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**Teacher**

**AMMARI H.**

**Contact information**

**Email: [h.ammari@univ-batna2.dz](mailto:h.ammari@univ-batna2.dz)**

**Office: N° 04-Departement of English-**

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## INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

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Psychology as a modern scientific discipline originated in Western Europe and North America in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The new discipline emerged out of **Western philosophy**. Psychology became a science and an **academic discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup>** century when people who wanted to learn more about behavior and mental processes began to use **the scientific method**. At the start of the twentieth century most psychologists considered their discipline to be the study of **mental life**, **mind** or **consciousness**. Within a few years, however, such definitions were criticized for being vague and unscientific. Between the 1920s and the 1950s many psychologists preferred to define their discipline as **the study of behavior**, because **what people do-- unlike what they think or feel --can be directly observed or measured**. But this definition also came under attack, or criticism. To those who still wanted to study thinking, dreaming, feeling and all other mental processes, reducing psychology to the study of behavior made not much sense. Today, most psychologists are willing to include **BOTH behavior** and **mind** in the formal definition of psychology.

## Roots of Psychology

While psychology did not emerge as a separate discipline until the late 1800s, its earliest history can be traced back to the time of the early Greeks. During the 17th-century, the French philosopher **Rene Descartes** introduced the idea of **dualism**, which asserted that the mind and body were two entities that **interact** to form the human experience/human behaviour.

The known history of psychology may be divided into two broad periods: (1) **Pre-scientific** – extending from the **Greek philosophers** through the latter half of the 19th century, and (2) **Scientific** – extending from about the last quarter of 19th century **(1879) to the present**.

During the pre-scientific period, there had been many definitions of psychology in historical perspectives. Since the ancient Greek philosophers until the mid-nineteenth century, we find reference to human problems and their solutions in philosophical writings. Psychology, in its gradual historical development, was considered as the study of **soul, mind, mental processes**, etc., and a discipline under philosophy. Psychology is derived from the Greek words “**psyche**” meaning, soul and “**logos**” meaning study. To the Greeks, psychology is simply the study of the soul.

Psychology separated itself from philosophy and emerged as an independent discipline in the latter part of the nineteenth century. During the last century, as all sciences developed, **psychology became scientific**. The old literal definition of psychology as the study of soul was rejected as being very unscientific. For the last four centuries, philosophers translated ‘**psyche**’ as ‘**mind**’ and ‘psychology’ as “a study of mind”. Later, it was defined as “a study of mental processes”. These definitions were also rejected as being unscientific. Currently, psychology is defined as “the scientific study of behavior and mental processes”, or “the scientific study of human and animal behavior”, or “the scientific study of human behavior”. The most prevalent definition of psychology is: **“It is the scientific study of human behavior.”**

### “Who were the “FOUNDERS” of psychology?”

*Historians acknowledge that three German scientists—Ernst Weber, Gustav Fechner, and Hermann von Helmholtz—were the first to systematically - (scientifically) study behavior and mental processes. But it is **Wilhelm Wundt***

**(1832-1920)** who is generally thought of as the **"father" of psychology**. Wundt's vision for the new discipline included studies of social and cultural influences on human thought. Wundt established a psychological laboratory at the University of Leipzig in Germany in 1879, an event considered to mark the birth of psychology as a formal academic discipline"

## **PSYCHOLOGY**

**"Is the scientific study of behavior and mental processes and how they are affected by the organism's (body) physical state, mental state and external environment"**

## **PSYCHOLOGY AS A HUMAN (OR SOCIAL) SCIENCE**

In very broad terms, psychology is one of the disciplines which are concerned, in a fundamental way, with **the study of man**. More specifically, it belongs to a family of disciplines known as the human (or social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, as well as economics, political science, etc. All of these sciences attempt to analyze human problems objectively and to search in behavior and mental activity. All of them teach us to understand both the similarities and the differences among individuals and groups. But there are some important differences in emphasis between them.

Psychology is recognised more as a social science because it studies the behaviour of human beings in their **socio-cultural contexts**. Humans are not only influenced by their socio-cultural contexts, they also create them. Psychology as a social science discipline **focuses on humans as social beings**.

Psychology as a social science focuses on the individuals and communities in relation to their **socio-cultural** and **physical environment**.

Psychologists in general are interested in topics such as:

*“Learning, emotion, intelligence, heredity and environment, differences between individuals, the nature and development of personality, group behavior, etc.”*

## Psychology as the Science of Behavior

**John B. Watson** is credited as the man who made psychology a positive science (Behaviorism). Watson defined psychology “as science of human behavior” in 1911 and later published his famous article in 1913. The article introduced behaviorism theory as an important perspective in psychology.

## The Behaviorist School of Thought in Psychology

**Behaviorism** became a dominant school of thought during the 1950s. It was based upon the work of thinkers such as:

- **John B. Watson**
- **Ivan Pavlov**

- **B. F. Skinner**

Behaviorism suggests that all behavior can be explained by **environmental** causes rather than by **internal forces** ( such as thinking and understanding). Behaviorism is focused on **observable behavior**.

The behavioral school of psychology had a significant influence on the course of psychology, and many of the ideas and techniques that emerged from this school of thought are still widely used today. Behavioral training, token economies, aversion therapy, and other techniques are frequently used in psychotherapy and behavior modification programs.

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## Goals of Psychology

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Psychology is chiefly concerned with human behavior, what makes people behave or act the way they do. In an attempt to explain that behavior, we must know **the events in the environment** that have caused such behavior; describe as to how they differ when observed with the same events; and predict the possible consequences of that behavior so as to help in the change and improvement of the lives of every individual. These are the steps followed in psychology to study behaviour:

**1. Description** The first task for any psychologists is to gather information about the behavior being studied and to present what is known. For example, we describe human behavior in his environment such as a “classroom environment”.

**2. Explanation** Psychologists are not content to simply state or describe the facts. Rather, they also seek to explain why people (or animals) behave as they do. Psychologists propose these explanations as **hypotheses**. Once these hypotheses are tested and completed, more explanations called **theories** are constructed. Usually a complex explanation, a theory is based on findings from a large number of experimental studies assembled to explain the results. Such

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theories improve our understanding which allows us to describe and explain behavior.

**3. Prediction.** The third goal of psychologists is to predict, as a result of accumulated knowledge, what organisms will do, and, in the case of human beings, what they will **think of or feel** in various situations. By studying descriptive and theoretical accounts of past behaviors, psychologists can predict subsequent behaviors.

**4. Control.** Some psychologists seek to influence or control behavior in helpful ways. Other psychologists conduct studies with a long-term goal to find out more about human or animal behavior. Others are more interested in discovering ways to use what we already know about psychological principles to **solve more immediate problems.**