

Perspectives in Psychology



SUMMARY OF PERSPECTIVES

- 🌀 **Biological Approach:** takes a physiological (and hence a generally reductionist) approach to psychology. It includes the study of the contribution of evolution and genetic inheritance to our behaviour. Issues under this heading are reductionism/functionalism vs. non-reductionist views.
- 🌀 **Behavioural Approach:** this approach suggests that the only valid data in psychology is observable behaviour. Another assumption is that a person begins life “tabula rasa” and must learn everything. It also assumes that mechanisms of learning are identical for all species. Issues under this heading include freewill vs. determinism (behaviour is determined by the environment according to Skinner), reductionism vs. non-reductionism (behaviour can be reduced to S-R associations), nature vs. nurture (behaviour is learnt) and objectivity vs. subjectivity (the only data worth having is objective data). It takes in a great many key debates.
- 🌀 **Cognitive Approach:** looks at all aspects of intelligent behaviour (including perception, attention, memory, thinking, problem solving, computer models) from an information processing point of view. Reintroduces the idea of thinking being as important as observable behaviour, but uses scientific methodology rather than a subjective basis for research. Issues under this heading include reductionism vs. non-reductionism (artificial intelligence takes a reductionist viewpoint, as do some information processing models; however, many other aspects of cognitive psychology are non-reductionist); structuralism vs. functionalism (many aspects of cognitive psychology talk about structures being developed, describing what things do rather than what things are for); nature vs. nurture (both aspects can be found in cognition, though many cognitive psychologists would go for an interactionist viewpoint); objectivity vs. subjectivity (most phenomena in cognitive psychology are studied in an objective, scientific manner, subjectivity is frowned upon in cognitive circles!).
- 🌀 **Psychoanalytic Approach:** this is one of the person-centred approaches in psychology (the other major one being humanism) which is heavily deterministic and emphasises developmental aspects of the person and their major influences on subsequent behaviour. It is an approach that focuses on the importance of the unconscious and the development of personality, the major motivator being conflict. Issues under this heading are determinism vs. freewill (one of Freud’s assumptions was psychological determinism, which suggests that nothing we ever do is accidental); nature vs. nurture (Freud suggests that there is an interaction between our instinctual impulses and behaviour subsequently learnt); objectivity vs. subjectivity (almost all the evidence gathered was based on subjective reports: objectivity was not considered to be of paramount importance); nomothetic vs. idiographic (Freud takes an idiographic approach, unlike behaviourist psychologists who try to develop general rules of behaviour)
- 🌀 **Humanistic Approach:** this approach looks at behaviour from an individual, uniquely human point of view. It treats each person as an individual and emphasises the capacity to grow and change through person-centred therapy. Issues under this heading include freewill vs. determinism (the notion is that we all have the power of personal agency and can grow and change if we want to; it rejects the deterministic view of the biological and psychoanalytical approaches); reductionism vs. non-reductionism (it rejects the notion that the person can be reduced to S-R units or biological foundations); objectivity vs. subjectivity (it suggests that objectivity is a wasted search and that subjective data is the only kind of data that counts).

These are the main approaches in psychology and we can sum up the major issues and debates that arise from these different approaches as follows:

Freewill vs. Determinism

Reductionism vs. Non-reductionism

Structuralism vs. Functionalism

Nature vs. Nurture

Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

Nomothetic vs. Idiographic