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## UNIT 8 BEHAVIOURISM\*

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### Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Ascertain the origins of behaviourism;
- Discuss the contributions of John Watson; and
- Describe the overall impact of Watsonian Behaviourism.

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\* Dr. Saif R. Farooqi, Department of Applied Psychology, Vivekananda College, University of Delhi

## 8.0 INTRODUCTION

Behaviourism or the behaviourist approach lays stress on the role of environmental stimuli in determining the way we act. Learning — changes in behaviour because of experiences (excluding changes due to fatigue, injury, or drug effects) — is at the centre of this approach. The study of classical and operant conditioning in behaviourism has further augmented the understanding of learning. During the development of psychology, United States of America in twentieth century witnessed the substantial support received by behaviourism as a system that defines psychology as the study of behaviour. It commenced as an empirical discipline that studied behaviour in terms of adaptation to environment stimuli.

Behaviourism is also referred to as behaviouristic psychology. The central tenet of behaviourism is that an organism learns behavioural adaptation, whose learning is governed by the principles of association (forming connections between ideas and events). Behaviour, according to this approach, is not just a manifestation of underlying mental events, but has a unique meaning. Overt behaviour, that is, behaviour which can be observed and hence quantified remains the focus of the discipline. One of the factors that give behaviourism its uniqueness, just like any other approach, is its focus of attention. Behaviourism stands apart from other approaches by its emphasis on the relationship between observable behaviour (responses) and environmental events (stimuli).

### Box 8.1: Basic Assumptions of Behaviourism

Behaviourism has the following two basic assumptions:

- 1) *Parsimony*. Out of all the basic principles in behaviourism, the most fundamental is the concept of “parsimony”, also called “Occam’s razor” after the English philosopher who first proposed it. Parsimony often seeks the simplest possible explanation for any event. The opposition of behaviourists to introspection was in part due to the too many vague concepts solicited by it which lacked parsimony. On the other hand, behaviourism emphasized the use of operational definitions, that is, defining concepts in terms of observable events, which naturally led to the focus on *stimuli* and *responses*.
- 2) *Associationism*. Behaviourism gives prominence to the role of experience in determining behaviour, which manifests itself through learning. The basic explanation since the time of Aristotle has been that organisms learn by association, that is, by forming connections between ideas and events. Behaviourists in psychology were particularly influenced by this concept of “associationism”, which was also endorsed by the British empiricists. Followed by parsimony, associationism becomes the second basic assumption of behaviourism.

Hence, parsimony and associationism conjointly formed the underpinnings for the emergence of behaviourism.

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## 8.1 ORIGINS OF BEHAVIOURISM

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Psychologists in the early twentieth century were likely to focus on either the experimental study of physiological processes, or the introspective analysis of experience. Restricted technology for studying brain at that time hindered the physiological research, problems of subjectivity limited the scope of introspection, and functionalism was criticized for adopting a philosophical approach. In the face of these constraints, behaviourism emerged as an approach emphasizing on quantifiable and observable aspects of behaviour.

In 1913, John Broadus Watson, an American psychologist, formally instituted behaviourism in his paper, *Psychology as the Behaviourists View It*. Through this paper, he changed the course of modern psychology. A revolutionary shift from existing systems of psychology was proposed by Watson with the assertion that the study of inner consciousness is not the appropriate direction for the development of psychology. The supposition of any non-physical mental state of consciousness was seen as a pseudo-problem for science and was completely replaced with overt, observable behaviour as a legitimate subject matter of true science, by Watson.

Watson advocated very comprehensible and straightforward principles of his approach. He compelled the need for a scientific psychology that dealt only with the observable acts which could be objectively defined in terms of *stimulus* and *response*. Further, all mentalistic concepts and terms were debarred by Watson's psychology. Behaviouristic science forbade the use of such words as image, mind, and consciousness, which had been carried over from the days of mental philosophy. Watson professed consciousness to be a plain assumption which was unverifiable as the ancient concept of soul and forthrightly dismissed its existence. This rendered the technique of introspection, which was supposed to study the existence of conscious processes, of no use to the science of behaviour. Watson, however, was not solely responsible for the basic ideas of the behaviourist movement since they had been evolving in psychology and biology for years. The period from antiquity to the nineteenth century marked the historical trend that led to Watsonian behaviourism.

### 8.1.1 The Pre-Socratic Philosophers

The pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Ionian physicists and **Hippocrates**, explained human activity in terms of mechanical reactions which can be reduced to biological or physical causes.

