

Psy 151: Introduction to psychology (2010 - 11, I Semester)

Approaches and History of Psychology

A summary of major points discussed during lectures

1. Major approaches

- Neurobiological
 - Behavioural
 - Cognitive
 - Psychoanalytic
 - Phenomenological/ Humanistic
- (Details from reading assignment)**

2. Approaches and History

- Some overlap
- Approaches refer to broad ways of understanding behaviour
- Some approaches have direct roots in schools of psychology

3. 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
 - 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

4. Roots in philosophy

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

5. 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)
- 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

6. Middle Age

- 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
- 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

7. 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
- 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)

8. 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

- Schools of Psychology
- Psychology grew either as an offshoot from the Leipzig lab or as different schools of thought outside Germany – schools were formed
- For several decades (1900 to 1930 approx.) psychology took shape through schools – contemporary psychology developed from these schools

9. Structuralism

- Wundt, Titchener
- Wundt: Experience as the subject matter of psychology (experience dependent on an experiencing person)
- Structure of mind (analysis should be applied to psychological phenomena)
- An attempt to compartmentalize the mind into its basic parts – mental elements
- Elements of consciousness: Sensations, images, affective states (intensity, duration etc.)
- Introspection: Trained observers objectively examine and verbally report what is going on in their minds in response to controlled stimulation; objective attitude
- Criticisms of introspection: Not verifiable, retrospection and memory distortions, subjective, influence of observer's attitude, considerable laboratory training
- Criticisms of structuralism: Reliance on introspection as its main method; Failure to relate mind and action

10. Functionalism

- The study of mind as it functions in adapting the organism to its environment
- American psychologist William James (psychologist, physiologist, philosopher; versatile intellect and pragmatic philosophy)
- Psychology dept., Univ. of Chicago
- Dewey, Angell, Carr
- Major text: Principles of psychology (1890)
- Opposed the reduction of mind to its components
- Emphasized studying consciousness as an ongoing process (stream of consciousness)
- Mind as functional in adjustment. It is not static
- Connection between mind and behaviour
- Learning as adaptive process
- Regarded introspection as a limited method

11. Behaviourism

- Main proponent: American psychologist John B. Watson (began his career in psychology at Chicago University)
- Pavlov, Skinner, Thorndike

- Opposed introspection --- emphasized objective experimental procedures
- Bias in favour of animal psychology
- No place for “mentalist concepts”
- Subjective mental states cannot be the subject matter of psychology
- Major emphasis: Study of observable behaviour such as actions, responses, performances
- Goal of psychology: To identify S-R relations
- Environmental influences as all important
- Major contribution to theory of learning

12. Gestalt Psychology

- The Gestalt movement began in Germany in the early 20th century (about the same time behaviourism began to dominate American Psychology)
- Against reductionistic analysis
- Main contributors: Wertheimer, Kohler, Koffka
- Gestalt roughly means ‘form’ or ‘organized whole’ (reflects the emphasis of this school on organizational processes in behaviour)
- Basic principle: The whole is more than the sum of its parts
- Gestalt psychology is often identified as a theory of perception, although its principles are applicable to other domains
- Rejected the S-R approach
- Seeing the whole picture – moment of insight
- Kohler’s experiment

13. Psycho-analysis

- Synonymous with the name of Sigmund Freud
- A theory of personality
- Complex ideas about human personality and behaviour
- The unconscious, structure of personality, defense mechanisms, psycho-sexual stages of development, Levels of consciousness: Id, Ego, Super-ego