

Hilgard E R. *Theories of learning*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948. 409 p.
[Stanford University, CA]

This book gives an introduction to and a critical exposition of the learning theories prevalent at the time, emphasizing the prominent theorists. The treatment of each theory discusses representative experiments in support of the theory. [The SSC® indicates that this book has been cited in over 695 publications since 1966.]

Ernest R. Hilgard
Department of Psychology
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305

November 10, 1987

The idea of summarizing the various theories of learning took shape as a consequence of my dissatisfaction with an earlier text that I co-authored, *Conditioning and Learning*.¹ Anyone who read that book carefully would have noted the uneasiness of the authors over the limitations of the conditioning approach to learning. It was well received as an expository review at a time when conditioning had come to prominence in American psychology by way of the adaptations and emendations of Pavlov through the writings of C.L. Hull, B.F. Skinner, G.H.S. Razran, and many others, including the book's authors. But that is not the point. Neither of us was content with our failure to arrive at a synthesis that satisfied us. We had made some progress by showing that distinctions between the two kinds of conditioning were more a matter of experimental arrangements than of fundamental processes, and our

classification into classical and instrumental conditioning was widely adopted. At this early date we showed considerable sympathy for E.C. Tolman's² more cognitive approach and described his theory as an expectancy theory, noting that it was appropriate to many aspects of conditioned responses.

I felt that the way to meet this dissatisfaction was to give all the major theories of learning a hearing, just as R.S. Woodworth³ and E. Heidbreder⁴ had done for the broad systematic positions prominent earlier, but by then losing favor, while the more focused learning theories seemed to be supplanting them. I started to write the learning theory book soon after *Conditioning and Learning* appeared, but World War II came along, and when I departed for Washington early in 1942 the manuscript was left to lie fallow. After the war I was busy as a department head trying to meet the demands of enrollments swollen by returning GI's before the teaching staff could be expanded. Having a heavy teaching load, I found that I had made enough progress on the theories of learning book that my notes became the basis for a course that I undertook for our graduate students and for graduate students in education, and in time the book was ready for publication.

The delay in publication owing to the war accounts for emphasis upon the theories that had become prominent in the 1930s, so that the account was in part historical. Later editions continued to reflect the historically prominent theories but encompassed current developments as well.⁵

The influence of the book is attested by such statements as that of G.A. Miller and R. Buckhout 25 years after the book first appeared: "According to E.R. Hilgard, whose textbooks have for many years settled these matters for American students..."⁶ (the quote continues with my somewhat critical characterizations of S-R theories).

1. Hilgard E R & Marquis D G. *Conditioning and learning*. New York: Appleton-Century, 1940. 429 p. (Cited 180 times since 1966.)
2. Tolman E C. *Purposive behavior in animals and men*. New York: Century, 1932. 463 p. (Cited 515 times since 1966.)
3. Woodworth R S. *Contemporary schools of psychology*. New York: Ronald Press, 1931. 232 p. (Cited 45 times since 1966.)
4. Heidbreder E. *Seven psychologies*. New York: Century, 1933. 450 p. (Cited 60 times since 1966.)
5. Bower G H & Hilgard E R. *Theories of learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981. 647 p. [See also: Bower G H. Citation Classic. (Smelser N J, comp.) *Contemporary classics in the social and behavioral sciences*. Philadelphia: ISI Press, 1987. p. 142.]
6. Miller G A & Buckhout R. *Psychology: the science of mental life*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. p. 237.