### 8.1.2 French Sensationalism

An important antecedent of twentieth century behaviourism was the French sensationalist tradition. The role of French philosopher **Auguste Comte** is crucial in the history of objectivism. He was the founder of positivist movement, which accentuated the factual knowledge, the truth of which is evident and unquestionable. As Comte suggested, knowledge seems to be valid only when it is social in nature and when it can be observed objectively. Since introspection depends on an individual's subjective consciousness and is not objectively observable, it was revoked.

### 8.1.3 British Empiricism

Behaviourism got its clearest intellectual substratum from the British empiricists. The British philosopher John Locke, considered as one of the most influential Enlightenment thinker, proposed the concept of mental passivity, claiming that the mind is dependent on the environment for its contents. The major principles of behaviourism are also derived from *empiricism* and *associationism*, the two dominant themes of British philosophers.

### 8.1.4 Animal Psychology

The relationship between animal psychology and behaviourism was made clear by Watson, when he said that behaviourism is a direct outgrowth of studies in animal behaviour during the first decade of the twentieth century. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that a very vital precursor of Watson's approach was animal psychology, which emanated from evolutionary theory. It incited the venture for demonstrating the existence of mind in lower organisms and the continuity between the minds of human and animal. **Conwy Lloyd Morgan**, one of the pioneers of animal psychology, gave the law of parsimony and relied heavily on experimental instead of anecdotal techniques, which led the field of animal psychology towards more objectivity.

### 8.1.5 Russian Physiologists

Watson's fundamental empirical approach of associations in behaviourism can be seen in the work of a group of predominantly Russian physiologists studying reflexology. Physiologist Ivan Petrovitch Pavlov put forward the most comprehensive system of Russian reflexology.

In 1904, Ivan Pavlov received the Nobel Prize for his work on the neural and glandular bases of digestion. In association with this research (working primarily with dogs that began in 1879), sometime around in 1902, Pavlov discovered the fundamental principles of associative conditioning. During his research, Pavlov noticed a phenomenon which he named *psychic salivation*, that is, dogs would salivate even before they were actually given food. Following his belief that digestion involved a series of reflexes, Pavlov set out to unmask the control mechanism of this anticipatory response.

His discovery came to be known as *classical* conditioning — the study of learning, which involves reflexes. Classical conditioning explains the process whereby a novel stimulus can elicit an existing reflex response due to learning. Classical conditioning is a form of learning, which involves association of two environmental stimuli such that response to one stimulus can be changed based on its association with the other stimulus. Pavlov, grounding its significance in classical conditioning, outlined the principle that conditioning procedures represent the quantification and objectification of the acquisition and forgetting of associations.

Pavlov set forth what he contended was a legitimate explanation of the formation of associations based on physiological reflexology by experimentally examining the accepted concepts of association theory discussed by philosophers such as David Hume and James Mill.

The role of nervous system, especially the cortex in providing the mechanisms of reflexology was acknowledged by Pavlov in his theory of classical conditioning. All higher nervous activity can be investigated in virtue of highly controlled experimental paradigm of conditioning. Pavlov regarded his procedures as ideally suited to investigate all types of behaviour since they involved precise experimental control of environmental stimuli to produce response changes. He also asserted that all learning is based on association and is reducible to the contiguous relationship between environmental stimuli and the meditational role of the cortex.

Pavlov's classical conditioning had a great impact on Watson as he discerned a model for the behaviourist methodology in Pavlov's work, which he was trying to foster. Foreseeing the possibility of applying classical conditioning to humans, Watson proceeded to study the emotions by attempting to form emotional responses experimentally, as opposed to introspectionists, who studied emotions by trying to describe the mental states involved. Pavlov, although a physiologist of exquisite competence, was an experimentalist first. He ascertained that the experimental method is the exclusive means of finding truth in science. The experimental approach of behaviouristic psychology, thus, is indebted to Pavlov's objective reflexology, which later formed the basis of classical conditioning.

### 8.1.6 Edward Lee Thorndike

Edward Lee Thorndike was the major American researcher relevant to the antecedents of Watsonian behaviourism. Although Thorndike can be categorized as one of the American functionalists, based on his overall career, his pioneering work on associations made him a significant figure leading to the beginning of behaviourism.

