

Skinner's ideas on reinforcement, behaviorism and consciousness



Reinforcement is a term in operant conditioning and behavior analysis for the process of increasing the rate or probability of a behavior (e. g. pulling a lever more frequently) by the delivery or emergence of a stimulus (e. g. a candy) immediately or shortly after the behavior, called a " response," is performed.

The response strength is assessed by measuring frequency, duration, latency, accuracy, and/or persistence of the response after reinforcement stops.

The mind is of physical origin, created out of your brain functions of intellect, memory, imagination and intuition. These brain functions rise and fall upon demand creating what is referred to as mind or mind functions. How effectively these mind functions operate depends upon how genetically functional the brain is, the interconnectivity of its circuitry and its chemical integrity. This is what the materialist sees and works with: the transitory brain functions. When the body is deprived of life, the brain dies. To the pure materialist that is the end of that, establishing a potential agnostic or an atheistic mindset.

Using the same example - Alzheimer's disease - the brain or mind functions do become partially or totally inaccessible, but consciousness never alters. Consciousness is your ability to see and know both externally (awareness) and internally (self-awareness). It is your internal screen that sees and knows what is seen and known. And an Alzheimer's patient can always see and know. The patient just does not know what he or she sees or knows, as the mind functions that provided all that information are not accessible.

Behaviorism (or behaviourism), also called the learning perspective (where any physical action is a behavior), is a philosophy of psychology based on the proposition that all things that organisms do—including acting, thinking and feeling—can and should be regarded as behaviors.[1] The behaviorist school of thought maintains that behaviors as such can be described scientifically without recourse either to internal physiological events or to hypothetical constructs such as the mind. [2] Behaviorism comprises the position that all theories should have observational correlates but that there are no philosophical differences between publicly observable processes (such as actions) and privately observable processes (such as thinking and feeling).[3] although he did not necessarily agree with Behaviorism or Behaviorists, Edward Lee Thorndike, John B. Watson who rejected introspective methods and sought to restrict psychology to experimental methods, and B. F. Skinner who conducted research on operant conditioning.[3]

Consciousness (pure awareness) is who you are and does not have a physical origin. The physical mind functions provide the opportunity for that non-physical entity to learn and survive in the physical world. Mind functions come and go, or rise and fall upon demand. Consciousness remains unchanged no matter what the mind functions produce or do not produce. This is the split between consciousness and your brain or mind functions. And that separation is fundamental in understanding your existence. It points directly at pure consciousness as who you are, and not what the mind functions produce. What your mind functions produce is what consciousness can see and know. You take that production as who you are, as it can be

witnessed. It is a deception that controls your life without you being aware of that deceit. This is your shadow-world.

Skinner argued that verbal behavior is a function of the speaker's current environment and his past behavioral and genetic history. For Skinner, the proper object of study is behavior itself, analyzed without reference to hypothetical (mental) structures, but rather with reference to the functional relationships of the behavior in the environment in which it occurs

Skinner influenced education as well as psychology. He was quoted as saying " Teachers must learn how to teach ... they need only to be taught more effective ways of teaching." Skinner asserted that positive reinforcement is more effective at changing and establishing behavior than punishment, with obvious implications for the then widespread practice of rote learning and punitive discipline in education. Skinner also suggests that the main thing people learn from being punished is how to avoid punishment.

Skinner says that there are five main obstacles to learning:

People have a fear of failure.

The task is not broken down into small enough steps.

There is a lack of directions.

There is also a lack of clarity in the directions.

Positive reinforcement is lacking.

Skinner suggests that any age-appropriate skill can be taught using five principles to remedy the above problems:

Give the learner immediate feedback.

Break down the task into small steps.

Repeat the directions as many times as possible.

Work from the most simple to the most complex tasks.

Give positive reinforcement.

B. F. Skinner, the researcher who articulated the major theoretical constructs of reinforcement and behaviorism, defined reinforcers according to the change in response strength rather than to more subjective criteria, such as what is pleasurable or valuable to someone. Accordingly, activities, foods or items considered pleasant or enjoyable may not necessarily be reinforcing (because they produce no increase in the response preceding them). Stimuli, settings, and activities only fit the definition of reinforcers if the behavior that immediately precedes the potential reinforcer increases in similar situations in the future. Reinforcement theory is one of the motivation theories; it states that reinforced behavior will be repeated, and behavior that is not reinforced is less likely to be repeated.[1]

The sole criterion that determines if an item, activity, or food is reinforcing is the change in probability of a behavior after administration of that potential reinforcer. Other theories may focus on additional factors such as whether the person expected the strategy to work at some point, but in the

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behavioral theory, reinforcement is descriptive of an increased probability of a response.

