Learning

Psychology 390

Psychology of Learning

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Learning

- Many Definitions
- Webster’s Dictionary
  - The act or experience of one that learns
  - Knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study
- Older psychology
  Changes in behavior as a result of experience.
Klein

- An experiential (not experimental) process resulting in a relatively permanent change in behavior that cannot be explained by temporary states, maturation, or innate response tendencies.
Three Points

- Change in Potential of Behavior.
- Behavior is Relatively Permanent.
- Other Processes are Important.
Change in the Potential

- Learning reflects a change in the potential for a behavior.
- Learning does not automatically lead to a change in behavior.
Behavior is Relatively Permanent

- Changes in behavior due to learning are relatively permanent.
- New experiences can override previously learned behavior.
Other Processes

- Changes in behavior can be due to processes other than learning.
- E.g., eating may be motivated to eat by physiological processes (blood sugar).
  - However eating can be influenced by learning (classical conditioning, experiences with new food, etc.)
Philosophical Assumptions and Trends that have Influenced Learning
Empiricism

- Aristotle, Locke
- All human knowledge comes from experience.
- Nothing is innate
- Tabula Rasa (blank slate)
vs. Nativism

- Plato
- All knowledge is inside of you when you are born.
- Use different methods to get it out.
  - Reasoning
  - Questioning
vs. Rationalism

- We get knowledge by reasoning about things.
**vs. Determinism**

All behavior is predictable. People’s behavior is entirely determined by their heredity and the environment. Includes both past and present environment.
vs. Free Will

- We have the power to determine our actions.
- You are responsible for your behavior, not the environment, genetics, etc.
Second Major Group of Thought
Associationism and Atomism

- **Associationism**
  Knowledge is a series of connections or associations about things.

- **Atomism**
  Complex things come from simpler elements.
  Complex things can be broken down into its simpler elements (have to assume something is connected).
Third Major Influence
Scientific Materialism

- Don’t need anything beyond scientific, physical principles.
- People can be explained by simple physical principles without a “special life force” (e.g. mind).
- We can use the same terms for humans as we do for other things.