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Some Problems of Instrumental Avoidance Learning

Hikohito Hiraide

The purpose of this paper is to investigate some recent experiments on avoidance learning. The major topics covered are: (1) active and passive avoidances, (2) autonomic and skeletal motor responses, (3) avoidance of Time-out from positive reinforcement, and (4) acquired properties of pre-shock stimulus (cs).

These conclusions may be summarized as follows: (1) Active and passive avoidances involve the same fundamental principles, of fear conditioning and of the reinforcement of whatever action eliminates the fear. But they are distinguished from the stimuli associated with the fear. We have few experimental reports on extinction of passive avoidance. (2) It doesn't always follow that there is a close connection between autonomic and skeletal responses and then it is questionable whether the measurement of the skeletal responses, which has been used conventionally in the instrumental avoidance training, is a suitable index of the fear. (3) Although some differences between the effects of shock and TO are found, it is tentatively concluded that withdrawing positive reinforcement and eliminating the opportunity to obtain positive reinforcement are aversive. It is requisite to carry out the study of TO from negative reinforcement. (4) It is discussed whether the pre-shock stimulus is an aversive property or a discriminative one. And two of my preliminary experiments are reported.