

The Evolution of Psychology

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The origins of psychology

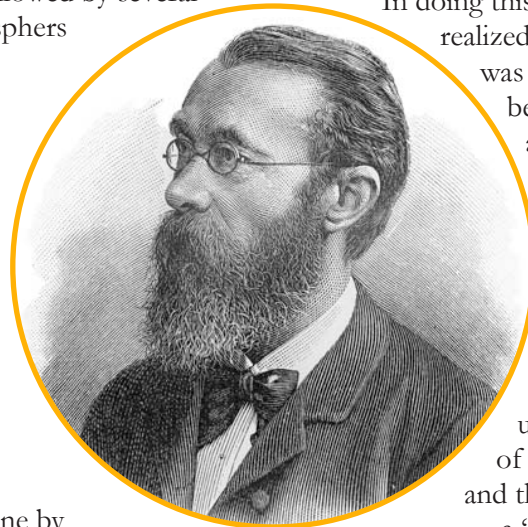
The term Psychology derives from two Greek words “Psyche” which means soul, and “Logos” which refers to the study of a subject, and when combined, meaning “the study of the soul”, to which historically, many early thinkers and philosophers have given thought. Perhaps the earliest on record was Gautama Buddha, who in 400 BC addressed the subject of the mind and body, and explained in detail the steps and stages involved in the formulation of thought and consciousness following sensory stimuli. In more recent history, the French

philosopher Rene Descartes in the 16th and 17th century expounded that the mind is fundamentally different from the mechanical body. He was followed by several European philosophers each giving their opinion on the subject.

Psychology as a formal subject begins with “structuralism” It was in the 1870’s that psychology was recognized formally as a scientific discipline by the pioneering work of a German Professor Wilhelm Wundt. He began to study the basis of consciousness, which he considered to be the primary focus of psychology, by breaking down the mental experiences of individual subjects. Thus modern psychology began as the scientific study of behavior and mental activity. He established a psychology laboratory in the University of Leipzig in 1879 and started the first Psychology Journal to report the outcomes of research

in 1881. The research involved asking subjects to describe what they experienced as they worked on mental tasks such as viewing colours, reading a page in a book, or working on a math problem.

In doing this work they realized that there was a difference between feeling a sensation and the perception or



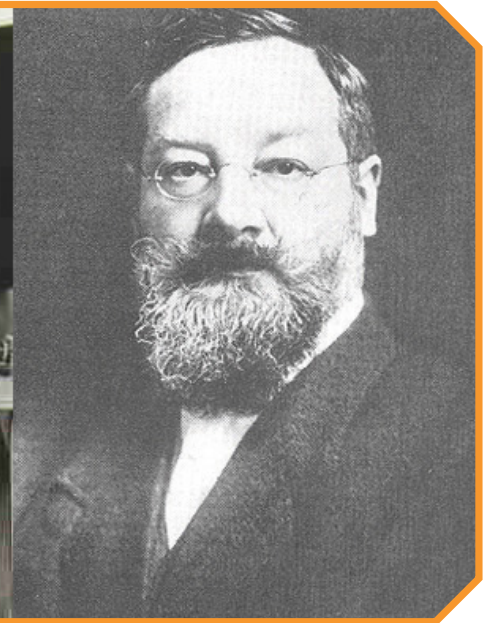
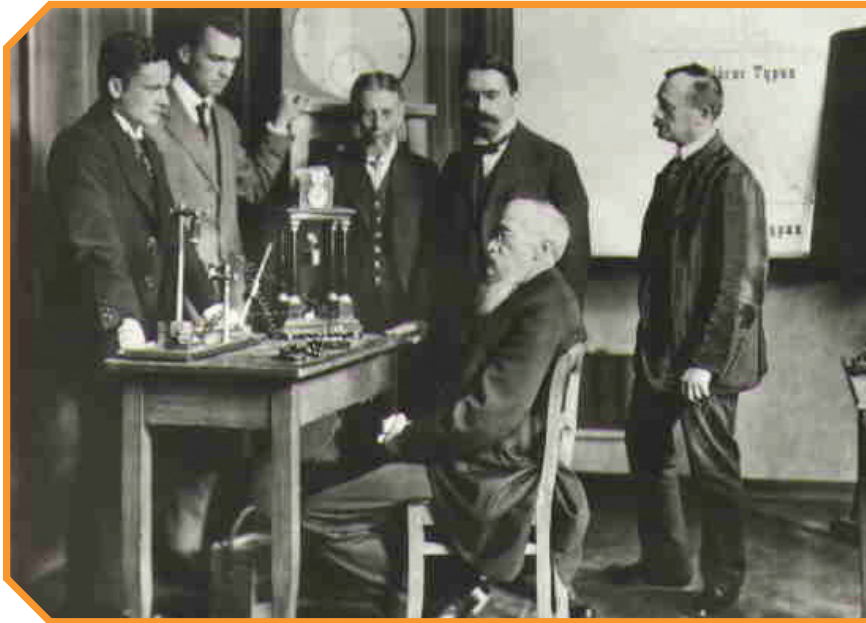
Professor Wilhelm Wundt

