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Psychology Independent: Learning

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Pavlov's Ideologically Scientific Contribution to Psychology

Psychology is generally considered to be a science, despite its applied nature (i.e. it is applied biological science). While both Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner contributed fundamentally important discoveries to the psychological study of learning, (the textbook implies) Skinner contributed a more exhaustive body of work to learning whereas Pavlov's ideology focused more on the scientific method of psychology. Non-psychologists often cite Pavlov for his famous experiment involving classical conditioning, but fewer know the intricacies of his underlying ideology. Until Pavlov's time, psychology had not been defined with empirical scientific evidence; rather, psychology was a more nebulous and vague study.

Pavlov attempted his famous experimentfirst in mostly anecdotal conversations with his researchers. This thought finally developed into formulating an experiment based upon scientific analysis and quantitative results, which helped shape the course of the entire discipline. In part, this ideology was likely effected due to Pavlov's insight into the physiological nature of human reactions (notably, digestion). However, the converse (that his research was a result of his ideology) is equally likely. Pavlov's dog experiment was based upon the quantitative amount of saliva produced by a dog in response to a certain variable (the unconditioned stimulus), and his results can be replicated in laboratory conditions.

Skinner adopted Pavlov's ideology in constructing his own regarding learning, and more broadly, behavior. Particularly striking (especially to American society in New England) is Skinner's aversion to the use of punishment due to the relative lack of success it carries. Skinner posited: punished behavior is suppressed (not forgotten), punishment teaches discrimination (i.e. how to avoid the punishment, not to stop the causation), punishment can teach generalized fear, and physical punishment increases aggression in the receiver. Subsequently, Skinner supported the aforementioned postulates using the psychological scientific method (arguably established by Pavlov), and purported the ideology that solely external influences shape behavior. The salient portion of this allegation lies in the idea that thoughts, feelings, and beliefs do not shape behavior: solely experience shapes behavior.

Any account of Skinner would be incomplete without a nod to his derivation of operant conditioning, which proved to be a significant concept in the field of psychological learning. Likewise, Pavlov's contribution to learning in his induction of classical conditioning appears as the basis of many psychological claims a century later. However, Pavlov's psychologically and biologically rooted background realized scientific-based thinking, which in turn fostered a growth of the discipline of psychology in a new direction.