**2d. Psychological Determinism (Ivan Pavlov - classical conditioning)**

**Background**

* Psychological determinism is associated with the Behaviourist school of thought in Psychology.
* One behaviourist concept of determinism is called reflex conditioning (a.k.a. classical conditioning).
* One of the pioneers of reflex conditioning was Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936). Pavlov’s work on reflex conditioning revolved around his work dogs; thus, his work is often referred to as ‘Pavlov’s Dogs’.

**Reflex/Classical Conditioning: the process**

* Pavlov started his work by agreeing with the common notion that the normal reaction of a dog to the presence of food was to produce saliva. Pavlov called this an ‘unconditioned reflex’ i.e. a dog does not need to be taught this, it is just a normal biological reaction.
* Pavlov started his experiment by ringing a bell, which he called a neutral stimulus, every time food was given to the dogs. Therefore, the dogs began to associate receiving food with the sound of a bell.
* Pavlov developed his experiment by eventually ringing the bell but not producing food for the dogs. However, Pavlov noted that the dogs still produced saliva, even in the absence of food.
* Pavlov concluded the dogs had been ‘conditioned’ to produce the unconditioned reflex of saliva to the neutral stimulus of the bell i.e. the dogs had no choice but to salivate to the sound of a bell.
* Definition of conditioning: the sub-conscious repeating of behaviour to certain environmental conditions i.e. the dogs sub-consciously salivated to the environmental conditions of a bell ringing.

**Reflex/Classical Conditioning: conclusions**

* From the above experiment Pavlov postulated that all human reactions are also just conditioned responses, associated with the environmental conditions of one’s surroundings.
* For example, a young child may enjoy throwing their food. However, a parent will get ‘cross’ with the child for doing this. The child will, therefore, develop an association with throwing their food and a ‘cross’ authoritarian figure (even though throwing food is actually fun). Therefore, in later life the child will have been conditioned not to throw food (which may be a good thing – especially when visiting the parents of a girlfriend/boyfriend).
* Therefore, expanding out, the above example, we can postulate that all of a person’s actions are determined by their own unique environmental conditioning i.e. every action we do is just subconsciously repeating taught conditioned behaviour.

**Operant Conditioning**

* Behaviourist psychologist B.F. Skinner (1904-1990) developed a further development of reflex/classical conditioning, called ‘operant conditioning’.
* Operant conditioning states that a young child can be conditioned to repeat behaviour, by rewarding behaviour that we wish to be repeated (a toddler can be rewarded with a chocolate for using the toilet correctly) and to not repeat certain behaviours with a form of punishment (not allowing a child to watch ‘Peppa Pig’ on TV if they soil themselves). It is this way that a child is conditioned to use the toilet correctly.
* Skinner argued that, in fact, all human reactions come from operant conditioning; therefore, all human reactions are determined by conditioning.