Our final criticism of the trial and error doctrine is that . . . its fundamental notion of stimulus–response bonds . . . is wrong. Stimuli do not . . . call out responses willy-nilly. Rather, learning consists in the organisms' discovering and refining what all the respective alternative responses lead to. And then, if . . . the consequences of one of these alternatives is more demanded than the other, the organism will tend . . . to select and to perform the response leading to the more demanded-for consequences. (Tolman, 1932, p. 354)

2. Tolman’s Legacy

In the 1930s, assumptions about mechanism were so deeply entrenched in American psychology that Tolman’s theoretical ideas were viewed as radical. Looking back, Tolman was clearly ahead of his time. Thirty years after Tolman’s theory was published, the grip of behaviorism began to wane and cognitively oriented theories began to flourish (Rescorla, 1988).

Social Learning Theory. One of these theories is known as social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1963; N. E. Miller & Dollard, 1941). Among other things, social learning theory assumes that (1) people can learn in the absence of reinforcement and (2) expectancies are a critical part of what is learned. For example, if we see another person being punished for stealing, we expect to be punished if we steal. These ideas, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13, are derived from Tolman’s theory. Social learning theory has also been used to explain other social psychological phenomena, such as helping behavior (children learn to be helpful by modeling the behavior of others), and prejudice and discrimination (people imitate negative intergroup attitudes as portrayed by parents, peers, and the media).