Historical Background of Psychology

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What is Psychology?

**Psychology is the science of behavior and mental processes**

- Mental processes: what the brain does when we think, remember, feel, etc.

- Behavior: outwardly observable acts of an individual, alone, or in a group.

**Goals**

- Describe
- Explain
- Predict
- Control mental processes and behavior.
Brief History of Psychology

‘Psychology has a long past, but its real history is short.’

Ebbinghaus (1908)

Psychology’s Roots:

Prescientific Psychology

Scientific Psychology
Prescientific Psychology

- Prescientific Psychology In India, the Buddha pondered how sensations and perceptions combined to form ideas.
- Socrates (469-399 BCE) & Plato (428-348 BCE):
  
  Socrates and his student Plato believed that the mind was separate from the body, that it continued to exist after death, and that ideas were innate.
Aristotle (384-322 BCE):

Aristotle suggested that the soul is not separable from the body and that knowledge (ideas) grow from experience.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650):

Descartes, like Plato, believed in soul (mind) body separation but speculated on how the immaterial mind and the physical body communicated.
Francis Bacon (1561-1626):

Bacon was one of the founders of modern science, especially the experimental method.

John Locke (1632-1704):

Locke held that the mind is a *tabula rasa* or blank sheet at birth and experience writes on it.
Scientific Psychology: Structuralism (1870’s-1900)

Wilhelm Wundt—the father of psychology

- Set up the first psychology lab in 1879.
- Created the approach of structuralism
- Wanted to know what the structure of the mind was
- Used introspection

- Edward Titchener—student of Wundt, introduced experimental psychology to the USA.
Functionalism (1880’s–current)

- Arose in protest to the private mental events studied by structuralists
- Focused on the process of conscious activity
- Had its roots with evolution. How is a particular behavior adaptive?
- William James: Not what mind does, but why it does it
- Became incorporated into all of psychology
Behaviorism (1915–current)

- By 1920, Structuralism and Functionalism were replaced by Behaviorism, Gestalt Psychology & Psychoanalysis.

- J.B Watson-Founder replaced the mind and restricted to the study of behaviour

- Watson’s argument- All behavior is a result of conditioning and the environment shapes behavior by reinforcing specific habits.

- Denied the existence of inborn or innate behavioural tendencies.

- Held that no specific differences between human and animal behaviour

- Behaviorists discussed psychological phenomenon in terms of stimulus and responses, giving rise to the term stimulus-response (S-R) psychology.
Gestalt Psychology

- Gestalt - German word meaning “form” or “configuration”

- Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Kohler - Gestalt Psychologist’s primary interest was perception they believed that perceptual experiences depend on the patterns formed by stimulus and on the organization of experience.

- Whole pattern of sensory activity, the relationships and organizations within this pattern.

- The whole is different from the sum of its parts because of the relationships between the parts.

- School of thought that emphasized the total experience of the individual and not just parts of the mind or behavior
Psychoanalysis

- A theory of personality and method of psychotherapy originated by Sigmund Freud.

- Concept of unconsciousness, thoughts, attitudes, impulses etc that we are unaware of.

- Repressed Unconscious wishes and desires expressed in Dreams, slips of tongue & physical mannerism.

- Method of Free Association
Key features:

- Mind has 3 parts: conscious, unconscious and preconscious
  - conscious: thoughts and perceptions
  - preconscious: available to consciousness, e.g. memories and stored knowledge
  - unconscious: wishes and desires formed in childhood, biological urges. Determines most of behaviour
- Personality has 3 components - id, ego & superego
  - id: unconscious, urges needing instant gratification
  - ego: develops in childhood, rational. Chooses between id and external demands
  - superego: conscience, places restrictions on behaviour
Key features:

- Freud’s ‘mental iceberg’ view of the mind
Key features:
Psychosexual stages of development

- Develop through stages in childhood
  - Oral (0–18 months)
  - Anal (18 months–3 years)
  - Phallic (3–6 years)
  - Latent (6 yrs–puberty)
  - Genital (puberty onwards)
- At each stage, libido is focused on different part of body
- Failure to progress (fixating) causes neuroses
Key features:

- Ego mediates conflict between id, ego, superego
  - defence mechanisms include repression, displacement, denial, reaction formation
  - repression pushes stuff into unconscious, but it exerts influence from there, may cause problems

- Cure neuroses by bringing material from unconscious to conscious
  - free association
  - dream analysis
Evaluation:

Significant impact:

- theories of personality, motivation, development
- therapeutic techniques in clinical and counselling psychology
- captured the popular imagination, providing an accessible framework for everyday understanding

Unscientific?

- methodologically poor
- untestable (e.g. concept of denial)

Limited impact on scientific psychology