Agreement with the learning theory of:

Behaviorist on building complex behavior through serial schedule of contingency reinforcement. For example: clean-up time, bring their attention towards lesson by giving them star

Important point discussed Skinner's article (1954):

Contingencies of reinforcement by stimulus for shaping required behavior

Contingencies of reinforcement can be used to set-up the cooperative attitude and coordinate the task.

Aversion of consequence

Disagreement with the behaviorist theory:

According to Skinner (1954) continuous reinforcing technique could increase the probability of occurring or shaping complex behavior of any organism " a long series of contingencies is necessary to bring the organism into the possession of mathematical behavior most efficiently."

Adversely, this technique would be fail in the scenario of crowded class to provide them continuous one-to-one reinforcement on their response in order to strengthen efficient behavior in the presence of one teacher. To cite my own example of teaching grade level -1, I was introduced new words of English story book make them efficient in reading those new words by

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applying Skinner's mechanism of strengthening desired behavior through series of contingency reinforcement where gradual reinforcement at each step to each child was unmanageable for a lonely teacher in an allotted period of time. In other words, children required positive reinforcement in each stage led them to approach the complex pattern of behavior which could be unrealistic in more students' classroom setting.

Point of concern:

Critical point should focus before introducing any reinforcer

All the learning theories have their own premises of learning which ultimately goal is to produce an effective learner who apply those complex behavior or knowledge in formal and in-formal environment which they had learned. For example, according to behaviorist school of thought on 'learning' is based on changes in behavior on stimulus-response strengthening mechanism where environment provide stimulus to motivate learner to respond in the manner of desirable behavior which we want them to learn. According to behaviorist perspective contingencies of reinforcement where any event consequences can be increase or reduce the possibility of particular behavior will be occur in future. For example, if teacher praise any student on his better performance it will get more motivated to that student to demonstrate this specific behavior again.

Inconsistent concept:

Skinner (1954) explain the complex contingency of reinforcement by given the example of two birds playing ping-pong ball, that can be strengthen

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various social behavior in academic setting. However, reinforce-complex environment sometime produce unfavorable results. For instance, competitive environment work properly in learning condition when all learner get benefit from consequences as per their efforts they exert. In contrast, few students who are more brilliant in class only get benefits from the incentives which decrease the motivational level of low achieving learners. According to my perspective, behaviorist theory of social contingencies can be applicable in which where every child get benefit from the stimulus-response learning environment.

“ Whatever happened to the psychology as the science of behavior” by B. F. Skinner (1988)

Behaviorist psychology is most concern to understand the control and predicted methods of behavior of any organism. They are unbeliever in introspective method and limited to the experimental psychology (Harzem, 2004)

Skinner's view on Behaviorism:

In the period of Skinner's operant conditioning, the general trend of thought on behaviorist psychology was unclear as the field of scientific study of any organism. The theories of learning was appear as not scientific study of mind exactly rather the concern about human affected behavior with the environment (Skinner as cited in Skinner, 1988). At that time behaviorist psychology lack with the scientific study which focus as stimulus-response connection and affect of contingences of reinforcement.

In international peer review commentary (1988) highlighted some crucial point of behaviorist psychology that Behaviorism did try to examine the organism by their own programmed way and establish methods of learning through stimulus rather investigate the world in individuals inside. For instance, the Skinner's pigeon peck operant conditioning where structured environment entertained pigeon when she perform certain action according to the experimenter wish and those consequences which the bird learned strengthen those behavior and increase the probability of occurrence. So in that sense behaviorist psychology unable to understand internal organ mechanism of learning and mainly work on external stimulus cause for human or animal learning.

Second point highlighted in commentary (1988) in behaviorism is lack of consciousness. If we see the difference between man and brute there is difference exists. Mostly more investigation had done by behaviorism was on animals and animals have restricted with their brain - organ reflex. For example, they perceive things from the environment through their perceptual field and then goes into brain and produce reflexes. In contrast, human have faculty of thinking who can taken things from outer world and can evaluate those emerging consequences by conscious mind.

If we see in man and brute there is conscious exist in their inside. However, with difference that human conscious evolve with intellectual growth but animals have only conscious of reaction to physical environment. In this regard, behaviorist were unable to describe internal consciousness of both organism.