

Psychology 202

Chapter 1: The Science of Psychology

Why Study Psych?

- People are fascinated with their own mental activity
- **Psychological science:** The study of the mind, brain, and behavior, but also responsible for our memories, thoughts, and feelings
- **Mind** — refers to mental activity The perceptual experiences we have while interacting with the world
- Mental activity results from biological process with the brain; “The “mind is what the brain does”
- **Behavior** — wide variety of observable actions which range from subtle to complex
- Psychology is relevant in all aspects of life

Psychological Science Teaches Critical Thinking

- One of the hallmarks of a good scientist is **amiable skepticism** (combines openness and wariness)
- **Amiable skeptic:** Remains open to new ideas, but is wary of new scientific findings. They also develop the habit of carefully weighing the facts when deciding what to believe — the ability to think this way is called **critical thinking**.
- **Critical thinking:** Systematically evaluating information to reach reasonable conclusions

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- Critical thinking involves using logic, looking for holes in evidence, seeing if the information makes sense, considering alternate explanations, and seeing whether the information is biased.

The Nature/Nurture Debate

- People have wondered why people act and think the way they do and have debated whether the individuals psychology is attributed more to *nature* or to *nurture*
- That means are psychological characteristics biologically innate or do they acquired through culture?
- **Culture:** The beliefs, values, rules, and customs that exist within a group of people who share a common language and environment and that re transmitted though learning form one generation to the next
- **Nature/Nurture Debate:** The arguments concerning whether psychological characteristics are biologically innate or acquired through education, experience, and culture
 - Nature and Nurture rely on each other. Their influences cannot be separated
- Psychologists now widely recognize that both nature and nurture are important to humans' psychological development

The Mind/Body Problem Also Has Ancient Roots

- **Mind/Body Problem:** A fundamental psychological issue: Are mind and body separate and distinct, or is the mind simply the physical brain's subjective experience?
- The mind has been viewed as residing in many organs of the body, including the liver and the heart
- Scholars continue to believe that the mind is separate from and in control of the body
- **Sensus communis:** home of thought and judgment ("common sense")

Experimental Psychology

- **Wilhelm Wundt** — Wundt founded modern experimental psychology
- Established the first psychology laboratory and institute
- Developed the method of **introspection** — a systematic examination of subjective mental experiences that requires people to inspect and report on the content of their thoughts

Introspection and Other Methods Led to Structuralism

- **Structuralism:** An approach to psychology based on the idea that conscious experience can be broken down into its basic underlying components
- Argued that understanding of the basic elements of conscious experience would provide the scientific basis for understanding the mind
- General issue with introspection is that experience is subjective
- **Stream of consciousness:** A phrase coined by William James to describe each person's continuous series of ever-changing thoughts
- James argued that the mind was much more complex than its elements and therefore could not be broken down
- Argued that psychologists ought to examine the functions served by the mind — how the mind operates
- **Functionalism:** An approach to psychology concerned with the adaptive purpose, or function of mind and behavior

Evolution, Adaptive, and Behavior

- **Charles Darwin** — Major influence of functionalism. Published a book which introduced evolutionary theory.