Thorndike completed his doctoral dissertation, in 1898, titled *Animal Intelligence: An Experimental Study of the Associative Processes in Animals*, which was later published in 1911. Thorndike's purpose of research was to analyze the conditions under which animals changed their behaviour (that is, learning was involved). In due process, he kept his focus on the relationship between a response and its consequences, resulting in what he labelled as *the law of effect*. The law holds that the responses, which lead to a pleasant and satisfying outcome for the organism are more likely to be repeated, and the responses, which lead to an unpleasant outcome are not likely to be repeated. It is a kind of associationism where a sort of connection is made between a response and its consequence by the organism.

Formerly, Thorndike's law of effect stated that any response generating reward or satisfaction tend to be repeated, whereas any response generating punishment or annoyance tend to be eliminated. The law of effect was later modified to emphasize that reward strengthens associations, whereas punishment renders subjects to move towards another response, rather than weakening the existing association between the response and the stimulus context. The notion of individuals responding to reward and punishment can be traced to the ancient Greeks. Thorndike's version varied in terms of experimental support that aided his explanation. By articulating his standpoint with an experimental premise, Thorndike laid the foundations for the behaviourist approach. Thorndike's *law of effect* seemed to prefigure

B. F. Skinner's concept of reinforcement as an explanation of the role of consequences in learning, which later formed the basis of the learning approach known as *operant conditioning*.

Both Pavlov and Thorndike provided specific empirical documentation of the association process, despite adopting different paradigms to produce learning. Their contribution to the wave that resulted in behaviourism was compelling, albeit they had no primary intention to do so. Watson was the one who made systematic context of behaviourism explicit.

### 8.1.7 Functionalism

A direct antecedent of behaviourism was functionalism. Although not totally objective, functional psychology, during the time of Watson, represented greater objectivity than its predecessors. Introspection was condemned by the functionalists such as James McKeen Cattell, who emphasized behaviour and objectivity. Consciousness and introspection were of little use to applied psychologists since their various speciality areas constituted objective functional psychology. Thus, the drift of functional psychologists from the Wundt and Titchner's psychology of conscious experience was noticeable even before Watson appeared in the scene. Some functional psychologists were quite specific in necessitating an objective psychology that would focus on behaviour instead of consciousness as evident in their writings and lectures.

Cattell in 1904, at the World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri, opposed the study of consciousness and discredited introspection. Watson witnessed Cattell's speech and his later public position and Cattell's statement was so similar in nature that it has been suggested that Cattell be called the "grandfather" of Watson's behaviourism. The idea of psychology as being objective was supported and reinforced by the intellectual climate in the United States in the decade before Watson formally established behaviourism, favoring overall movement of American psychology towards a behaviouristic direction.

A wave was slowly bringing the American psychologists towards behaviourism. From 1904 onwards, a lot more of them expressed their preference for defining psychology as the science of behaviour rather than as an attempt to describe consciousness. Thus, the transformation of psychology as the science of behaviour was already catching attention. Watson's role was incredible not only because of being the first proponent of the idea, but in foreseeing more clearly than anyone else, the call of the time. Watson worked earnestly and vehemently as the main agent of a revolution, which was inevitable and whose success was assured since it was already in progress.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How did the French and British philosophers play a role in the beginning of behaviourism?

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2) How is functionalism a direct antecedent of behaviourism?

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## 8.2 JOHN B. WATSON (WATSONIAN BEHAVIOURISM)

According to Watson, psychology, being the science of behaviour must deal with actions, which can be described objectively, and thus, it becomes important to discard the use of mentalistic concepts and terminology, which are subjective in nature. Therefore, for Watson's behavioural psychology, items or elements of behaviour, such as muscular movements or glandular secretion, became the primary subject matter. Behaviourism concerns behaviour of the whole organism in relation to its environment. Stimulus-response complexes can be analyzed into their elementary stimulus and response units to work out the specific laws of behaviour.

As far as methodology and subject matter is concerned, Watson's behavioural psychology was an endeavour to develop a science, which was devoid of mentalistic notions and subjective methods; a science which was as sound and objective as physics.



Figure 8.1: John B. Watson

Source: firstdiscoverers.co.uk

### Box 8.2: John B. Watson

John B. Watson had joined the University of Chicago to pursue a graduation in philosophy. However, he got interested in psychology after being influenced by the work of James Rowland Angell, the functional psychologist. In 1903, at the age of 25, Watson completed his PhD, becoming the youngest student at the University of Chicago to have doctoral degree. He stayed at the University of Chicago as an instructor, till 1908. After that he joined John Hopkins University as a professor. His stay at John Hopkins University, for the next 12 years, turned out to be his productive years in academics. At the age of 31, Watson became the chair of the department of psychology at John Hopkins, and also became the editor of the well-known *Psychological Review*.

