

Classical Conditioning Chapter 1

This is an excerpt from the text that explains classical conditioning. (page 11)

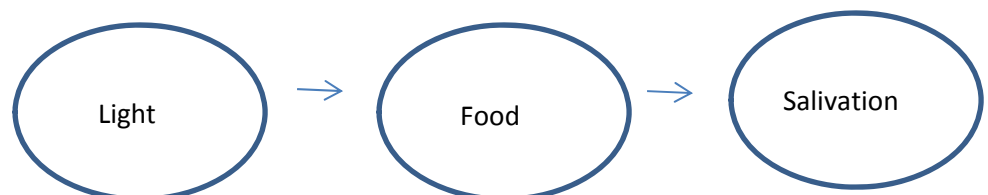
Early work in the field of behavior was conducted by the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936). Pavlov studied a form of learning behavior called a conditioned reflex, in which an animal or human produced a reflex (unconscious) response to a stimulus and, over time, was conditioned to produce the response to a different stimulus that the experimenter associated with the original stimulus. The reflex Pavlov worked with was salivation in response to the presence of food. The salivation reflex could be elicited using a second stimulus, such as a specific sound, that was presented in association with the initial food stimulus several times. Once the response to the second stimulus was “learned,” the food stimulus could be omitted. Pavlov’s “classical conditioning” is only one form of learning behavior studied by behaviorists.

This description is exactly “right-on”, but not enough for you to understand. So let me help clarify:

If I blow air to your eye you will blink. The blinking response is called a **reflex** and it is automatic, like an instinct, you don’t need to learn it. This blinking reflex can be elicited by the air puff (let’s call the air puff a stimulus – which is anything that causes some response in us). Let’s say the experimenter associates the air puff with a specific sound – this means that he makes the specific sound and then immediately blows the air on your eye. And he does this over and over again. So when you hear the specific sound, you are probably now expecting the air puff. So the sequence would be: sound ---- air puff --- you blink. Now what will happen if we just present the sound without the air puff? You got it. You will probably blink to the sound. This reflex of blinking that we started with, can now be elicited by a sound, and of course you had to learn that. The learning is called classical conditioning. When you now blink to the sound, we call the blinking a “conditioned reflex” because you’ve had to learn to do it (unconsciously probably).

The passage above mentions salivation. Isn’t that an automatic reflex when we see food? (it is). So food (a stimulus) automatically elicits salivation (a response). If we learn to associate food with a light, it could happen that when we see the light, now we salivate to it too. In the terms from the passage above, the salivation to the light is a “conditioned reflex”. If all went well, you’d have been classically conditioned.

During Learning:



After Learning