understanding of that stimulus, and that there was a “reaction time” between these two

events. This analytical approach led to one of the two schools of thought in psychology known as “structuralism” – which was based on analysing consciousness into its basic elements and investigating how these elements are related. Structuralism sought to examine fundamental components of conscious existence like sensations, feelings and images, by careful self-observation of one’s own conscious experience. A student



Rene Descartes



of Wundt, Edward Titchener who became famous for his work on psychology went back to America and began his own research there. He soon realized that although subjects could do something, eg., a math problem, they could not always describe how they did it and that therefore, there were unconscious processes that could not be described or understood.

“Functionalism”

Soon, another school of Psychology emerged as “functionalism” - which sought to understand why animals and humans acquired the various psychological aspects that they possessed, rather than how they were developed as was the pursuit of structuralism. Led by William James, of the Harvard University functionalism began to investigate the function or purpose of consciousness as opposed to its structure. James wrote the “Principles of Psychology” in 1890, which became the standard reading for generations of psychologists, and an influential text in the history

Edward Titchener

of the subject. Students of the functionalism school of psychology wanted to understand the stream of consciousness and not its elements. They were led to believe that psychology is deeply embedded in cultural and intellectual influences. They believed that Darwin’s Theory of Natural Selection also applied to psychology and that typical psychological characteristics must serve a purpose, were useful or functional. Just as physical characteristics such as developing strong muscles enabled the person to run faster, they believed that the human brain must have adapted to serve a particular function in human experience. This approach is what led to an interest in mental testing, patterns of development, effective education practices, and behavioural differences between sexes. This line of thinking led to evolutionary psychology which is based on the assumption or idea that psychological attributes get selected in a population by their “fitness” or their ability to confer an advantage to the individual to

survive, much along the lines of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Thus the structuralists brought laboratory research, and functionalists developed into two modern schools of psychology thought – 1) applied psychology and 2) behaviorism.

Behavioralism

In the 19th century there was a major input into the field of psychology by Sigmund Freud who introduced the psychodynamic approach to understanding behavior. By extensive analysis of his own patients Freud developed the theory that thoughts, memories, and desires that are well below the surface of conscious awareness nonetheless exert great influence on behavior. He theorized that psychological disturbances are caused by personal conflicts existing at unconscious level. Thus emerged the psychoanalytical theory, which attempts to explain personality, motivation, and mental disorders by focusing on unconscious determinants of behavior. This implied that people are not the masters of their own

minds and went on to suggest that behavior is greatly influenced by how people cope with their sexual urges. These ideas led to heated debate at the time, and were even thought to be scandalous by some.

Later in the 19th century emerged yet another line of thinking in

emphasis on the fact that environmental factors influence and molded behavior. He applied the general principles of behaviourism to improve the way children were taught,



psychology which moved the focus from studying the mind, which was difficult to do in an objective manner, to focusing on behavior itself. "Behaviourists" as they were called, based their ideas on the premise that one could study and understand behavior without knowing how the mind that led to the behavior worked, the latter being difficult to study. J B Watson an American psychologist was perhaps the first behaviourist, and he was greatly influenced by the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, who demonstrated that dogs would secrete saliva on hearing a sound which was previously associated with their meal times. Skinner in the 20th century was of the opinion that internal thoughts could not be studied scientifically, and laid

and went on further to apply these principles to ways of producing peaceful and productive societies. In his book "Beyond freedom and dignity" Skinner expounds the behaviourist theory that organisms tend to repeat responses that lead to positive outcomes, and they tend not to repeat responses that lead to neutral or negative outcomes.