Watson had been thinking of an objective psychology from 1903. He presented his ideas for the first time in 1908, at Yale University. He gave many such lectures at other different places. In 1913, his now famous paper that established the school of behaviourism was published in the *Psychological Review*. Two years after that, in 1915, he was elected the president of APA (American Psychological Association). In 1919, Watson published his book, *Psychology from a Behaviourists Standpoint*. In the book, he presented a more complete form of his behaviourism.

Watson was forced to resign from John Hopkins University, for having an affair with his research assistant Rosalie Rayner. After that he even left academics and joined an advertising agency, where he applied his psychological principles in advertising and marketing. His academic

career lasted 20 years, which can be considered to be too short. Despite that, Watson, undoubtedly, had a huge influence on psychology. His behaviourism completely changed course of modern psychology.

Following are the contributions of Watson that represent his behaviourism:

### 8.2.1 Types of Behaviour

Watson explained four types of behaviour:

- 1) *Explicit* (overt)– behaviour which can be learned and is *overt* such as talking, writing, and playing;
- 2) *Implicit* (covert)– behaviour which can be learned but is *covert* such as the increased heart rate caused by the sight of a dentist's drill;
- 3) *Explicit unlearned behaviour*– behaviour which comes naturally and is visible such as grasping, blinking, and sneezing;
- 4) *Implicit unlearned behaviour*– behaviour, which comes naturally but is not visible such as glandular secretion and circulatory changes.

According to Watson, these categories incorporate everything that a person does, that is, from thinking to blinking. For studying these types of behaviours, Watson proposed four different methods:

- 1) *Observation*– observing in either naturalistic or experimentally controlled environment;
- 2) The *conditioned-reflex method*– proposed by Pavlov;
- 3) *Testing*– refers to behaviour samples and not measurement of “capacity” or “personality”; and
- 4) *Verbal reports*– another type of overt behaviour

### 8.2.2 Instincts

There had been a radical change in Watson's views about instincts over the years. In 1914, the role of instincts in behaviour was accepted by him. Instincts had a noteworthy role in his theory. By 1919, Watson made the point that instincts are present in infants, which are quickly displaced by learned habits. In 1925, the idea of instincts in humans was completely discarded by him, asserting that there may be a few simple reflexes such as sneezing, crying, eliminating, crawling, sucking, and breathing, but no complex, innate behaviour patterns called instincts.

Watson contended that people are made what they are by experiences and not inheritance. Personality is ought to change depending upon experiences. Watson, by internalizing the perspective that learning is the key to understand the development of human behaviour, became an extreme environmentalist, and thus, was referred to be as a radical environmentalist.

With denying the role of instincts, Watson also dismissed the existence of inherited capacities like temperaments or any kind of talents. Behaviours that appeared to be inherent seemed to be as a result of early childhood training. Children are not born with innate abilities to be great musicians or athletes, but the encouragement and reinforcement of their parents and caregivers made their inclination towards such behaviours. One of the reasons of Watson's profuse popularity was his immense stress on nurturing



effects of parental and social environment with an implication of training children in whichever way possible.

### 8.2.3 Emotions

In introspection, emotions were studied like any other aspect of human experiences, that is, by describing the mental states involved. Watson, however, holding the belief that emotions represented observable responses, attempted to experimentally create emotional responses in order to study them. Watson considered emotions to be bodily responses to specific stimuli. An internal body change such as rapid heart rate is produced by the presence of an attacker, which results in an appropriate learned response. No conscious perception of the emotion or sensations from the internal organs is suggested by the theory.

A particular pattern of physiological changes is involved in each emotion. Even with the recognition of emotional responses involving overt movements, Watson believed internal responses to be predominant. Emotion is then understood as a kind of implicit behaviour in which physical manifestations such as blushing, perspiring, or increased pulse rate make the internal responses evident to some extent. Watson's theory of emotions was less complicated than that of William James. The theory of James asserted that the perception of stimulus was immediately followed by the bodily changes, the feeling of which results in experiencing emotion. The standpoint of James, on emotions, was criticized by Watson. Watson professed that emotions can be described completely with regard to the objective stimulus situation, the overt bodily response, and the internal physiological changes, discarding the conscious perception of the situation and the feeling state.

