims of humanistic psychologists, like Rogers, who employed a phenomenological method. At the same time, he was convinced that phenomenology lacked a satisfactory postulational foundation and methodology. Stephenson sought to work within a fully naturalistic framework and was, therefore, intent upon avoiding all "psychisms." He found what he was looking for in Kantor's interbehavioral psychology and, in particular, in Kantor's behavior segment and the formula for a psychological event. These Stephenson regarded as fundamental. Kantor, however, approached the subject (person) from the psychologist's standpoint (i.e., objectively). Stephenson, through use of the Q-methodology, extended an interbehavioral approach to embrace subjectivity, defined as self-reference.

In time, it became clear to Stephenson that Q operates within the probabilistic framework of quantum theory. A full statement of the implications of this position appeared as a five-part article by Stephenson in *The Psychological Record* entitled "William James, Niels Bohr, and Complementarity" (e.g., Stephenson, 1988).

Stephenson was a friendly man, and gracious in manner, yet he was an intense and enthusiastic person obviously completely dedicated to his work. He was often a severe and even a harsh critic, but his criticism was intended simply to place the same heavy intellectual demands on his associates as he had already placed them on himself. As a professional psychologist, Bill Stephenson was a maverick in the best sense of the word. He served psychology well and provided inspiration to many. We should be fortunate to have more like him. (Parker E. Lichtenstein, Newark, OH)

## Reference

Stephenson, W. (1988). William James, Niels Bohr, and complementarity. *The Psychological Record*, 38, 19-35.

---

From *Journalism Educator*, 1989, 44(3), p. 67

### *William Stephenson*

William Stephenson, 87, former professor of journalism and psychology at the University of Missouri at Columbia, died June 14, 1989, after suffering a stroke in May.

Stephenson, a native of England, developed the Q Methodology of attitude and opinion measurement, a concept used in several areas of social science. He managed the Institute of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford for 13 years and held faculty appointments at a number of colleges including the University of Chicago, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of Iowa.

He received doctoral degrees from the University of Durham in physics and the London University in psychology.

Stephenson also conducted extensive mass communication and market research. He served for a time as a consultant for J. Walter Thompson Company in London. His work has been applied in a number of ways, from improving newspaper readership to developing the Ford Mustang.

A memorial fund has been established at the Stephenson Research Center at the Missouri School of Journalism.

---

*...wisdom lingers. (Tennyson)*