

## What is free will?

To have free will we must be able to choose our behaviour- it is not determined by either the **environment** or our **genetic inheritance** or some form of **soft determinism** such as the Cognitive Perspective in Psychology would argue.

Behaviourist argue that we do **NOT** have free will because our behaviour is determined by the environment, current or previous environmental experiences which will determine how we behave- we do not have a choice.

To illustrate the behaviourist ideas we can consider the work or studies of firstly **Pavlov**. Pavlov showed how reflex behaviours could be conditioned by various neutral stimuli to become associated with an unconditioned stimulus to evoke a conditioned response such as salivation.

This work was further supported by **Watson's** study on Little **Albert** which showed that humans could be conditioned to fear a previously 'un-scary' object which was a white rat. This study showed that **Albert did not have free will**, he was conditioned by the environment to fear the rat i.e. His behaviour was determined by the environment. However, often researchers such as Minoko found that it is easier to condition a fear in animals of snakes rather than flowers or guns... but this behaviour is still not free will rather it is genetic or biologically determined behaviour.

In contrast to classical conditioning which appears to refute the idea of free will, we can consider **Skinner's** operant conditioning theory. Skinner argued that learning occurred from positive and negative reinforcement and punishment and he denied the possibility of free will in humans. He believed our behaviour was determined by the application by reinforcers and the pattern or schedule of reinforcement used.

Tolman's work contradicts some of Skinner's ideas. Tolman found that rats demonstrated latent learning i.e. They were able to "remember" which arm of the maze had food and which had water (by a cognitive map perhaps) and then when they were hungry they went directly to the food arm of the maze without the **trial and error** of Skinner. This illustrates the more cognitive argument to free will that it is a complex interaction between the environment and biology with some individual processing.

Future work within the Learning Perspective becomes less determinist and more open to the idea of free will. Bandura developed Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Learning Theory which incorporates elements of the individual's motivation and self-efficacy. This suggests that the student in the classroom may pay attention to the lesson avidly if they are highly motivated to succeed or if they feel a failure they may switch off and plan

their wardrobe for the weekend. This shows individual "free will" to some extent although Skinner would argue that this behaviour is the result of past experiences within the classroom and different types of reinforcement from the teacher.

However, a later development within the behaviourist approach was social learning theory, which departed from Skinner's hard determinism. Bandura suggested in his theory of 'reciprocal determinism' that people are both products and producers of their environments. Bandura (1973) argued, "the environment is only a potentiality, not a fixed property that inevitably impinges upon individuals and to which their behaviour eventually adapts. Behaviour partly creates the environment, and the resultant environment, in turn, influences the behaviour".

The view of soft determinism suggests that determinism is not an all-or – nothing situation, but must be related to the circumstances in which behaviour occurred.

Furthermore, most people feel that they possess free will, in the sense that they can freely choose from a number of options. Most people also have feelings of personal responsibility, presumably because they feel that they are in at least partial control of their behaviour.

Thus the concept of free will is not very applicable to the early behaviourist who felt that behaviour was determined by the environment, however, it is very applicable to Bandura's work. Bandura would agree that individuals are not passive robots but actively construct their environment.