Watson investigated the stimuli that bring about emotional responses in infants in a classic research and concluded that three fundamental emotions, namely, fear, rage, and love are shown by infants, wherein fear is produced as a result of loud noises and loss of support, rage is evoked by restriction of bodily movements, and love is generated by caressing the skin or by rocking and patting. Typical response patterns to these stimuli were also found. Fear, rage, and love were theorized as unlearned emotional responses and the composition of these basic emotions gives rise to other human emotional responses by the process of conditioning, making it possible to attach them to stimuli that were not originally capable of eliciting them.

### 8.2.3 Thought Processes

The conventional view of thought processes assumed that their occurrence in brain is not strong enough to stimulate any neural impulse over motor nerve to the muscle causing no action in muscles and glands. The occurrence of thought processes in the absence of muscular movements makes them inaccessible to observation or experimentation. So, as per this theory, thought is considered to be exclusively mental and having no physical reference point, making it intangible.

Watson's attempt was to reduce thinking to implicit motor behaviour by claiming that thought was some sort of sensorimotor behaviour like all other aspects of human functioning. Going by the reason that thinking behaviour must involve implicit speech reactions or movements, Watson, reduced

thinking to subvocal talking, which relies on the same muscular habits that are learnt for overt speech. These muscular habits turn inaudible as children grow up because they are constantly warned by parents to stop talking to themselves, subsequently making thinking a way of silently talking to themselves. According to Watson, the voice box, that is, the muscles of tongue and larynx, are involved in this implicit behaviour of thinking. Overt reactions to the stimuli that are expressed by gestures such as frowns and shrugs, are also representations of thoughts.

### 8.2.4 Learning

Although allured by Thorndike's early animal research, Watson was convinced that Thorndike's law of effect was redundantly mentalistic. Thorndike believed that centre of satisfiers in the brain made reinforcement work. However, Watson presumed this to be a feeling or a state of consciousness. According to Watson, the critical thing about conditioning is its ability to cause contiguity, that is, causing events to be associated in time. Rather than relying on Thorndike's law of effect, Watson elucidated learning with respect to the ancient principles of contiguity and frequency. These were also more in line with what Pavlov had suggested.

Watson specified that a learning trial always ends with the animal making a correct response in a learning situation. This indicated that the correct responses are more likely to occur as compared to incorrect responses and the probability of repeating a response is increased as the frequency of its occurrence increases. This is the *law of frequency*. This also indicates that the final response of the organism in a learning situation will be the one which it will likely make when it will next encounter the same situation, known as the *law of recency* as labelled by Watson. Watson concluded that mechanical arrangement of stimuli and responses results in learning.

### 8.2.5 The Mind-Body Problem

Four views on the mind-body relationship existed by the time Watson had begun to formulate his theory. These are given as follows:

- 1) *Interactionist* view—According to this view, the mind and body interact in a way that the mind influences the body and likewise the body can influence the mind. This view was proposed by Rene Descartes and was accepted by William James.
- 2) *Psychophysical parallelism*—As per this view, mental and bodily events are parallel having no interaction between them.
- 3) *Epiphenomenalism*—This view posits that mental events are the by-products of bodily events but do not cause behaviour. That is, bodily events cause mental events, but mental events cannot cause bodily events.
- 4) *Physical monism (materialism)*—This view discarded the existence of mental events (consciousness) altogether.

Initially, accepting the epiphenomenalism viewpoint, Watson later switched to the physical monism viewpoint. Watson maintained that consciousness is an unprovable plain assumption. He, thus, resolved the mind-body issue by straightforwardly denying the existence of mind. He argued that any approach to psychology that approves the study of consciousness in any

form cannot be called science. In the opinion of Watson, mental processes, consciousness, souls, and ghosts are all unsuitable for scientific use.

### 8.2.6 Sex Education

Watson had a great deal to say about sex education, insisting that frank and objective information about sex should be given to children. He also often appreciated Freud for breaking down the myth and hesitation around sex.

### 8.2.7 Advertising

Watson joined the J. Walter Thompson advertising firm in the later part of his career, where he utilized his expertise to use psychology in advertising with quite a lot of success. He became the vice-president of the advertising firm within four years, by carrying out studies on consumer behaviour and writing popular articles for the general public. Thus, in addition to finding an entire new approach to psychology, Watson is also acclaimed for being the first psychologist to apply psychological theory to advertising and marketing.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How is Watson's notion of emotions different from that of William James?  
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- 2) In what ways did Watson suggest thought processes to be observable?  
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## 8.3 CRITICISMS OF WATSONIAN BEHAVIOURISM

The following two points summarize the major criticism against Watsonian behaviourism:

- 1) Psychology got restricted by behaviourism since it confined the behaviour solely to the peripheral events of stimulus and response elements. Watson also ignored physical, central mediation of stimulus and response bonds by relinquishing mental events.
- 2) Watsonian behaviourism resorted to *reductionism* by assuming that behaviour is reducible to environmental stimuli and observable responses.

