

PREFACE

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Best wishes,

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Table of contents

PREFACE.....1

TABLE OF CONTENT.....2

A. SCIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGY.....3

GLOSSARY CHAPTER A.....6

Want to pass your exams? Follow a course at Capita Selecta!.....8

A. SCIENCE OF PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological science

Psychology studies mental activities and behaviour. Psychologists try to understand and predict these mental activities and behaviour. Actually, everyone is an intuitive psychologist, meaning that everyone tries to understand and predict behaviour. The difference is that psychological science is not only based on intuition. **Psychological science** is the study of mind, brain and behaviour by means of research. The mind points to mental activity in daily life, for example perceptual experiences like sight, smell and touch. Biological processes in the brain are responsible for the mental activity. Behaviour refers to observable acts.

Critical thinking

It is good to be open to new ideas, but you should never just assume they are good. **Critical thinking** is systematically evaluating information by use of reasoned evidence. It concerns looking for holes in the evidence, using logics and reasoning and accepting alternative explanations.

Typical thinking

Psychological research has shown that human intuitions are often wrong. Human thinking often contains bias, which makes critical thinking a difficult task. Psychological reasoning holds the use of psychological research to determine the way people usually think. This makes it possible to determine when people probably come to wrong conclusions. The use of psychological reasoning helps to improve critical thinking. There are different types of bias in people's typical thinking:

- **Confirmation bias:** the tendency to evaluate evidence supporting the own idea as more important than evidence contradicting this idea;
- Misjudging the credibility of the source;
- Not understanding or not using statistics;
- Discovering non-existing relations;
- The use of related comparisons;
- Accepting clarifications after an event;
- Using mental shortcuts: the use of simple rules and heuristics to make decisions;
- Self-serving bias: not seeing personal flaws.

The beginning of psychology

Psychology has its origin in philosophy. In the 19th century psychology became a science in Europe. During the years, different theories and ideas prevailed. A number of well-known topics have a long history. An example is the **nature-nurture debate**. In this debate, the question is whether psychological characteristics are innate or obtained through education, experience and culture. Nowadays it is known that both aspects are important, but for a long time, opinions on this debate have been divided. Another bone of contention is the **mind-body problem**. In this debate, the question is whether mind and body are separated or the mind should be seen as the subjective experience of activity in the brain. Leonardo Da Vinci was one of the first who tried to link the brain to bodily functions. He assumed among other things that sensory messages, such as sight, smell and touch, were located in one part of the brain, the *sensus communis*. Descartes is the founder of **dualism**, the idea that mind and body are separated but still linked.

Chronology

Mid-19th century, philosopher John Stuart Mill stated that psychology should be distinguished from philosophy and that it had to be a science of observation and experiment. Some years later, in 1879, Wilhelm Wundt founded the first psychological laboratory and the first psychological school. He is considered the founder of modern experimental psychology. Wundt developed the **introspection method**, whereby people

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had to analyse their own thoughts. A problem of introspection is that it is subjective and therefore not reliable. This is also the reason why it no longer used.

Edward Titchener, a student of Wundt, was the founder of **structuralism**. Structuralism assumes that consciousness and conscious experiences can be subdivided in underlying components. Titchener also used introspection for his experiments.

William James was one of the people who criticized structuralism. He suggested that the thoughts of people continuously change (**stream of consciousness**), while structuralism was a static psychological movement. William James said that it was more important to understand the mind as a whole, than to know how the separate parts work. The psychological stream that is connected to these ideas is called **functionalism**.

Charles Darwin's **evolution theory** had much influence on functionalism. According to this theory people change and the good changes lead to a higher chance of survival and reproduction. These changes are then passed on to the offspring. These kinds of changes are called **adaptations**. Charles Darwin called the mechanism behind this **natural selection**. Natural selection is the process by which adaptive changes are passed on and non-adaptive changes are not passed on. According to Darwin the best adapted species would survive and reproduce. This is called **survival of the fittest**.

Gestalt psychology also criticized structuralism. It was started in 1912 by Max Wertheimer. Gestalt-psychologists assume that the whole is different than the sum of its parts. Gestalt-psychologists used untrained observers for their experiments to show their most important criticism against structuralism: human perception is subjective and depending on context.

Sigmund Freud stressed the unconscious. He believed that unconscious conflicts were caused by bad experiences in childhood of which the person is trying to block the memories. He developed **psychoanalysis**, which brings the subconscious mind to consciousness, so unconscious conflicts can be solved. He also used the method of **free association**. This method makes it possible to speak uninhibited. The idea behind it is that in this way problems come up automatically.

The theories discussed above, all focus on conscious and unconscious mental processes. John B. Watson found that psychology as a science, should only focus on what can be observed. From this though **behaviourism** was originated, which was strongly influenced by the work of Ivan Pavlov. Behaviourism emphasizes the role of the environment in the development of behaviour. This means the focus was completely on the nurture-aspect.

