

Skinner and Pavlov - The Behaviourist Approach

Behaviourism

The next major trend in psychology, behaviourism, followed directly from functionalism. It went further in its rejection of the special nature of mental events, denying that unobservable and unverifiable mental events were properly the subject matter of psychology. Behaviourists believed that because psychology is the study of observable behaviours, mental events - which cannot be observed - are outside the realm of psychology. Behaviourism is therefore the study of the relation between people's environments and their behaviour; what occurs within their heads is irrelevant.

One of the first behaviourists was Edward Thorndike (1874-1949), an American psychologist who studied the behaviour of animals. He noticed that some events, usually those that one would expect to be pleasant, seemed to 'stamp-in' a response that had just occurred. Noxious events seemed to 'stamp-out' the response, or make it less likely to occur. We now call these processes reinforcement and punishment, and they are described in more detail during the AS-level of the course.

Skinner and Pavlov

- Learning Theory:

Behaviour which is immediately rewarded becomes more likely to be repeated in the near future.

- Classical Conditioning:

If something happened that makes a person produce a reflex response, then other things happening to the person at the same time might produce the same response in future.

- Operant Conditioning:

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1. **Positive reinforcement:** When something **desirable is obtained** in response to doing something. The same behaviour is likely to be repeated again
2. **Negative reinforcement:** When something **undesirable is removed**.
3. **Punishment:** When something **undesirable is received**. The same behaviour is unlikely to be repeated.

The subject matter of psychology is behaviour:

Psychology is a science, and science should have a subject matter which is directly, publicly observable. So psychologists cannot study the mind/cognitive processes scientifically. They should only study behaviour – how people respond to stimuli.

Criticism:

- Ignores the role of thoughts and emotions as it only concentrates on the behaviour of the person
- Takes no interest what happens inside the mind and other cognitive aspects of the person