# Behaviorism and Summers' Bad Behavior

The anti-social behavior which was most publicly discussed by observers of Larry Summers during his presidency of Harvard, was part of the tinder for the fire of revolt, by faculty and students alike, which forced him out of the university. That behavior was characterized by arrogance, social distance bordering on unawareness of others, and, above all, by a lack of affect—an inability to recognize or deal with the state of mind and intentions of other people.

Summers' "Red Queen" propensity to fire those at Harvard who disagreed with him politically; his hostile behavior over the crisis faculty meetings which eventually led to his removal; and his lack of empathy, led several faculty members to think there was a clinical, or even genetic explanation. Some speculated that it was a form of autism, called Asperger's Syndrome, after its discoverer, Hans Asperger, a Viennese psychiatrist. Asperger's Syndrome was officially recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994. It affects mostly boys, and is commonly known as the "little professor" syndrome.

Summers' family legacy is that of experts in "mathematical economics," based on the idea that human beings in society form their behavior on the basis of mathematical logic, or *can be made to do so*, by government policy and regulation: i.e., behaviorism. One of Summers' uncles, Nobel Prize winner Paul Samuelson, was the inventor of "mathematical economics"; his belief in controlling behavior by mathematical logic led him to the idea, enshrined in his famous textbook, that "built-in government stabilizers" made it impossible for financial institutions' behavior ever to cause another crash! Another uncle is mathematical economist Kenneth Arrow; and Summers' father, a mathematical economist, obsessively trained him in mathematical logic as a boy.

Thus, Summers has, for many years, been a true believer in the work of the kooky group of "behaviorist economists"—Peter Orszag, Cass Sunstein, et al.—exposed in the April 2, 2009 *Time* magazine as shaping Obama Administration economic policies. His notorious Harvard pal Andrei Shleifer was another of them.

As World Bank chief economist in 1991, Summers signed a memo which, on the basis of pure mathematical economics, argued that the industrial countries should ship their toxic waste to Third World countries. "The economic logic is impeccable," the memo argued. The LDCs would benefit from the fees for this service, and their peoples' average lifespans, being shorter, wouldn't be so much affected by the toxic waste.

The reaction to this memo's exposure was one reason, nearly 20 years later, President Obama did not nominate Summers as his Treasury Secretary.