The rationale to Watson's approach is to propose that behaviour really reduces to physics and physiology. Whether behaviour can be viewed as a separate and distinct science becomes questionable by such reductionism. So, although offering simplicity and clarity, the authenticity of a truly behavioural level of investigation in Watson's behaviourist psychology remained debatable.

**William McDougall**, the pioneer of the instinct theory of motivation, had major criticisms against Watson. He had a heated a debate with Watson, which was published as *The Battle of Behaviourism*, in 1929. The instinct theory by McDougall states that human behaviour is a result of innate

tendencies to thought and action. Behaviourism soon took over these ideas, which were well acknowledged initially. Watson refused to accept the notions of instincts. Although McDougall agreed with Watson about the data of behaviour being the appropriate focus for psychological research, but he claimed that the data of consciousness are also indispensable. McDougall questioned how psychologists can determine meaning of a subject's response without using introspection. He also felt that with a great emphasis on objectivity it cannot be possible to know about daydreams and fantasies, which are important aspects of behaviour.

McDougall then challenged Watson's assumption of fully determined human behaviour, which suggests that everything is the direct result of past experiences and is predictable once the past events are known. Such a psychology, he argued, overlooks free will or freedom of choice. Without the idea of free will and accountability of one's actions, McDougall felt that humans will not take initiatives, there will not be any efforts for the betterment of society. Likewise, the attempts of preventing war, mitigating injustice, and achieving social or personal ideal will be meaningless.

## 8.4 OVERALL IMPACT OF WATSON

Lasting less than 20 years, Watson's productive career in psychology continued to exert its profound influence on the development of psychology, for many years to come. The publication of Watson's paper, *Psychology as The Behaviourists View It*, in 1913 changed the course of modern psychology. Psychology gained more objectivity in its methods and terminology because of Watson as he reacted actively against the prevalent methods of study in psychology at that time. Watson urged for a complete reformulation of psychology by discarding both the content (consciousness) and the methodology (introspection) prevalent at that time. Watson, subsequently, "re-established" the science of psychology. Watson gifted a unity to psychology because of the possibility to yield consensus through objective observations by defining behaviours in terms of stimulus and events, thus providing an alternative to the introspective method of structuralism.

Consequently, a positive, objective science of psychology was offered by Watson's systems by focusing on behavioural adaptability to environmental stimuli, which made behaviourism the dominant system of American psychology by 1930.

Watson's view of psychology has two long-lasting effects:

- 1) The major goal of psychology was changed from the description and explanation of states of consciousness to the prediction and control of behaviour.
- 2) Overt behaviour became almost the exclusive subject matter of psychology.

Today, a lot of psychologists can be considered behaviourists owing to the pervasiveness of Watson's influence on these issues. Some of the central tenets of behaviourism have been so obvious that they have simply become part of standard experimental psychology. In a way, all modern psychologists

are behaviourists in that they restrict their data to observable behaviour, precisely attempt to define stimuli and responses, remain unconvinced with the theories devoid of empirical testing, and dismiss subjective reports as scientific evidence. Even the current definition of psychology - *the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes* - came into being, due to behaviourism.

Watson received a prestigious Gold Medal from APA in 1957, for his influential contributions to psychology. September 25, 1958 marked Watson's demise at the age of 80. The influential philosopher of science Gustav Bergmann, in 1956, reviewing Watson's accomplishments, made a striking statement that next to Freud, Watson was "the most important figure in the history of psychological thought during the first half of the century".

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) What were the criticisms of William McDougall against Watsonian behaviourism?  
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- 2) How is behaviour prevalent in psychology, in contemporary times?  
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**8.5 SUMMARY**

Now that we have come to the end of this Unit, let us list all the major points that we have learnt:

- In 1913, John Broadus Watson, an American psychologist, formally established behaviourism in his paper, *Psychology as the Behaviourists View It*. Through this paper, he changed the course of modern psychology.
- The central tenet of behaviourism is that an organism learns behavioural adaptation, whose learning is governed by the principles of association. Parsimony and associationism are the two fundamental assumptions of behaviourism.
- According to behaviourism, behaviour is not just a manifestation of underlying mental events but has a unique meaning. Overt behaviour, that is, behaviour which can be observed and hence quantified remains the focus of the discipline.
- Watson stressed on the need for a scientific psychology that dealt only with the observable acts which could be objectively defined in terms of stimulus and response.
- The major principles of behaviourism are also derived from empiricism and associationism, the two dominant themes of British philosophers.
- Foreseeing the possibility of applying classical conditioning to humans, Watson proceeded to study the emotions by attempting to form emotional responses experimentally.

