

The Development of Psychology & Modern Psychology

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- Psychology has its modern roots in the thinking of the French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes who argued that the mind and the body were two separate entities which interacted (dualism)
- The mid-nineteenth century gave rise to materialism and empiricism. Materialism maintained that the mind was made of matter; therefore all natural phenomena, including human behaviour, could be explained in terms of physical entities: the interaction of matter and energy. Empiricism emphasised that all knowledge was acquired by means of sensory experience; no knowledge was innate. The concept of empiricism was developed by John Locke and David Hume.

Modern Psychology

- The first laboratory of experimental psychology was established in Leipzig in 1879 by Wilhelm Wundt.
- Wundt and his colleagues gave rise to structuralism: the idea that the mind was made up of components which could be broken apart and studied. The method of studying these components was introspection – the observation and recall of experience.
- At about the same time Ebbinghaus contributed important methods for objectively measuring learning and forgetting.
- Darwin’s ground-breaking theory of evolution, or theory of natural selection, argued that traits necessary for survival would be inherited and not only those adaptively useful traits would survive.
- Functionalism, which grew out of Darwin’s theory of evolution, was concerned with the process of consciousness such as perceiving and learning. Its major advocates were William James and James Angell.
- Functionalism gave rise to behaviourism, founded by John Watson, which still dominates the way we research. The subject matter of behaviourism is observable behaviour: according to behaviourists, mental events – because they were unobservable – should play no part in scientific psychology. Behaviourism developed a radical strain in the 1950s which viewed the organism’s behaviour strictly in terms of stimulus and response.
- Humanistic psychology is concerned with the special nature of humanity and emphasises human experience, choice, and creativity, and the potential for personal growth.
- The cognitive revolution arose from the belief that behaviourism’s emphasis on observable behaviour missed some of the complexity of human cognition and behaviour. The cognitive revolution saw a rekindling of interest in phenomena such as memory, thinking, creativity, imagination and so on, and human behaviour was interpreted in terms of information processing.
- The biological revolution in psychology manifested itself in the increased interest of psychologists in all fields. This has given rise to cognitive neuroscience in which the disciplines of neuropsychology and cognitive psychology have combined and used neuroimaging methods to create a greater understanding of the role of the brain in thinking, feeling and perceiving, specifically to localise function in the brain.