

Skinner Behaviourism

Skinner believed in how consequences influenced behaviour. He also felt it was important to distinguish between two forms of learning respondent (also called classical) conditioning and operant (also called instrumental) conditioning.

Respondent conditioning behaviour is elicited by a specific stimulus, while in operant learning the response is emitted. Elicited behaviour is seen as involuntary, emitted behaviour is seen as voluntary. Skinner called this operant conditioning since animals operate on the environment.

Skinner knew that many stimuli determine whether an operant is emitted, but he believed that, in general, it was possible to ignore them. Skinner said that actions, operates, are emitted, and controlled by their consequences.

A reinforcer is defined as any event, which increases the probability of occurrence of a response. An example of this is, a hungry animal which food, would act as a reinforcer.

When something strengthens behaviour it is acting as a reinforcer.

Skinner made 'the Skinner box' this was to measure behaviour. He used rats and small animals to test his theory. The box had a lever that the rat can press. It contained a food tray that the food can be delivered from, as reinforcement. Pressing the bar is the response to be learned; the operant response. If the response were correct, food (reinforcement) would be delivered into the food tray.

Skinner also believed that reinforcement has a much stronger influence on behaviour than punishment. Punishment, Skinner thought, does not give the correct response.

Skinner also did a study on food-deprived pigeons. Reinforcement was given at random intervals. The pigeon tended to repeat what ever it was doing just before the reinforcement. This behaviour came to dominate the pigeon's behaviour. Skinner called this superstitious behaviour. An example of this is, if a person sitting an exam and is wearing a red top. If then the person does well it might wear the red top again to try to receive the same success as the last exam. This tends to explain the superstitious behaviour of the pigeon.

Questions to ask

1. What did Skinner believe behaviour influenced ?
2. Name the Two forms of learning mentioned
3. What is also known as respondent conditioning ?
4. What is also known as operant conditioning ?
5. What is 'elicited' behaviour ?
6. What is 'emitted' behaviour ?
7. What is a reinforcer ?
8. Give an example of a reinforcer
9. What was the 'Skinner box' measuring ?
10. Give an example of superstitious behaviour

