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Development

Just from the beginning of our lives, all of us begin to develop associations with certain stimuli. We grow up associating shoes with outdoors, leashes with dogs, and wheels with cars. We may also make similar associations when arguing with a parent, and learning that continued whining brings about satisfactory results. It’s interesting that as we develop mentally, the way we learn tends to change. It seems very obvious that elderly people and teens have a very different thinking process. They also are in very different mental stages, and use different parts of their brains. Once all these factors are added up, it’s not as peculiar as to why adults think that teens are impulsive, impatient, and ignorant. Sometimes it’s because they actually are. During developmental stages we also tend to make assumptions about race, ethnicity, genders, and so forth. Much of this has to do with nature itself and our genes, our minds are set to work a certain way. But the environment is what actually puts our brains to use and teaches us things as we grow up. Some of it is through reinforcement, others punishment, both positive and negative.

Eventually we humans learn to understand another’s thoughts and/or feelings and feel empathy. This is similar to mirror neurons; when you view someone or something doing something, and then you later perform the same action. Modeling is where we learn various behaviors by observing and imitating others. A study that was very intriguing was when Italian scientists performed a study on a monkey in order to find out if the monkey thought about moving its hand when it viewed another moving their hand. It turns out that not only monkeys, but many species actually do, and that’s why we feel empathy. All this is because of the way our brain develops and works as we grow up. Many of these situations of learning and developing theories in our brains actually happen at once. It is typically not a one by one approach. Development seems to be a complicated process, because a multitude of things are happening at once. The minute we are born we start taking in thousands of pieces of information, all going toward the instinctual behavior to learn from experiences and stay alive.

Learning (Mod. 18-20)

It’s interesting to talk about how and why people learn, and then walk into a grocery store and watch people and experience them learning. You can see kids begging and begging for candy just enough so that they will eventually get some from their mother or fathers. In this case the child has been under the process of operant conditioning. Because they associated them whining with the getting what it is that they want. This is also an example of positive reinforcement. Which is something that strengthens a response be presenting a pleasurable stimulus. Acquisition is the initial learning of an association. Extinction is the diminished responding that occurs when the conditioned stimulus no long signals the unconditioned stimuli. Which is linked to spontaneous recovery which is the reappearance of a weakened conditioned response after a brief amount of time. Generalization is the tendency to respond likewise to stimuli similar to the conditioned stimuli. Similar to when someone has a car accident, not only will they be afraid of cars, but soon they will be afraid of streets and traffic as well.

Human learning presents many interesting phenomena, from psychological disorders, to subconscious assumptions. Learning is very apparent in everyday life, therefore it is good to know exactly how it is that not just humans, but animals as well, learn. Knowing how we learn can then tell us how we should go about teaching people. Once you know how the brain works, it suddenly isn’t so difficult to teach a dog how to sit, or to come. Phobias also are an obvious form of classical conditioning, because someone his simply just learned to associate a normal day object/experience with a bad object/experience. Just like how Watson taught a child to be afraid of a white rat. And it’s also interesting that the reverse these effects on people, all that needs to be done is the same conditioning, but reversed. It now makes sense why, in order to overcome a fear, you must experience it. That way you can associate that experience with a positive memory. Learning will always be of interest in the psychological field, and scientists will hopefully continue to learn about the brain and the amazing learning/associating abilities it has.