


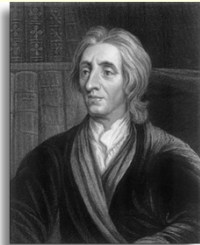
# Psychology's Fundamental Themes



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## Themes Related to Psychology as a Field of Study ~ 1

- **PSYCHOLOGY IS EMPIRICAL**
  - To be **EMPIRICAL** means to be based on observation or experience, to be verifiable.
  - The concept is connected historically with John Locke who in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* took the position that no knowledge is present in the mind at birth, that it is essentially blank.
  - All knowledge (our understanding) is acquired through experience, by means of our senses.
  - The mind at birth, he wrote, was like a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*.
  - **Comment:** Psychology is an empirical science. Its assertions about behavior or mental processes are based solely on scientific evidence, and not on
    - SPECULATION, PERSONAL OPINION, FOLKLORE, HEARSAY, TRADITION, FAITH, or any other non-empirical source.




**John Locke**  
1632 - 1704

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## Themes Related to Psychology as a Field of Study ~ 2

- **PSYCHOLOGY IS THEORETICALLY DIVERSE**
  - The field of astronomy is guided by a single scientific paradigm or guiding principal, namely, that the sun is the center of the solar system and the planets revolve around it.
    - This is known as the Copernican view of the universe.
  - **Psychology, by comparison**, has many theories to explain human and animal behavior and human mental processes, it has no single paradigm as in astronomy, ...
  - ...and many psychologists
  - ...are **ECLECTIC**.
  - **Example:** The typical *theories of personality* textbook contains over a dozen different points of view on this subject.

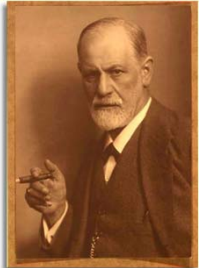


**Nicolaus Copernicus**  
1473 - 1543

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## Themes Related to Psychology as a Field of Study ~ 3

- **PSYCHOLOGY EVOLVES IN A SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT**
  - Social customs, world events, and the societal needs at a given time have had a direct impact on what psychology studies.
  - Sociohistorical conditions can also influence belief systems regarding the causes of human behavior at one period in time...
  - ...and change in another.
  - **Example:** Freud's views on human nature and what caused behavior were influenced by the sociohistorical events associated with the attitudes of Victorian society and then changed during World War I.



**Sigmund Freud**  
1856 - 1939

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## Themes Related to Psychology's Subject Matter ~ 1 & 2

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- **BEHAVIOR IS DETERMINED BY MULTIPLE CAUSES**
  - While human nature seems to propel us to look for singular or simple explanations of human behavior, experience tells us single causes are rarely sufficient.
  - Behavior most often is caused by multiple factors, an idea referred to as *multifactorial causation of behavior*.
  - **Example:** *Personal* vs. *Situational* explanations of behavior, e.g., your little brother's poor report card grades.
  
- **OUR BEHAVIOR IS SHAPED BY OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE**
  - A person's cultural background exerts considerable influence over their behavior.
  - **Example 1:** Etiquette in regard to "cleaning your plate" at dinner party in North America versus India.
  - **Example 2:** Punctuality customs in North America versus Asian and Latin American cultures.

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## Themes Related to Psychology's Subject Matter ~ 3

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- **HEREDITY AND ENVIRONMENT JOINTLY INFLUENCE OUR BEHAVIOR**
  - The issue addressed here is that of the role played in our behavior by our *biology*, our *nature*, and
  - ...the role played by our *environment*, i.e., by our *nurture*.
  
  - The debate among psychologists and others is referred to as the **NATURE – NURTURE DEBATE**.
  
  - It is well-known, however, that when our *genetic heritage* (our *genotype*) interacts with our *environment* it produces *what we ultimately become* (our *phenotype*) and that both heredity AND environment play a key role.
  
- **Examples:**
  - Height attained by British Royalty
  - Drug addicted babies and babies impacted by Thalidomide

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## Themes Related to Psychology's Subject Matter ~ 4


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- **OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD IS HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE**
  - *Sensing* and *perceiving* the world around us is an active process.
  - Individuals process incoming information selectively focusing on some aspects of incoming stimulation and ignoring others.
  - The tendency to make perceptions personal makes them highly subjective.
  - Human subjectivity is precisely what the scientific method is designed to counteract.
  - **Example:** the Princeton – Dartmouth football game experiment.

