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Psychology Notes Competitive Exams Schools of Thought Part 3

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Major Schools of Thought in Psychology

When psychology was first established as a science separate from biology and philosophy, the debate over how to describe and explain the human mind and behavior began. The different schools of psychology represent the major theories within psychology.

- The first school of thought, structuralism, was advocated by the founder of the first psychology lab, Wilhelm Wundt. Almost immediately, other theories began to emerge and vie for dominance in psychology.
- In the past, psychologists often identified themselves exclusively with one single school of thought. Today, most psychologists have an **eclectic outlook** on psychology. They often draw on ideas and theories from different schools rather than holding to any singular outlook.

The following are some of the major schools of thought that have influenced our knowledge and understanding of psychology:

Structuralism and Functionalism

Structuralism was the first school of psychology, and focused on breaking down mental processes into the most basic components. Major Structuralism thinkers include Wilhelm Wundt and Edward Titchener.

The focus of structuralism was on reducing mental processes down into their most basic elements. Structuralist used techniques such as introspection to analyze the inner processes of the human mind. Functionalism formed as a reaction to the theories of the Structuralist school of thought and was heavily influenced by the work of William James. Major functionalist thinkers included John Dewey and Harvey Carr. Instead of focusing on the mental processes themselves, functionalist thinkers were instead interested in the role that these processes play.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism became a dominant school of thought during the 1950s. It was based upon the work of thinkers such as:

- John B. Watson

- Ivan Pavlov
- B. F. Skinner

Behaviorism suggests that all behavior can be explained by environmental causes rather than by internal forces.

- Behaviorism is focused on observable behavior.
- Theories of learning including classical and operant conditioning were the focus of a great deal of research.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a school of psychology founded by Sigmund.

- This school of thought emphasizes the influence of the unconscious mind on behavior.
- Freud believed that the human mind was composed of three elements: The ID, the Ego and the
 - Super-ego.
- The ID is composed of primal urges.
- The ego is the component of personality charged with dealing with reality.
- The superego is the part of personality that holds all of the ideals and values we internalize from
 - our parents and culture.
- Freud believed that the interaction of these three elements was what led to all of the complex
 - human behaviors.
- Freud's school of thought was enormously influential, but also generated a great deal of controversy.
- This controversy existed not only in his time, but also in modern discussions of Freud's theories. Other
 - major psychoanalytic thinkers include:
 - Anna Freud
 - Carl Jung
 - Erik Eriksson

Humanistic Psychology

- Humanistic psychology developed as a response to psychoanalysis and behaviorism.

- Humanistic psychology focused on individual free will, personal growth and the concept of self-actualization.
- While early schools of thoughts were largely centered on abnormal human behavior, humanistic psychology differed considerably in its emphasis on helping people achieve and fulfill their potential.
- Major humanist thinkers include:
 - Abraham Maslow
 - Carl Rogers.
- Humanistic psychology remains quite popular today and has had a major influence on other areas of psychology including positive psychology.
- This particular branch of psychology is centered on helping people living happier, more fulfilling lives.

Gestalt Psychology

- Gestalt psychology is a school of psychology based upon the idea that we experience things as unified wholes.
- This approach to psychology began in Germany and Austria during the late 19th century in response to the molecular approach of structuralism.
- Instead of breaking down thoughts and behavior to their smallest elements, the gestalt psychologists believed that you must look at the whole of experience.
- According to the gestalt thinkers, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Cognitive Psychology

- Cognitive psychology is the school of psychology that studies mental processes including how people think, perceive, remember and learn.
- As part of the larger field of cognitive science, this branch of psychology is related to other disciplines including neuroscience, philosophy and linguistics.
- Cognitive psychology began to emerge during the 1950s, partly as a response to behaviorism.
- Critics of behaviorism noted that it failed to account for how internal processes influenced behavior.
- This period is sometimes referred to as the “cognitive revolution” as a wealth of research on topics such as information processing, language, memory and perception began to emerge.
- One of the most influential theories from this school of thought was the stages of cognitive development theory proposed by Jean Piaget.

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