

Psychology's Methodology is simply a reflection of Psychology's history. Discuss.

In order to discuss Psychology's history, It is important to understand where the science originated I will review it's philosophical origins and discuss how its methodology, has been affected by the chronicles of Psychology.

Philosophical ideas influenced the development of Psychology, beginning probably, with Plato (427-347 BC), in ancient Greece. He began to ask questions on learning, motivation and perception. His only source of research was transcripts, from discussions with his mentor Socrates. All he had as his basis of knowledge were ideas, untested in any way.

Aristotle (384-322 BC), created a whole system of knowledge based on experiences such as waking, sleeping, gender, self-control and relationships. He described his theory as 'enlightenment' which was the idea that the mind influenced these bodily experiences, but the body could not effect the mind in any way.

Philosophers had a great deal of authority and respect from the Greek society. They were disinclined to use any methodology, in which their theories could be measured, as they believed that the truth could be found in thinking rather than carrying out any experiments. These beliefs were indoctrinated into the lives of the Greeks, by the method of authority. According to Charles Sanders-Pierce (1877) the easiest way to fix a belief is to take someone you trust 's word, in faith. (Elmes, Kantowitz & Roediger pg 16.1985).

René Descartes(1596-1650), believed that the mind and body were completely separate. He developed the idea of 'Cartesian Dualism' which was the concept of interactions with the mind and body, but the mind is not affected by anything that happens to the body. Descartes carried out an experiment on a dissected bull's eye and projected an image onto the retina through the lens. This encouraged several other studies that supported his view that the body is fundamentally a

machine, which works almost automatically. This Dualist method of thinking affected the way Western Medicine developed, in that often the body was treated for an illness without looking at the person holistically', this method of treatment is still evident in some areas today.

According to Descartes the mind has a single function, which is thinking. This emphasis on reason was developed into an approach called 'Rationalism' which meant that the mind could be controlled by methodical introspection, this idea dominated 19th century. Furthermore he believed that the mind produced two different concepts.

- 1 derived ideas that come from external stimuli on the senses i.e. sight and smell
- 2 Innate ideas, on consciousness i.e. the self, infinity, God

This led later, to the Nature versus Nurture Debate. Whether certain behaviour is mainly inborn into an individual or learned functioning. This subject is still of great relevance to many aspects of psychology and the subject of many studies today.

John Locke (1632-1704), rejected Descartes innate doctrine and agreed with Aristotle that a baby's mind is a "tabula rasa" (clean slate), and can only gain knowledge and reason, from experiences. Locke formally began British Empiricism. This idea had an immeasurable effect on Psychology. Locke argued that no methodology could measure thinking and was therefore irrelevant. He observed that only the behaviour resulting from external stimulus counted as legitimate data. The theory in psychology known as Behaviourism came from this observation. Locke understood that we respond to a chain of "associations" rather than react after each individual stimulus. This enables us to build up our own experiences.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) argued in his "Critique of Pure Reason" (1781), that innate reason alone cannot explain our experiences, and he defined three mental activities: knowing, feeling and willing. Modern psychologists often analyse attitudes between knowledge (Cognition) from feeling (Affective) thoughts, which shows how 'Transcendentalism' i.e. explanations outside experience, effect

modern psychological methodology, and contrasts with the mechanistic approach of Descartes and his contemporaries.

One of the first psychology laboratories was founded in the late 1870's, by Wilhem Wundt (1832-1920), at Leipzig. Germany provided the ideal birthplace for psychology, having the correct empirical and positive "Zeitgeist", i.e. the intellectual and economic environment. There were many universities in Germany compared to most other countries. Wundt organised the first experiments into the way people were shaped by society, and studied their social customs, language, laws and morals.

Charles Darwin (1809-82) had a major impact on psychology's methodology. He caused a great deal of outcry when he published 'On the origin of species by natural selection', in 1859. Much of this consternation was due to people simply misunderstanding what was said. There are many subsets of the Theory of Evolution, one of which is **Common Descent**, which described how organisms could be traced back to their ancestors – like a family tree. He researched into how apes express emotion in a way, which is very similar to human responses to the same emotion, and deduced from his experiments that humans could be reasonably described as complicated animals. (Hayes 2000).

