

Psychology – Determinants of Animal Behaviour – Operant Conditioning

Thorndyke suggested that learning could take place through trial and error rather than just association. He demonstrated this through the use of his "hungry cat in a box". The cat had to learn to push a lever before the box would open and it was allowed the food in front of the box. Eventually, the cat learned.

Law of Effect

- Positive effects (rewards) lead to "stamping in" of a behaviour
- Negative effects (punishments) lead to the "stamping out" of a behaviour
- Positive punishment (receiving a shock) decreases behaviour
- Negative punishment (removal of a pleasant stimulus) decreases the likelihood of behaviour
- Behaviour shaping (learned behaviours) are built up through reinforcements
- "Learned helplessness"

Evaluation of Operant Conditioning

- Much evidence based on lab studies of animals
- Useful for guide dogs, circus animals etc.
- Useful in treating mental disorders such as schizophrenia through token economies
- Instinctive drift – what animals learn tends to resemble their instinctive behaviour. Beland et al. (1961) unable to train a pig to put a token in a piggy bank.

Latent Learning

Evidence for latent learning – in the absence of any reward. 1930s, Tolman and Honzik compared maze running in rats that had a reward with ones that did not. Even without the reward, they still learnt to go through the maze. No reward is seemingly necessary.

Insight Learning

Also called the "Aha!" principle. Involves sudden restructuring or reorganisation of a problem. Kohler (1925) placed an ape in a cage with two sticks and a banana outside. The ape linked the two sticks together to get the banana. However, other studies show little evidence of encultured apes doing this. It could be that insight learning is nothing more than conditioned responses.

Observational Learning

Bandura, 1977 – "Bashing Bo-Bo".