

### **Definition**

Psychology is the scientific **study of the mind and behavior**. Psychology is a **multifaceted discipline** and includes many **sub-fields** of study such areas as :

- human development,
- sports,
- health,
- clinical,
- social behavior and
- cognitive processes.

### **Psychology and Philosophy**

Psychology is really a very new science, with most advances happening over the past 150 years or so. However, its origins can be traced back to ancient Greece, 400 – 500 years BC. The emphasis was a philosophical one, with great thinkers such as Socrates influencing Plato, who in turn influenced Aristotle. Philosophers used to discuss many topics now studied by modern psychology, such as memory, free will, attraction etc.

### **Historical background**

In the early days of psychology there were two dominant theoretical perspectives. An American psychologist named William James (1842-1910) developed an approach which came to be known as **functionalism**. He argued that the mind is constantly changing and it is pointless to look for the building blocks of experience.

Instead, focus should be on how and why an organism does something. It was suggested that psychologists should look for the underlying cause of behavior and the mental the processes involved. This **emphasis on the causes and consequences** of behavior has influenced contemporary psychology.

**Structuralism** was the name given to the approach pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt. Structuralism relied on **trained introspection**, a research method whereby subjects related what was going on in their minds while performing a certain task. However, it proved to be unreliable method because there was too much individual variation in the experiences and reports of research subjects.

Despite the failing of introspection Wundt is an important figure in the history of psychology as he **opened the first laboratory dedicated to psychology** in 1879, and its opening is usually thought of as the beginning of modern psychology. Wundt was important because he **separated psychology from philosophy** by analyzing the workings of the mind using more **objective and standardized procedures**.

### **Psychology as a science**

Because psychology is a science it attempts to investigate the causes of behavior using **systematic and objective procedures** for

- observation,
  - measurement and
  - analysis,
- backed-up by theoretical interpretations, generalizations, explanations and predictions.

The classic contemporary perspectives in psychology to adopt these strategies were the **behaviorists**, who were renowned for their reliance on **controlled laboratory experiment** and rejection of any unseen or **subconscious forces as causes of behavior**. And later, **cognitive psychology**, adopted this rigorous, scientific, lab based scientific approach too. With its broad scope, psychology investigates an enormous range of phenomena:

- learning and memory,
- sensation and perception,
- motivation and emotion,
- thinking and language,
- personality and social behavior,
- intelligence,
- child development,
- mental illness.

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