



# Learning and Behavior: A Contemporary Synthesis

*Mark E. Bouton*

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## **Learning and Behavior: A Contemporary Synthesis** Mark E. Bouton

The considerable progress that has been made researching fundamental learning processes tells an important and interesting story. In this new book written for undergraduates, graduate students, and curious professionals Mark Bouton recounts that story, providing a strong background in modern learning and behavior theory that is informed by the history of the field. The text reflects the author's conviction that the study of animal learning has a central place in psychology, and that understanding its principles and theories is important for students, psychologists, and scientists in related disciplines (e.g., behavioral neuroscience and clinical psychology). Almost all of the chapters are organized to illustrate how knowledge is accumulated through the systematic development of theory and research. The book opens with a brief history that connects the modern issues with their philosophical and biological roots. The second chapter addresses the idea that basic learning processes are designed to help an organism adapt to a changing world; in the process, it introduces the reader to a wide range of interesting examples of learning. After analyzing some fundamental phenomena in Pavlovian learning, the book then provides a very clear and readable review of modern conditioning theories since the Rescorla-Wagner model, discusses memory retrieval and behavior-system processes that govern performance, and addresses the question (posed by research in the late 1960s and 1970s) of whether the laws of learning and behavior uncovered in the laboratory maze and Skinner box have generality by studying learning in honey bees and categorization and causal judgments in humans. Instrumental learning is then discussed from various perspectives in chapters on behavior and its consequences (research in behavior analysis), how stimuli guide instrumental action (a survey of the field of animal cognition), and how motivation influences instrumental action. The final chapter reviews and integrates the major themes of the book, describing avoidance learning, learned helplessness, and related examples of learning before reviewing the modern cognitive and synthetic perspective on instrumental action. Lively and current, *Learning and Behavior: A Contemporary Synthesis* engages students while illustrating the interconnectedness and excitement of modern research.

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