- Edward Lee Thorndike was the major American researcher relevant to the antecedents of Watsonian behaviourism. His pioneering work on associations made him a significant figure leading to the beginning of behaviourism.
- Thorndike's law of effect suggests that the responses, which lead to a pleasant and satisfying outcome for the organism are more likely to be repeated, and the responses, which lead to an unpleasant outcome are not likely to be repeated.
- James McKeen Cattell opposed the study of consciousness and discredited introspection. Cattell has been suggested as the "grandfather" of Watson's behaviourism.
- Watson's behavioural psychology was an endeavor to develop a science, which was devoid of mentalistic notions and subjective methods; a science which was as sound and objective as physics.
- Initially, accepting the role of instincts in behaviour, Watson, in 1925, completely discarded the idea of instincts in humans, asserting that there may be a few simple reflexes such as sneezing, crying, eliminating, crawling, sucking, and breathing, but no complex, innate behaviour patterns called instincts.
- Watson considered emotions to be bodily responses to specific stimuli. An internal body change such as rapid heart rate is produced by the presence of an attacker, which results in an appropriate learned response. Watson, reduced thinking to subvocal talking, which relies on the same muscular habits that are learnt for overt speech.
- Watson elucidated learning with respect to the ancient principles of contiguity and frequency. These were also more in line with what Pavlov had suggested. Watson described his approach to learning through the law of frequency and the law of recency.
- Watson urged for a complete reformulation of psychology by discarding both the content (consciousness) and the methodology (introspection) prevalent at that time. Watson, subsequently, "re-established" the science of psychology.
- Today, a lot of psychologists can be considered behaviourists owing to the pervasiveness of Watson's influence on these issues. Some of the central tenets of behaviourism have been so obvious that they have simply become part of standard experimental psychology.
- The current definition of psychology – the scientific study of behaviour and mental processes – came into being, due to behaviourism.

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## 8.6 KEY WORDS

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**Behaviourism:** An approach that emphasizes on the role of environmental stimuli in determining the way we act. Learning is at the centre of this approach. The central tenet of behaviourism is that an organism learns behavioural adaptation, whose learning is governed by the principles of association.

**Learning:** Changes in behaviour because of experiences (excluding changes due to fatigue, injury, or drug effects)

**Parsimony:** The most fundamental principles of behaviourism. Parsimony often seeks the simplest possible explanation for any event.

**Associationism:** The basic explanation since the time of Aristotle has been that organisms learn by association, that is, by forming connections between ideas and events. Behaviourists in psychology were particularly influenced by this concept of “associationism”, which was also endorsed by the British empiricists.

**Classical Conditioning:** A form of learning, which involves association of two environmental stimuli such that response to one stimulus can be changed based on its association with the other stimulus.

**Law of Effect:** The responses, which lead to a pleasant and satisfying outcome for the organism are more likely to be repeated, and the responses, which lead to an unpleasant outcome are not likely to be repeated.

**Types of Behaviour:** Watson explained four types of behaviour – (1) explicit behaviour, which can be learned and is overt; (2) implicit behaviour, which can be learned, but is covert; (3) explicit unlearned behaviour, which comes naturally and is visible in actions such as grasping, blinking, and sneezing; and (4) implicit unlearned behaviour, which comes naturally but is not visible such as glandular secretion and circulatory changes

**Emotion:** Watson considered emotions to be bodily responses to specific stimuli. An internal body change such as rapid heart rate is produced by the presence of an attacker, which results in an appropriate learned response. No conscious perception of the emotion or sensations from the internal organs is suggested by the theory.

**Thought Processes:** Watson attempted to reduce thinking to implicit motor behaviour by claiming that thought was some sort of sensorimotor behaviour like all other aspects of human functioning. Thinking is reduced to subvocal talking, which relies on the same muscular habits that are learnt for overt speech.

**Law of frequency:** The correct responses are more likely to occur as compared to incorrect responses and the probability of repeating a response is increased as the frequency of its occurrence increases.

