

“Is behavior mainly inherited or it is learned?” Discuss based on your knowledge concerning modern Psychological theories.

The answer to this question is based on the debate of nature and nurture. Nature represents the idea that behavior is inherited while the psychologists who support nature are known as nativists. Hence, nurture is that behavior is learned and those who believe in nurture are known as the empiricists.

The nativists position is that a person is born with an inherited “blue print”, meaning an inherited disposition such as DNA. And afterwards his behavior will be developed through the process of maturation. So, the environment doesn’t affect behavior only when there are methods employed in order to change an individual’s nature (e.g.: gene therapy or brain surgery).

The empiricists position states that a baby’s mind at birth is like a blank page, known as tabula rasa and there are recorded all future experiences from which the baby learns how to behave. Therefore environment has a direct effect on an individual’s behavior.

For example, both sides can explain the situation of an individual being aggressive. From the nature’s side it is believed that aggression is due to hormones and certain stimulations in the brain area (Freud, Lorenz). In addition, the empiricists side support that aggression is learned by the environment and imitated.

Different approaches take different positions on this debate and we will try to illustrate each case below.

To begin with the neurobiological perspective, the aim of this perspective is to relate behavior to events that take place within the body. For instance a behavior such as anxiety is believed that is a consequence of specific brain stimulations. As the neurobiological perspective accounts behavior to biological causes therefore is the nearest perspective to nativists side.

Later on, there is the psychoanalytic perspective which believes that behavior is controlled by the ID, which is the restricted impulses, the SUPEREGO, meaning the ideal self created by the society, and the EGO which keeps balance between the ID and the SUPEREGO. This theory is based to the existence of the unconscious (Freud). This approach lines up as second that is most common to nature because Freud said that individuals inherited the impulses, which were forbidden and pushed into the ID.

Afterwards, the cognitive perspective declares that imitating created schemas from the day of birth creates behavior. This approach is a step forward to empiricists beliefs because it says that individuals are born with a white page in their mind and code experiences as schemas,

store them and retrieve them for later use, consequently the behavior is learned.

Moving on, we have the humanistic perspective which supports that each individual aims his self-actualization which, according to Maslow, you have to fulfill first your biological needs of existence (food, water) and then try to satisfy the rest of your needs such as the need of approval by others. This perspective tends to nurture because while accepting basic physiological needs, the focus is upon the individuals experience of their social and physical environment.

Last of all is the behavioristic approach which supports that others can observe your behavior (Watson). As well as the stimulus response psychology (Skinner) which studies the stimuli that elicit behavioral responses. The reason of behavioristic approach being the closest to nurture is because it focuses on the acquisition of observing all behavior from the environment via conditioning.

Even though several opinions for this debate have been stated there are some points where nature and nurture interact with each other. For instance two psychologists showed restricted environmental experience could physically affect the visual cortex of the brain.

Finally, we conclude to the fact that behavior is a mixture of both heredity and environment because a biological predisposition present at birth interacts with the experiences that we encounter throughout life.