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Quiz 1

1. Explain depression from modern perspectives and using an eclectic approach.

Depression is an undesirable relatively abnormal psychological state. Fundamentalism suggests that Depression as a behaviour maye have at one point been beneficial, otherwise it wouldn’t be so prevalent. Psychoanalytic Theory might suggest that depression is the product of our conscious mind unsuccessfully controlling and inhibiting our subconscious irrational impulses. Depression is difficult to explain from a Behaviourist perspective because it is often chronic and does not have a clear stimulus. Neuroscience might say that Depression is the result of abnormal chemical ratios in the brain but, again, this at best can describe what is wrong and not what caused it to happening in the first place.

1. What is the definition of a confounding variable?

A confounding variable is anything that is not controlled for or directly being changed or observed in an experiment. If the independent variable is the thing being modified by the experiment, and the dependant variable is the change that the experiment is measuring in response to the independent variable, then a confounding variable is anything else that varies between trials or test groups.

For example: If a researcher was testing reaction time as it relates to hunger but some of the members in one test group hadn't gotten a full night's sleep, then in that experiment sleep/rest would be considered a confounding variable since it was not effectively controlled for.

1. Explain the different perspectives that William James, Sigmund Freud and John Watson on the causes of behavior.

William James believed that natural selection was the process that defined how an organism acted and reacted. He believed that this observation of understanding what in the environment caused an organism to act the way it does is much more useful than understanding the physical/theoretical structure of those mental processes. Understanding what causes change in the first place makes it possible to start influencing those processes even if you don't understand how they are organized.

He believed that organisms had innate built in psychological programs and methods, and that organisms with methods suited better to the environment tend to survive and reproduce but the organisms with worse methods tend not to survive. This view is known as Fundamentalism.

Sigmund Freud focused on the unconscious mind. He believed that one's unconscious was what controlled our impulses and wants, as well as our fundamental base behaviours. He also believed that we humans, having evolved past being “animals,” have developed conscious processes that impede and correct our subconscious impulses. This description of the conscious and unconscious is known as Psychoanalytic Theory.

John Watson followed a stricter and more physical line of reasoning in his studies. He operated under the assumption that the only thing that was scientifically relevant was observable behaviours. It didn’t matter what someone thought or felt because those things are nebulous and impossible to prove or quantify. Instead he focused on physically observable and quantifiable events.

The reasoning structure he created based on these rules is known as Behaviorism. In Behaviorism an environmental stimulus is defined, the response of the organism is predicted or observed, and then the two events are studied using the scientific method and correlated. This method of studying psychology is useful in predicting and defining behaviours, or even forcing a new correlation between a stimulus and reaction, but not very useful to understand why two things may be correlated.