In the first half of the 20th century, psychology was mainly focused on the study of behaviour. However, it became clear that the experience of a situation can affect behaviour. This conclusion led George A. Miller to begin the cognitive revolution in psychology. **Cognitive psychology** is concerned with all processes that deal with issues such as understanding, knowledge, memory, problem solving and information processing. The cognitive revolution brought the mind back in a central position within psychology. The cognitive psychologists examined the processes but had little interest in the brain mechanisms involved. Early in the 1980s the cognitive neurosciences took shape. These scientists examined the neurological mechanisms involved in mind, learning, perception, language and memory.

After the second world war, **social psychology** arose. This was partly due to the fact that one wondered how 'normal' people could have been put on to very cruel deeds. Social psychology focusses on the power of a situation and on the way people are formed by their interactions with others. The importance of a scientific, experimental approach was highlighted to understand how people are affected by each other. A sub-area of

social psychology is **personality psychology**, which deals with the study of human characteristics and how they vary between different social situations.

In the 50's among others Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow supported a humanistic approach in the treatment of psychological problems. This method is focused on gaining self-awareness. Only from the 1970s, women were allowed to get a diploma in all areas of the psychology. Until then, women were also never used as subjects in experiments. This questions the generality of the conclusions of these experiments.

Developments in psychology

Biology

Biology plays an increasingly important role in psychology. Three important developments have improved the understanding of psychological phenomena.

- Brain chemistry: there are hundreds of substances that play a role in mental activity and behaviour;
- Neuroscience: through neuroscience it was found that different parts of the brain work together in producing activities. Besides, there is more knowledge about the localization of functions;
- Human genome: this is the genetic code for the human body. It is examined which specific genes affect actions, thoughts, feelings and disorders.

Evolution

Also the evolution is becoming increasingly important. Evolutionary psychology attempts to explain mental characteristics as products of natural selection. The theory of evolution is important when one questions whether behaviour and physical activity are adaptive. In addition, the genetic heritage of early humanity plays a role. The human preference for sweet and fat food, for example, is inherited because this used to be an advantage when food was still scarce.

Culture

Culture ensures that we learn to adapt to other people. Many rules within a culture are adaptive solutions from previous generations. There has been recognition that culture plays a role in forming opinions of people from all over the world. Psychologists have played a large role in understanding the relationship between culture and behaviour.

Levels of analysis

Behaviour is more and more often analysed from multiple levels. There are four different levels of analysis, which in many cases do not operate separately.

- Biological level: focusses on how the body, including the brain, contributes to the mind and behaviour;
- Individual level: focusses on individual personality differences and the mental process that influences how people experience the world;
- Social level: focusses on how groups interact and how group members influence each other;
- Cultural level: focusses on the thoughts, feelings and actions of people from different cultures. A sublevel is the ethnomusicology, which focusses on music.

Glossary chapter A

Adaptations	Changes that ensure a higher chance of survival and reproduction.
Behaviourism	Emphasizes the role of the environment in the development of behaviour.
Cognitive neuroscience	Research on the neurological mechanisms involved in mind, learning, perception, language and memory.
Cognitive psychology	Deals with all processes that deal with issues such as understanding, knowledge, memories and memory, problem solving and information processing.
Confirmation bias	Tendency to see evidence that supports the own idea as more important than evidence that contradicts the own idea.
Critical thinking	Systematically evaluating information by use of reasoned evidence.
Dualism	The idea that the mind and body are separated but linked.
Free association	Uninhibited talk.
Functionalism	The idea that it is more important to understand the mind as a whole than the separate parts.
Gestalt psychology	Assumes that the whole is different from the sum of the parts.
Introspection method	Method in which people had to analyse their own thoughts.
Mind-body debate	The question is whether mind and body are separated or the mind should be seen as the subjective experience of activity in the brain.
Natural selection	The process by which adaptive changes are passed on and non-adaptive changes are not passed on.
Nature-nurture debate	The question is whether psychological characteristics are innate or obtained through education, experience and culture.
Personality psychology	Deals with the study of human characteristics and how they vary between different social situations.

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Psychoanalysis	Brings the subconscious mind to consciousness, so unconscious conflicts can be solved.
Psychological science	The study of mind, brain and behaviour by means of research.
Social psychology	Focuses on the power of a situation and on the way people are formed by their interactions with others.
Stream of consciousness	People's thoughts are continually changing.
Structuralism	Assumes that consciousness and conscious experiences can be subdivided in underlying components.
Survival of the fittest	According to Darwin the best adapted species would survive and reproduce.
Theory of evolution	States that people change and that the good changes ensure a higher chance of survival and reproduction.

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On behalf of the complete Capita Selecta team, we wish you an successful academic year. We hope to see you at one of our Capita courses.

Kind regards,
Carlen Nieters
Business Unit Manager Capita Selecta