A New Look at an Old Theory

John M Pearce (University of Cardiff)

Pearce and Hall (1980) proposed that associative learning with one or more stimuli will take place until the outcome that follows them can be predicted by the sum of their associative strengths. At this point, such controlled processing is replaced by automatic processing. Automatic processing allows the stimuli to elicit responses, but prevents them from undergoing further changes to their associative properties. The present talk will explore the merits of an alternative view of this interaction between automatic and controlled processing. Controlled processing is assumed to continue until any outcome that occurs is accurately predicted by a single stimulus. The successful stimulus will then receive automatic processing that not only enables it to elicit a response, but also prevents any stimulus that accompanies it from receiving controlled processing. The implication of these proposals for how the associative strength, and the associability, of a stimulus can be modified will be considered.