

Re: Finding useful functions– part 1

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From: Stargazer (*fuckoff_at_spammers.com*)

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Wolf Kirchmeir wrote:

> *Stargazer wrote:*

> [...]>

>>

>> *The control of reinforcement schedules in an experimental setting*

>> *(no matter if with fishes or mermaids) will inform you about how*

>> *the animal reacts to artificially controlled reinforcement*

>> *schedules. That's part of what I call "artificial environments". It*

>> *will not inform you much about how the animal acts in natural*

>> *environments, where contingencies are completely different.*

>

> *It's not clear what you mean by contingencies, not why you think that*

> *natural ones would have different effects than artificial ones. The*

> *reinforcement schedule? The reinforcers? The animal's responses to the*

> *reinforcers? The discriminators? Etc?*

>

> *Just what do you think you are talking about?*

It is an unwarranted assumption to suppose that studying particular schedules of reinforcement will generalize to natural settings, where these schedules will never happen sequentially (besides being intermixed with different sets of stimuli). Additionally, what behaviorists study is not an animal's response to specific stimuli, but the responses to what the animal understands of those stimuli. This may lead to false conclusions, because the experimenter observes ("perceives") the stimuli in a different way than the animal being tested. If that is not enough, there's the effect of neural plasticity. Schedules of reinforcement, operant reinforcement, generalization and discrimination studies, etc., all affect the organism's ability to respond to what the experimenter set up. The organism becomes more "apt" to produce particular behaviors that are a function of what the experimenter contrived. This leads not to an understanding of the true behavior of an animal, but to how behaviors of these animals change in face of a predefined (and artificial) schedule, and not their real capacity to handle stimuli from an unpredictable and hectic natural environment.

SG