

First Assigned Read:

History Of Psychology

The history of psychology consists of a prescientific and a scientific epoch. The field of psychology as a scientific endeavor is a relatively new discipline, and borders on various other fields, ranging from physiology and the neurosciences to sociology and anthropology.

Overview:

The end of the 19th century marks the start of psychology as a scientific enterprise. The year 1879 is commonly seen as the start of psychology as an independent field of study, because in that year Wilhelm Wundt founded the first laboratory dedicated exclusively to psychological research (in Leipzig). Other important early contributors to the field include Hermann Ebbinghaus (a pioneer in studies on memory), Ivan Pavlov (who discovered the learning process of classical conditioning), and Sigmund Freud. Freud's influence has been enormous, though more as cultural icon than a force in (scientific) psychology. Freud's basic theories postulated the existence in humans of various unconscious and instinctive "drives", and that the "self" existed as a perpetual battle between the desires and demands of the internal id, ego, and superego.

The 20th century saw a rejection of Freud's theories as being too unscientific, and a reaction against Edward Titchener's abstract approach to the mind. This led to the formulation of behaviorism by John B. Watson, which was popularized by B.F. Skinner. Behaviorism proposed epistemologically limiting psychological study to overt behavior, since that could be quantified and easily measured. Scientific knowledge of the "mind" was considered too metaphysical, hence impossible to achieve. The final decades of the 20th century have seen the rise of a new interdisciplinary approach to studying human psychology, known collectively as cognitive science. Cognitive science again considers the "mind" as a subject for investigation, using the tools of evolutionary psychology, linguistics, computer science, philosophy, and neurobiology. This new form of investigation has proposed that a wide understanding of the human mind is possible, and that such an understanding may be applied to other research domains, such as artificial intelligence.

Prescientific psychology:

The Ebers papyrus (ca 1550 BC) contains a short description of clinical depression. Though full of incantations and foul applications meant to turn away disease-causing demons and other superstition, it also evidences a long tradition of empirical practice and observation.

From its inception, a great deal of work in philosophy, especially in the field of epistemology, dealt with the nature of the mind, its processes, and its contents, though usually in a theoretical (non-empirical) fashion.

The German scholastic philosopher Rudolph Goclenius was the first to use the term

psychology in 1590.

The root of the word psychology (psyche) means "soul" or "spirit" in Greek, and psychology was sometimes considered a study of the soul (in a religious sense of this term), though its emergence as a medical discipline can be seen in Thomas Willis' reference to psychology (the "Doctrine of the Soul") in terms of brain function, as part of his 1672 anatomical treatise "De Anima Brutorum" ("Two Discourses on the Souls of Brutes").

Until about the end of the 19th century, psychology was regarded as a branch of philosophy.

Scientific psychology:

In 1879 Wilhelm Wundt founded a laboratory at the University of Leipzig in Germany, specifically to focus on general and basic questions concerning behaviour and mental states. Then in 1890, William James published the book *Principles of Psychology* which laid many of the foundations for the sorts of questions that psychologists would focus on for years to come. James was the first professor of Psychology at Harvard University. Crucially, the approach of Wundt and James did not involve metaphysical or religious explanations of human thought and behaviour, freeing it from the realms of philosophy and theology, founding the modern science of psychology.

Of great influence to the development of this new scientific field was the establishment of the American Psychological Association in 1892

In the 1890s, the physician Sigmund Freud developed and applied a method of uncovering repressed wishes known as psychoanalysis. Freud's understanding of the mind was largely based on interpretive methods and introspection (a technique also championed by Wundt), but was particularly focused on treatment of individuals' psychological problems. Freud's theories were notable for their emphasis on the roles of the individual's unconscious and sexuality. While Freud's work remains scientifically controversial - with many modern-day psychologists and philosophers of science seeing it as being unscientific (being arguably unfalsifiable) - there is no question of the huge and lasting cultural influence it has had.

Partly as a reaction to the subjective and introspective nature of psychology at the time, behaviourism became popular as a guiding psychological theory. Championed by psychologists such as John B. Watson, Edward Thorndike and B. F. Skinner, behaviourism argued that psychology should be a science of behaviour, not the mind, and rejected the idea of internal mental states such as beliefs, desires or goals, believing all behaviour and learning to be a reaction to the environment. In Watson's 1913 paper *Psychology as the Behaviourist Views It*, he argued that psychology "is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science", "introspection forms no essential part of its methods..." and "The behaviourist... recognizes no dividing line between man and brute".

Behaviourism was the dominant model in psychology for much of the early 20th century, largely due to the creation and successful application (not least of which in advertising) of conditioning theories as scientific models of human behaviour.

However, it became increasingly clear that although behaviourism had made some important discoveries, it was deficient as a guiding theory of human behaviour. Noam Chomsky's review of Skinner's book *Verbal Behaviour* (that aimed to explain language acquisition in a behaviourist framework) is considered one of the major factors in the ending of behaviourism's reign. Chomsky demonstrated that language could not purely be learnt from conditioning, as people could produce sentences unique in structure and meaning that couldn't possibly be generated solely through experience of natural language, implying that there must be internal states of mind that behaviourism rejected as illusory. Similarly, work by Albert Bandura showed that children could learn by social observation, without any change in overt behaviour, and so must be accounted for by internal representations.

The rise of computer technology also promoted the metaphor of mental function as information processing. This, combined with a scientific approach to studying the mind, as well as a belief in internal mental states, led to the rise of cognitivism as the dominant model of the mind.

Links between brain and nervous system function were also becoming common, partly due to the experimental work of people like Charles Sherrington and Donald Hebb, and partly due to studies of people with brain injury (see [cognitive neuropsychology](#)). With the development of technologies for accurately measuring brain function, neuropsychology and cognitive neuroscience have become some of the most active areas in contemporary psychology.

With the increasing involvement of other disciplines (such as philosophy, computer science and neuroscience) in the quest to understand the mind, the umbrella discipline of cognitive science has been created as a means of focusing such efforts in a constructive way.

However, not all psychologists have been happy with what they perceive as mechanical models of the mind and human nature.

Carl Jung, a one-time follower and contemporary of Freud, was instrumental in introducing notions of spirituality into Freudian psychoanalysis (Freud had rejected religion as a mass delusion).

Alfred Adler, after a brief association with Freud's discussion circle, left to form his own discipline, called Individual (indivisible) Psychology. His influence on contemporary psychology has been considerable, with many approaches borrowing fragments of his theory. A recent rebirth of his legacy, Classical Adlerian Psychology, combines Adler's original theory of personality, style of psychotherapy, and philosophy

of living, with Abraham Maslow's vision of optimal functioning.

Humanistic psychology emerged in the 1950s and has continued as a reaction to positivist and scientific approaches to the mind. It stresses a phenomenological view of human experience and seeks to understand human beings and their behaviour by conducting qualitative research. The humanistic approach has its roots in existentialist and phenomenological philosophy and many humanist psychologists completely reject a scientific approach, arguing that trying to turn human experience into measurements strips it of all meaning and relevance to lived existence.

Some of the founding theorists behind this school of thought are Abraham Maslow who formulated a hierarchy of human needs, Carl Rogers who created and developed client centred therapy, and Fritz Perls who helped create and develop Gestalt therapy.

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