

The early stages of psychology



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The Early Stages of Psychology Philip C. Allen PSY/310 May 3, 2012 Shruthi Vale The Early Stages of Psychology People have been searching for answers to life's problems since the dawn of mankind. Humans would look to the stars for answers. They would look to nature for a cure. They even looked toward the heavens for gods to cure their ailments. Not until recently did we, as a race, begin to look toward ourselves to find solutions. We now know that we are capable of tapping into our minds and understanding what lies at the root of our mental illnesses.

Beginnings Psychology is still in its infancy when compared with other sciences. It is approximately 125 years old (University of Phoenix, 2008). The roots of psychology were founded in abstract philosophers like Rene Descartes and John Locke, but go as far back as ancient Greece. Although we know that Babylonians and Buddhists played a significant role in the development of psychology, much of their teachings are passed down orally and lost or forgotten.

Therefore, the Ancient Greeks provide the most useful starting point for a look back at the launching platform for what we know today as psychology (Aristotle's Psychology, 2008-2012). History shows us a pattern of the well-to-do in Roman times looking to philosophers for education in areas as mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, ethics, and more. Citizens wanting their children to learn beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic would send them to study with philosophers (Daniels, 1997). As this continued, we also saw them seeking guidance in the ways of the mind and social interaction.

Rulers were seeking the counsel of philosophers to understand their enemies and to understand their people. During the 17th-century, Descartes proposed that the mind and body were two separate entities allowing humans to experience the world in two different ways. The combination of these experiences is known as Dualism or the mind-body duality (Cherry, 2012). Descartes went on to explain how these two could be different yet connected. The mind is concerned with things of a thinking nature while the body is concerned with things of a physical nature.

If the mind were living on a spiritual plane and interacting with modes of understanding and willing, it cannot coexist with the body that is living on a physical plane and dealing with modes of sound, shape, and motion (Descartes, 2008). In the 18th-century, British national, John Locke, proposed that a person is only made of his or her experiences. He theorized that when a baby is born, his or her mind is a clean-slate on which any form of information can be transcribed. Locke adopted the famed tabula-rasa mentality.

According to Locke, a person will only gain knowledge once he or she interacts with the outside world and stimulate his or her sense organ (Raghunathan, 2001). This form of belief system also led Locke to publish a proclamation titled *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In this essay Locke discussed the limits of human understanding in respect to God, oneself, nature, and artifacts as well as a variety of different kinds of ideas. It tells us in detail what we can claim to know and what we cannot. People began to question themselves and their beliefs. Pushing forward to mid-1800, we begin to observe German physiologist Wilhelm Wundt.

Wundt is credited as the father of modern psychology. Wundt was using scientific research to measure reaction times. Reaction time, while a motor skill, is controlled in the brain. Therefore, it is a psychological response (Cherry, 2012). While most of his findings are discredited today, it cannot be argued that he was a valuable asset to the field. One of Wundt's greatest students, Edward Titchener, went on to found one of psychology's first major schools of thought. Structuralism was used to study a person's most primitive emotions and actions by breaking them down into their most simple parts.

Structuralism eventually died with Titchener (Cherry, 2012). Victorian Thomas Brown proposed the study of the mind as the basic framework for most scientific efforts. He believed that before any science could be taken seriously, the brain must be studied. Not only the physicality of the brain, but also the workings of the mind and how it thinks (Wee, 2005). With Brown's proposal, the majority of serious psychologists would no longer ignore the real world implications of human experience and action when dealing with the functioning of the mind.

In 1885, Herbert Spencer published *The Principles of Psychology*. Spencer had a strong background in biology and philosophy, therefore much of his writings were based solely on speculation, observation, and philosophical ideals. Wee (2005), "One of Spencer's most famous phrases was "survival of the fittest", which later formed the basis of a controversial branch of psychology/philosophy called Social Darwinism" (para. 4). Conclusion Since the days of Greek and French philosophers and German physiologists, we have developed a sound science.

We can delve deeper than ever before. We see beyond the layers of our conscious mind. We can look into our past to raise questions about our childhood and answer age old questions that were asked by unconscious. Today's psychologists are yesterday's shamans. References University of Phoenix. (2008). A History of Modern Psychology. Retrieved from University of Phoenix, PSY310 website. Cherry, K. (2012). Origins of Psychology. Retrieved from <http://psychology.about.com/od/historyofpsychology/a/psychistory.htm> Raghunathan, A. (2001). A Short History Of Western Psychology.

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