

# Introduction to Human Sciences (HS8.102)

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## History of Psychology

### Structuralism and Functionalism

The experimental study of psychology can be said to have had its inception with the establishment of Wilhelm Wundt's lab in Leipzig the late 1800s. He introduced a systematic observational approach to psychology.

He studied the mind by focusing on conscious experience and reaction time. Some questions he asked include:

- How different must two colours be for us to tell them apart?
- How long does it take for us to react to a sound?
- What thoughts come to mind when we solve a maths problem?

This was a structuralist approach: the focus was on what constitutes experience. A contrary view, the functionalist perspective, was introduced by the work of William James.

### Behaviourism

In the 20th century, B. F. Skinner dismissed the idea of subjective experience and introspection; rather, he endorsed an observable and quantifiable approach.

The school of thought founded by him, named behaviourism, focused on understanding the behaviour of learning. In this view, the consequence of an organism's behaviour determines if it will be repeated or not. However, he failed to acknowledge the role of "thinking" in behaviour.

He formulated "laws of learning" to explain all kinds of behaviours.

The first person to bring measurement to the behaviourist perspective was Edward Thorndike. He stated a "law of effect", which was later refined into the notions of reinforcement and punishment by Skinner.

## Cognitivism

Cognitivism, propounded by Edward Tolman, centred on the *interpretation* of stimuli by the mind. Tolman argued that without an understanding of evaluative processes, the understanding of behavioru would be incomplete.

He also introduced *latent learning* – learning that is not immediately visible, but that causes a cognitive change – and the concept of *cognitive maps*. He also produced empirical support in favour of this hypothesis.