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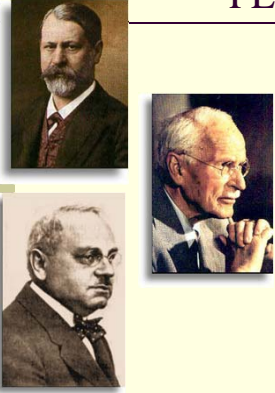
## Psychology's Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

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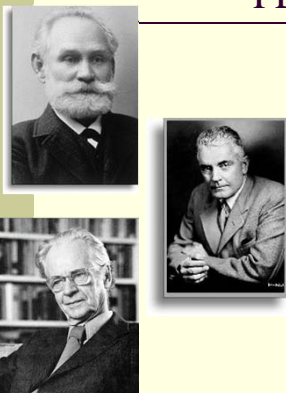
## PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE



- **Key Ideas:**
  - Behavior is directed by forces within one's personality which are instinct driven or associated with childhood experiences.
  - Emphasizes internal impulses, desires, and conflicts especially those that are unconscious.
  - Views behavior as occurring as the result of clashing forces within personality, the forces of the id, ego, and superego; and,
  - ...in general psychoanalysis has a pessimistic view of human nature and is highly deterministic.
- **Key Players:**
  - Sigmund Freud
  - Carl Jung
  - Alfred Adler
- **Time Frame:**
  - Pretty much 1900 to the present.

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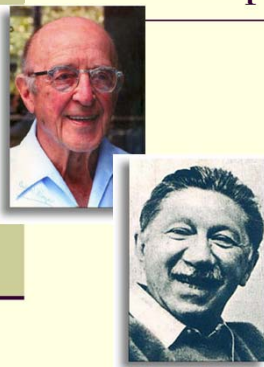
## BEHAVIORISTIC PERSPECTIVE



- **Key Ideas:**
  - Behavior is directed, shaped and controlled by environmental forces.
  - Emphasizes the study of observable behavior and the effects of learning.
  - Stresses the role of external rewards and punishments.
  - Behaviorism takes a somewhat neutral, scientific, mechanistic view of human nature.
  - For the behaviorist, behavior is environmentally determined and thus...
  - ...behaviorism, like psychoanalysis, is highly deterministic.
- **Key Players:**
  - Ivan Pavlov
  - John B. Watson
  - Burrhus F. Skinner
- **Time Frame:**
  - 1913 to the present.

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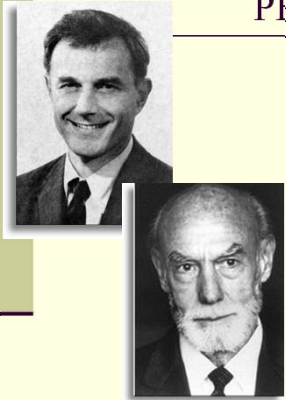
## HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE



- **Key Ideas:**
  - Behavior is guided by one's self-image, by subjective perceptions of the world, and by needs for personal growth.
  - Emphasizes self-actualization and personal goals rather than past experiences.
  - Humanists have a very positive, philosophical view of human nature.
  - Humanism emerged in part as a reaction AGAINST the perceived negative, highly deterministic, views of psychoanalysis and behaviorism.
  - Thus, they often called themselves members of *The Third Force*.
- **Key Players:**
  - Carl Rogers
  - Abraham Maslow
- **Time Frame:**
  - 1950's to the present.

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## BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE



- **Key Ideas:**
  - Human and animal behavior is the result of internal physical, chemical, and biological processes.
  - Seeks to explain behavior through activity of the brain and nervous system, physiology, genetics, the endocrine system, & biochemistry,
  - Like behaviorism, the biological perspective has a rather neutral & mechanistic view of human nature.
  - For this group, our behavior is mainly determined by our biology.
- **Key Players:**
  - James Olds
  - Roger Sperry
- **Time Frame:**
  - 1950's to the present.

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## COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE




- **Key Ideas:**
  - Much human behavior can be understood in terms of the mental processing of information.
  - Concerned with thinking, knowing, perceiving, understanding, memory, decision making, and judgment.
  - Explains behavior in terms of information processing and computer models.
  - Assumes a somewhat neutral, mechanistic, computer-like view of human nature and mental life.
- **Key Players:**
  - Jean Piaget
  - Noam Chomsky
  - Herbert Simon
- **Time Frame:**
  - 1950's to the present.

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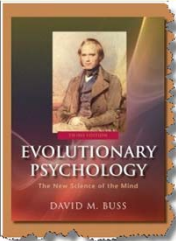
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## EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE



- **Key Ideas:**
  - Behavior patterns have evolved to solve adaptive problems.
  - Natural selection favors behaviors that enhance reproductive success.
  - Concerned with the study of evolutionary bases of behavior in humans and animals.
- **Key Player:**
  - David M. Buss
- **Time Frame:**
  - 1980's to the present.




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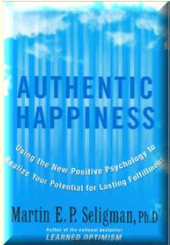
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## “Positive Psychology”



- **Key Ideas:**
  - Followers of this perspective believe that historically psychology has focused too much attention on psychopathology and suffering in human affairs.
  - They believe it has ignored studying those forces that make life worth living.
  - Positive psychology uses theory and research to understand the positive, adaptive, creative, and fulfilling aspects of human experience.
- **Key Player:**
  - Martin Seligman
- **Time Frame:**
  - Late 1990's to now



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