Once humans had been linked closely to animals in this way, it opened the floodgates to more animal research. Hall and Flourens, who removed parts of an animal's brain to find the effects on behaviour, carried out early brain research. Fritsch and Hitzig in 1870 passed an electrical current to parts of the animal's brain and observed the movement of their limbs. Because animals are so similar to humans, some psychologists felt they could make comparative studies, as similar human research would not be practical. Ethics didn't appear to be taken into consideration at this time.

Sigmund Freud (1910-1930), in his influential theory of the unconscious, gave a new direction to psychology and laid the groundwork for the psychoanalytic model. Freudian theory took psychology into such fields as, education, anthropology and medicine.

Freud is often critiqued for linking sexual problems with almost all his patients. However, in Victorian society, sex was often seen as a taboo subject which could explain why Freud seemed to find almost all of his subjects had sexuality as their main unconscious anxiety.

Freud has also been criticised for the limited samples he used in his research. A lot of his observations were made, through correspondence; not with the patients but with their fathers or husbands. This type of methodology was acceptable to Freud, presumably as he had lived in Nazi Germany with white male dominance for most of his life. His methods are seen by some to be unscientific, and yet his theories are still applied to some areas of psychology today.

Surprisingly, it's only been relatively recently that concerns about the ethics of research have strongly influenced psychologist's methodology. Further impetus for this came in the wake of certain American studies, such as Milgrams study of obedience (1963), in which he asked people to impose seemingly lethal electric shocks to strangers, simply because he 'authorised' them to do so. The results showed that 62.5% of people were found to have the mind frame to 'kill' under these circumstances. This was particularly shocking, given that the studies took place, in the wake of world war two, and in the American West Coast where the supposed ethos was of a caring and nurturing society.

John Bowlby (1907-1990), became famous after the World Health Organisation published 'Maternal care and mental health', 1951. Using interviews and data from schools and hospitals, he found evidence that maternal deprivation could be linked positively to juvenile delinquency. He also found that the relationship between mother and child was qualitatively different to other relationships the child might have. His controversial conclusion was that mothers should stay at home with their children, which was used as a persuasive argument by the Government to encourage mothers to stop work. This was a convenient message, which created more jobs for unemployed ex-servicemen after the war.

John B Watson (1878-1958) crystallised modern trends, which were of a nurturing and civilised society. His new approach rejected conscious and unconsciousness, and states emotions are simply environmental stimuli and internal measurable responses, and its goal was the prediction and control of behaviour. Watson believed that by conditioning reflexes and shaping behaviour in general, would lead to the construction of a better society.

“For the universe will change if you bring up your children...in behaviouristic freedom...Will not these children in turn, with their better ways of living and thinking, replace us as society and in turn bring up their children in a still more scientific way, until the world finally becomes a place fit for human habitation?”
Watson, 1930 (Shultz, 1996)

Watson's ideas were generally very popular, as they were observable and measurable, even though some of them were extreme. His denying of existence of any inherited characteristics meant that people could be trained to be whatever they wanted, which fitted the American ideology.

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), started out as an enthusiastic Behaviourist, but became disillusioned with the fact that it seemed to ignore psychologically healthy people. He researched individuals who were reaching their full potential and tried to find patterns and common characteristics. The results shown in 'Motivation and Personality, (1970) were called the theory of Self-Actualisation: the innate human motivation that each of us has to develop our talents and maximise our abilities.

The results of Maslow's studies contributed to an evolution in post-war psychology, which was accelerated by the onslaught of industrialisation and consumerism. Maslow's model of Self-Actualism was, and still is, used in training the workforce in motivation and achieving goals.

The expansion of technology during World War Two governed psychologists into developing assumptions on human cognition, particularly, attention span, as this was of major importance in wartime and in new technological areas. Cognitive research analysed

decision-making and reasoning, which was particularly useful in a society, whose workforce had higher aspirations than ever before. With this new commercial and technological era, human cognition was examined to evaluate how we access and process information, which was comparative to philosophical ideas that minds were like machines. Hayes 2000

Conclusion

Initially, it seems that psychology's theory's had come full circle, beginning with philosophy study of the mind, to the study of behaviour and then our most recent psychological research into cognition again. However, it is clear when we put these theories into their historical context, that the methods in which these theories were examined, were effected by external influences.

Once psychology had been excepted by most as science laboratories were set up. Psychologists armed with the basic knowledge that their philosophical predecessors had given them were able to construct theories using methodology, which could be controlled.

However, how strictly these methods were controlled depended on the assumptions of the researcher and the society in which they lived.