

Functionalism (Question References)

Paragraph 1 Many North American psychologists were uncomfortable with the strict structuralist approach advocated by European psychologists. Whereas structuralists tended to focus exclusively on the *content* of immediate experience, dissecting the mind into parts, North American psychologists worried more about the *function* of immediate experience. What is the purpose of the mental operations that underlie immediate experience? How are the components of mind used to achieve this end? Because of the emphasis on function rather than content, this school of thought became generally known as functionalism (Angell, 1903; Dewey, 1896; James, 1890).

2 Functionalists such as William James (1842–1910) and James Rowland Angell (1869–1949) were convinced that it was impossible to understand a whole like the mind by simply looking at its parts—that would be like trying to understand a house by analyzing the underlying bricks and mortar (James, 1884). It is necessary to first understand the goal—what specifically is being attempted by the mental operation? Then you can try to decipher how the individual parts work together to achieve that goal. For example, to understand how memory works, you must first consider its purpose—what specific kinds of problems do our memory systems help us solve as we work our way through the day?

3 Darwin's ideas about evolution through natural selection were extremely influential in the development of functionalism. If you want to analyze the color markings on a butterfly's wings, a Darwinian theorist would argue, you must ask how those markings help the butterfly survive, or at least reproduce. Similarly, when analyzing the operations and processes of mind, a functionalist would argue, you need to understand the adaptive value of those operations—how do they help people solve the problems they face?

4 Functionalism had a liberalizing effect on the development of psychology in North America. It greatly expanded the acceptable range of topics. For example, it became fashionable to study how an organism interacts with its environment, which led to an early emphasis on learning (Thorndike, 1898) and to the study of individual differences. Later, some functionalists turned their attention to applied issues, such as how people solve practical problems in industry and in educational settings (Taylor, 1911). To a functionalist, almost any aspect of behavior was considered fair game for study, and psychology boomed in North America.

5 Psychology changed even more radically in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although functionalism and structuralism clearly differed in their emphases, both still considered the fundamental problem in psychology to be understanding immediate conscious experience. The great functionalist William James is well known for his superb analysis of consciousness, which he compared to a flowing and ever-changing stream. Around 1900, the technique of introspection—looking inward to observe one's own mind—remained the dominant method of analysis in the tool kit of the experimental psychologist.

Behaviorism

- 6 Not all psychologists were convinced that self-observation could produce valid scientific results. [A] By definition, self-observations are personal, so it is difficult to determine whether the knowledge gained is accurate or representative of all people. It was also recognized that introspection might change the mental operations being observed. [B] If you are concentrating intently on documenting the elements of a banana, you experience “banana” in an atypical way—not as something to eat, but rather as a complex collection of sensations. Introspection also limited the range of populations and topics that could be covered—it is difficult to ask someone with a severe mental disorder, for example, to introspect systematically on his or her condition (Marx & Cronan-Hillix, 1987).
- 7 Therefore, around 1910, psychologists began to question the usefulness of studying immediate conscious experience. [C] Increasingly, the focus shifted toward the study of observable behavior. [D] The intellectual leader of this new movement was a young professor at Johns Hopkins University named John B. Watson (1878–1958). Watson was convinced that psychology must discard all references to consciousness or mental events, because such events cannot be publicly observed and therefore fall outside of the proper domain of science. Observable behavior should be the proper subject matter of psychology; consequently, the task for the scientific researcher should be to discover how changes in the environment can lead to changes in measurable behavior. Because its entire emphasis was on behavior, Watson called this new approach **behaviorism** (Watson, 1913, 1919).
- 8 Behaviorism had an enormous impact on the development of psychology, particularly in North America. Remember: The psychology of Wundt and James was the psychology of mind and immediate experience. Yet by the second and third decades of the twentieth century, references to consciousness had largely vanished from the psychological vocabulary, as had the technique of systematic introspection. Researchers now concerned themselves with measuring behavior, especially in animals, and noting how carefully controlled laboratory experiences could change behavior (Skinner, 1938; Hull, 1943). Influential psychologists such as B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) offered repeated demonstrations of the practical value of the behaviorist approach. Skinner discovered the principles of behavior modification—how actions are changed by reinforcement and nonreinforcement—that are now widely used in mental hospitals, schools, and the workplace (Skinner, 1969).
- 9 The behaviorist approach dominated psychology for decades. However, many psychologists have returned to the study of mental events (but with a healthy insistence on defining those events in observational terms). Behaviorism continues to be influential in modern psychology, but it no longer commands the dominant position that it once held.

1. With which of the following topics is the passage primarily concerned?
 - (A) Modern psychological approaches
 - (B) Experimental psychological methods
 - (C) The function of behavior in psychology
 - (D) The influence of evolution in psychology
2. Which of the psychologists studied the purpose of experience?
 - (A) Evolutionists
 - (B) Behaviorists
 - (C) Structuralists
 - (D) Functionalists
3. The word **atypical** in the passage is closest in meaning to
 - (A) not acceptable
 - (B) not orderly
 - (C) not new
 - (D) not usual
4. The word **expanded** in the passage is closest in meaning to
 - (A) determined
 - (B) demonstrated
 - (C) enlarged
 - (D) sustained
5. The word **its** in the passage refers to
 - (A) changes
 - (B) environment
 - (C) task
 - (D) behaviorism
6. In paragraph 6, what does the author say about self-observation?
 - (A) It should be the primary method for psychology.
 - (B) It may not provide accurate data.
 - (C) It is useful for the study of abnormal psychology.
 - (D) It is best to document the experience.
7. Which of the sentences below best expresses the information in the highlighted statement in the passage? The other choices change the meaning or leave out important information.
 - (A) Although behaviorism is still respected, it is not the primary approach in modern psychology.
 - (B) The influence of behaviorism is still as prominent as ever in modern psychology.
 - (C) In spite of its former position of importance, behaviorism has lost respect in modern psychology.
 - (D) Behaviorism has dominated modern psychology longer than any other approach.
8. The author mentions all of the following methods of analysis EXCEPT
 - (A) psychoanalysis
 - (B) behavior modification
 - (C) problem solving
 - (D) introspection
9. It can be inferred that the previous page in the textbook was a summary of
 - (A) structuralism in Europe
 - (B) North American psychologists
 - (C) Charles Darwin's theory
 - (D) recent trends in psychology
10. Four squares (□) indicate where the following sentence can be added to the passage.

The most obvious problem with the method is that it is simply not possible to replicate the experiments scientifically.

Where would the sentence best fit into the passage?

 - (A)
 - (B)
 - (C)
 - (D)