

Essay on the problems with behaviourism

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Behaviourism aims to identify observable, quantifiable laws in order to explain human behaviours. At least three kinds of behaviourism have been recognised. These are structuralism, methodological behaviourism and radical behaviourism (Strawbridge). Although psychology now focuses more on the internal matters of thought and emotions, behaviourism has had a long-lasting impact on countless issues (Behaviourism). However, the use of behaviourism has several major problems.

Firstly, whilst Skinner aligns his theory with Darwin's, there are contradictions between the two. For example, Darwin claims that humans are continually improving themselves to acquire better self-control. However, to raise self-control means to raise free-will, and Skinner's theory denies the existence of free-will (Naik).

A arguable problem with behaviourism is that it fails to show satisfactory evidence regarding human behaviour. Many experiments have been done, demonstrating both Pavlovian conditioning and operant conditioning. However, all of these experiments have been based on the behaviour of animals, rather than on humans (Naik). K. Boulding is sceptical Skinner's likening of animal behaviour to the more complex behaviour of humans (Naik, 1998). More experiments using human participants are required in order to validate the theory.

Another key problem with behaviourism is that it fails to explain the development of human language. Skinner's thinking on operant conditioning are competent in explaining neurosis and phobias. However, they are deficient in applicability to the more complicated human behaviours of language and memory (Naik). The theory's incapacity to explain the

language occurrence has resulted in a many critics dismissing the theory. Behaviourism has been popularly used for many years now, and it is arguable that a theory so widely-used must have substance to it. However, it is important to recognise the flaws in the theory. Its ideas should be cross-referenced with those of other psychological theories in order to reach an informed conclusion regarding its validity.

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