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Module 2

Approaches and History of Psychology

Lecture 2: Historical Origins of Psychology



History of Psychology

- Focus: Schools of psychology
- Paths to modern psychology: Ancient philosophy, religion, physiology, physics
- Roots in philosophy: Most important antecedents to modern psychology
 - Not a scientific phase
 - Western philosophers



Roots in philosophy

- Several questions were investigated
 - ❖ How do we know?
 - ❖ Nature of the relationship between mind and body
 - ❖ Definition of mind (Changed several times); different implications for the function of mind and for the human being



Roots in philosophy

- Early Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle)
- Middle ages (Descartes)
- British Empiricism (Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, David Hume, James, Mill, James Stuart Mill)



Early Greeks

Specific contributions

- To recognize that mind and body differ in nature (Dualism)
- Nature of mind and body and their relation to each other (Dualistic position: separating mind and body)



Early Greeks

...contd.

- Suggested the notion of understanding the unknown by reducing it to its constituent parts
- Two methodological approaches:
Empirical and Rational
- Laws of association: Contiguity, Similarity and Contrast



Middle Ages

- General intellectual darkness
- Toward the end of the middle ages a few thinkers questioned the dogma (15th and 16th century)
- French philosopher and mathematician Descartes stands in direct relationship to the history of modern psychology

Middle Ages

....contd.

■ Descartes

- Dualist (interactionist)
- Accurate descriptions of nervous system
- Path of nervous impulses

From Descartes onwards rapid development of science

Emergence of psychology: British philosophy and physiology



British Empiricism

- Dealt with problems that have a bearing on methodology and orientation
- Scientific phase not yet in
- The term psychology was used but not independently from philosophy
- Empiricism places the origin of mind in sensation



Empiricism contd...

- Higher mental processes – complexes of persistent impressions held together by associations
- Associations due to certain conditions present at the time of sensory impressions (repetition, contiguity)
- Notion of *tabula rasa* (blank tablet)

Empiricism ...contd.

- Greeks: Questions about nature of mind
Empirical – associationistic tradition:
answers in elementalism and
associationism
- An experimental/ observational approach
was now required to explore these issues
(paved the way for scientific psychology)



Empiricism

To summarize –

- Primary material of mind – sensations
- Mind can be reduced to its elements by analysis
- John Stuart Mill: Ideas generated from elements are not merely the sum total of individual parts (Gestalt psychology)



Scientific Psychology

- Psychology became empirical
- Unique contributions by Weber, Fechner, Helmholtz and Wundt
- Wundt: Founder of Psychology as a formal academic discipline. Established the first experimental lab in Leipzig, Germany in 1879
- Wundt: Leader of the first school of psychology



Thank you