

Examrace

Psychology Notes Competitive Exams Schools of Thought Part 4

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Q: (a) What Is Psychology?

(b) Briefly discuss early Schools of Psychology.

Defining Psychology

1. The word “psychology” is the combination of two terms - study (ology) and soul (psyche) , or mind. The derivation of the word from Latin gives it this clear and obvious meaning. Psychology is the STUDY OF MIND.

2. American Psychological Association define it as: “Psychology is the study of the mind and behavior.” Psychology evolved out of both philosophy and biology. Discussions of these two subjects date as far back as the early Greek thinkers including Aristotle and Socrates.

Psychology as a Separate Science

The emergence of psychology as a separate and independent field of study was truly born when Wilhelm Wundt established the first experimental psychology lab in Leipzig, Germany in 1879.

- Wundt’s work was focused on describing the structures that compose the mind.
- This perspective relied heavily on the analysis of sensations and feelings through the
- use of introspection.
 - Introspection is a highly subjective process in which properly trained individuals would
- be able to accurately identify the mental processes that accompanied feelings, sensations and thoughts.

Schools of Thought

Throughout psychology’s history, a number of different schools of thought have formed to explain human thought and behavior. These schools of thought often rise to dominance for a period of time. While these schools of thought are sometimes perceived as competing

forces, each perspective has contributed to our understanding of psychology. The following are some of the major schools of thought in psychology.

- Structuralism
- Functionalism
- Psychoanalysis
- Behaviorism
- Humanism
- Cognitivism

Structuralism

- Structuralism was the first school of psychology and focused on breaking down mental processes into the most basic components.
- Researchers tried to understand the basic elements of consciousness using a method known as introspection.
- Wilhelm Wundt, founder of the first psychology lab, was an advocate of this position and is often considered the founder of structuralism.
- Despite the fact that it was his student, Edward B. Titchener who first coined the term to describe this school of thought.
- While Wundt's work helped to establish psychology as a separate science and contributed methods to experimental psychology and Titchener development of structuralism helped establish the very first "school" of psychology, the structuralism did not last long beyond Titchener's death.

Major Structuralist Thinkers

- Wilhelm Wundt
- Edward B. Titchener

Criticisms of Structuralism

- By today's scientific standards, the experimental methods used to study the structures of the mind were too subjective — the use of introspection led to a lack of reliability in results.
- Other critics argue that structuralism was too concerned with internal behavior, which is not directly observable and cannot be accurately measured.

Strengths of Structuralism

- Structuralism is important because it is the first major school of thought in psychology.
- Structuralism also influenced experimental psychology

Functionalism

- Functionalism formed as a reaction to the structuralism and was heavily influenced by the work of William James and the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin.
- Functionalists sought to explain the mental processes in a more systematic and accurate manner.
- Rather than focusing on the elements of consciousness, functionalists focused on the purpose of consciousness and behavior.
- Functionalism also emphasized individual differences, which had a profound impact on education.

Major Functionalist Thinkers

- William James
- John Dewey
- Harvey Carr
- John Angell

Criticisms of Functionalism

- “It is literature. It is beautiful, but it is not psychology,” said Wilhelm Wundt of functionalist William James’ *The Principles of Psychology*.

Strengths of Functionalism

- Influenced behaviorism and applied psychology.
- Influenced the educational system, especially with regards to John Dewey’s belief that children should learn at the level for which they are developmentally prepared.

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