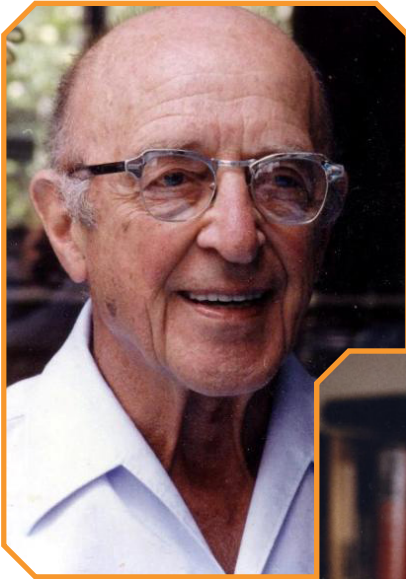
Applications of psychology

Although psychology evolved over the centuries, it had little application to solving practical problems until World War I. Post World War I psychologists began increasingly focusing on the applications of this knowledge to solving problems that occurred in the course of human life. With

time, four main professional specialties in psychology took form: 1) clinical psychology; 2) Counseling; 3) Educational and School and 4) Industrial and Organizational. Clinical Psychology deals with evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of psychological disorders. Counseling Psychology provides assistance to people struggling with everyday problems of moderate severity eg., marriage counseling, school counseling, etc.; Educational and School Psychology works to improve school teachings, curriculum, teacher training, etc.; and Industrial and Organized Psychology deals with a variety of tasks in the business world such as running human resources departments, improving staff morale and attitudes, increase job satisfaction and productivity, examining organizational structures and procedures, making recommendations for improvements.

The humanistic movement in psychology

In the 1950's there was a reaction against the schools of psychoanalysis and behaviorism on the grounds that these approaches were dehumanizing, pessimistic and failed to take account of personal choice. In the late 1950's Abraham



Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers, Rollo May and Erich Fromm.

The humanist movement had a strong influence on the development of psychology from then onwards, and contributed new ways of thinking about mental health. It also offered a new approach to understanding



Erich Fromm

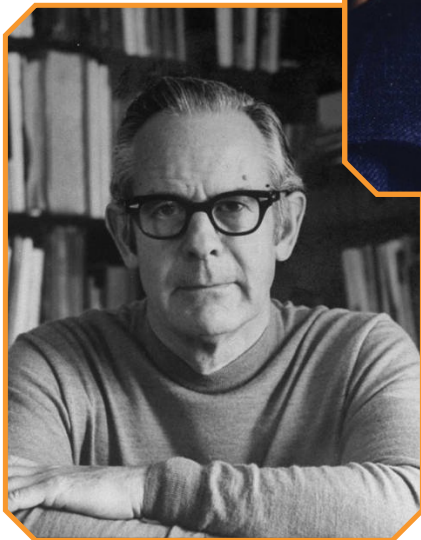
human behaviors, and led to the development of “cognitive psychology” and “positive psychology”.

Applied psychology and the work of psychologists

Today Universities and other higher

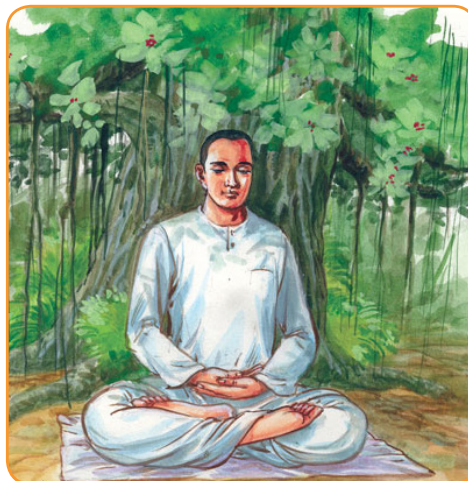
educational institutes award basic degrees in psychology and provide for granting postgraduate degrees in the subject. After the basic degree, students of psychology may receive training to work in several applied professional areas such as clinical practice; counseling; educational fields such as relating to schools; and in industry and organizations. In professing to understand or know about the working of the mind and thereby applying that knowledge, psychologists help people solve mental problems in the above mentioned fields and areas.

Psychiatrists, on the other hand, are medical doctors who diagnose and treat patients with mental illnesses, often with medication but also with various other forms of therapy. Thus, beginning with a curiosity to understand how the mind works, the field of psychology has evolved with psychologists researching and expounding various theories each leading to a school of thought or a branch of psychology. As with most sciences, as the knowledge or theory base grew, they began to be applied to solve problems encountered during human life, be they problems of the mind, learning and teaching, or work. Today psychologists work in highly specialized areas, continuing to research the subject as well as contributing to problem solving and improving the quality of human life.



Rollo May

Maslow began introducing topics such as self-actualization, creativity, individuality, and made them the themes of this new humanistic approach. Humanists thought that human behavior is governed by “self concept” and that psychology must take a more optimistic view of human nature, and take into account the strong human drive towards personal growth. Other major contributors to the humanist approach were



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