

Example of essay on a history of modern psychology

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



Generally speaking, psychology is the empirical or systematic study of behavior and mental function (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2012). It involves an analysis of behavioral and cognitive functions, through a scientific method. Though today psychology is a distinct science, it was not so regarded at its inception. For a long time, psychology was not treated as a distinct science, but was rather regarded as within the scope of medicine (Hergenhahn, 2009). At that time, philosophers explained cognitive and behavioral issues with reference to the body, just like any other sickness. One of these early philosophers, Hippocrates, opined that personality was as a manifestation of chemicals in the body, thus anomalous conduct was to be treated with conventional medicine (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2012). Even though the study of psychology as a distinct science began in the 1870's, its key concepts had been advanced long before by various philosophers. An example is Aristotle, who advanced some primordial concepts of psychology. In his treatise, ' On the Soul' he talks of the soul as the quintessence of all living things. He opined that the soul has a distinct form and controls the working of the body, more so the rational soul (or the mind) (Singh, 1991). This set the stage for studying the entity he referred to as the soul, particularly the rational soul. It is interesting to note that the term psychology in Latin means study of the soul.

Rene Descartes, arguably the fore thinker of psychology, opined that the mind and the body are separate entities, albeit interdependent. He believed that the mind invariably controlled the actions of the body, but in certain instances the body influenced the mind. His philosophy thus propounded a mind - body dichotomy, which is a key tenet of psychology; this view was

also supported by fellow contemporary philosopher, Benedict Spinoza.

Descartes' publication, 'The Passion of the Soul' set the stage for modern concepts of psychology, particularly the automatic stimulus - response (Goodwin, 2008).

Western philosophers who contributed to development of psychology as a discipline

Even though many western philosophers were averse to the interaction of mind and body as put forward by Descartes and his colleagues, they nevertheless contributed to development of psychology as a discipline. Key among these philosophers is the English philosopher, John Locke. Locke in opposing Descartes' view of innate ideas opined that the mind formed ideas through sensation and reflection (Singh, 1991). This view is to some extent still applied to date.

Locke's further contribution was through his book, 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding'. In the book, Locke propounded the concept of association of ideas (Singh, 1991). His concept was the precursor to the law of association or associationism, which is a component of modern psychology.

Another philosopher is George Berkeley. Berkeley, also an English philosopher opined that in terms of the relation between the mind and body, what matters is how the mind creates the matter, not as Descartes proposed, how the mind is related to the matter (Singh, 1991). In simple terms, Berkeley proposed that a person's knowledge is based on their experience. Though this view is questionable today, it nevertheless formed a foundation for elemental theories of psychology, especially those

propounded by empiricists.

David Hume also contributed greatly to the development of psychology. His most significant contribution was his distinction of ideas and impression (Singh, 1991). Hume opined that though the two are quite similar, they are however discrete experiences. Another important contribution Hume made was to downplay the previous belief that the mind and the body were separate. His philosophy is in fact documented as the first psychology without the mind- dichotomy (Singh, 1991). This no doubt greatly contributed to the ascertainment of the relation between the mind and the body, which is a key precept of psychology.

Development of psychology during the 19th Century

The study of psychology as a distinct science began in the 1870's, and mostly in laboratories. One of the first people to use this approach was the German scientist Wilhelm Wundt. He established a laboratory in the University of Leipzig, to study the conscious course of the mind and the body (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2012). He tried to specify the construction of mental experiences, thus introducing the concept of structuralism. Wundt's idea was to break down the processes of the mind to their most essential components, based on a similar approach in chemistry, utilized in analysis of the components and configuration of material (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2012).

Wundt's approach elicited reactions from other philosophers, Notably the American philosopher, William James. In propounding a functional approach to psychology, James opined that the study of psychology should be based

on the practical benefits it has on a person (Singh, 1991). Unlike Wundt who focused on the ' what' in the mental process, James focused on how the process operated (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2012). He attributed perception and reason to natural selection. He essentially removed the study of psychology from the confines of the laboratory.

Arguably the biggest development of psychology in the 19th century is attributable to the physician Sigmund Freud. Freud had previously worked as a neurologist, but he realized that some of the cures he employed were not very effective to some disorders. He thus began to study unconscious behavior, impulses and desires (Pastorino and Doyle-Portillo, 2012), in a view to find a more effective cure. Through his research, he concluded that the unconscious part of the mind was as important as the conscious part in determining behavior. His focus on unconsciousness led to the development of the psychoanalytic theory, which is greatly influenced the concept of free association.

References

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