Time-Outs and Torture

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Revisiting Maier & Seligman's (1976) dog experiment, they suggest that "uncontrollability ma produce a difficulty learning that responses have succeeded." Considering the similarity of learned helplessness with stressor tolerance: Who may assess that dogs' behaviour constitutes helplessness rather than temporary adaption to stressors? Cognitive interference and concepts of helplessness cannot be assumed in the dog model (Anisman & Merali, 2009).

Time Outs

If children throw tantrums, Armstrong et al. (2014) suggest time out as an appropriate strategy to deal with disruptive behaviour. On the punishment side of intervention methods, time outs should only be used on serious behaviour, e.g., aggression. Parents should use uninteresting locations and deliberately cut interaction to make sure children realize they must resolve their tension by themselves. Sending somebody into time out, the underlying emotion is likely still present or even aggravated by being sent to time out. To reinforce learning, praise should follow successfully completed time out.

Positive and Negative Evaluation of Tolerance

There is a striking resemblance between Seligman's uncontrollability experiment and the setup of time outs. Time outs aim at enhancing emotional self-control in children, i.e. learning to mediate a strongly experienced impulse with internal cognitive means. Dogs who

initially freak at the shock may similarly learn, by being forced to tolerate it, that the shock is not life threatening, and thus does not necessarily need to be escaped (cf. Glazer & Weiss, 1976). This approach either contradicts Rosenbaum's assumption that all behaviour is goal-oriented, or it suggests that goal-orientation is highly subjective and context-dependent, and must not necessarily follow hedonic assumptions. In one case, the resulting behaviour is positively framed as self-restraint, in the other negatively as learned helplessness. This difference in judgment may more reflect social expectations on individual behaviour than presence of individual motivational factors.

This reframing does not negate the findings that stressors aggravate learning processes (Maier, & Seligman, 1976). Their result that multiple conditioning sessions lengthen the period in which helpless behaviour is displayed, promotes an adaptive perspective: Interestingly, the monkeys who pushed the lever to avoid the shock in Brady et al.'s (1958) experiment died from stomach ulcers while the helpless ones that adapted to the shock survived. While this has not been replicated by later experiments, biochemical changes have (Anisman, & Merali, 2009). Stress that comes with preventive behaviour based on the contingency to terminate the shock and promotes hypervigilance may situationally be more harmful than tolerance of a painful but non-lethal stimulus (Higgins, 1997). Tolerance, in the light of evolution, may not be maladaptive, but only become detrimental with chronic exposure. Difference between experiments may be due to individual differences, shock intensity, changes in neurotransmitter activity, or direct influence on the autonomous nervous system (Anisman & Merali, 2009).

Conclusion

From miners to professional athletes, people must learn to tolerate adverse factors that others who are not involved do not need to cultivate. Mammals appear to have an intrinsic

quality that facilitates tolerance of adverse stimuli and appears to be evaluated differently regarding the context. Externally applied electrical shocks, in the long term, cannot be controlled in the same way as internally arising affective states can.

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