**Law of recency:** The final response of the organism in a learning situation will be the one which it will likely make when it will next encounter the same situation.

**Reductionism:** Behaviourism is considered to be following a reductionist approach, because Watson assumed that behaviour is reducible to environmental stimuli and observable responses.

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## 8.7 REVIEW QUESTIONS

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- 1) In the year ..... , Watson established behaviourism.
- 2) The two basic assumptions of behaviourism are ..... and .....
- 3) According to Watson, the three fundamental emotions ....., ..... and .....

- 4) The laws that Watson used for his approach to learning are ..... and .....
- 5) How did Pavlov and Thorndike influence Watsonian behaviourism?
- 6) What was Watson's view about instincts?
- 7) How did Watson experimentally demonstrate emotions?
- 8) How did Watson resolve the mind-body problem?
- 9) What are the two major criticisms against Watsonian behaviourism?
- 10) Discuss are the long-lasting effects of behaviourism in psychology?

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### Answers to Review Questions (1-4)

(1) 1913, (2) Parsimony and Associationism, (3) fear, rage, and love, (4) law of frequency and law of recency



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## UNIT 9 NEO-BEHAVIOURISM\*

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### Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Logical Positivism
- 9.2 Operationism
- 9.3 Contributions of Neo-behaviourists
  - 9.3.1 Edward Guthrie
  - 9.3.2 Clark Hull
  - 9.3.3 Edward Tolman
  - 9.3.4 Burrhus Fredrick Skinner
- 9.4 Behaviourism in Today's Time
- 9.5 Summary
- 9.6 Key Words
- 9.7 Review Questions
- 9.8 References and Further Reading
- 9.9 References for Figures
- 9.10 Web Resources

### Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to;

- Explain the evolution and extension of behaviourism;
- Discuss the development of logical positivism and operationism;
- Describe the role of logical positivism and operationism in the emergence of neobehaviourism; and
- Describe the contributions of the four major behaviourists – Guthrie, Hull, Tolman, and Skinner.

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## 9.0 INTRODUCTION

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The revolution brought about by Watson was not an overnight transformation in psychology. It took some time for Watsonian behaviourism to be firmly established. By 1924, a little over a decade later after Watson launched his behaviourism, it was said to have been spread all over. By 1930, Watson could justifiably proclaim that his victory was complete. Thus, behavioural psychology by 1930, had routed all prior approaches to the field.

Watsonian behaviourism was only the first phase of behaviourism. Behaviourism, as a school of psychology, went through different phases, continuously evolving. The evolution of behaviourism can be traced in three different stages:

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\* Dr. Saif R. Farooqi, Department of Applied Psychology, Vivekananda College, University of Delhi

- **First Stage:** The stage of behaviourism – *Watsonian behaviourism* – lasted from 1913 to about 1930.
- **Second Stage:** The second stage of behaviourism – *Neo-behaviourism* – is said to have dated from 1930 to about 1960. This stage strengthened the ideas of Watson in a more rigorous manner.
- **Third Stage:** The third stage of behaviourism – *Neo-neobehaviourism* or *Sociobehaviourism* – can be said to have dated from about 1960 to about 1990. This stage saw the return to the consideration of cognitive processes, while maintaining focus on the observation of overt behaviour.

During the later phase of Watsonian behaviourism, one major development in philosophy in form of *logical positivism*, and one major development in science, in the form of *operationism* was taking place. These two developments directly had an impact on behaviourism, leading to the emergence of neobehaviourism.

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## 9.1 LOGICAL POSITIVISM

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The goal of Comte's and Mach's positivism was to have sciences deal with only what is directly observable. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was considered as unrealistic, as physicists and chemists had discovered theoretical concepts such as gravity, magnetism, atom, force, electron, and mass indispensable. None of these entities were directly observable. The difficulty was, then, to find a way for science to use theory without encountering the dangers put forth in metaphysical speculation. The solution to this problem was given by logical positivism.

Logical positivism is the name given to the view of science developed by a small group of philosophers in Vienna known as the Vienna Circle, around 1924. The older positivism of Comte and Mach was taken up by the Vienna Circle and was combined with the rigors of formal logic. According to them, abstract theoretical terms were allowed only if such terms could be logically tied to empirical observations. The empirical and the theoretical were two major parts into which logical positivism divided science. The observational terms of science refer to empirical events, and the theoretical terms try to explain that which is observed.

The logical positivists in no way reduced the importance of empirical importance by accepting theory as part of science. As a matter of fact, empirical observation was the ultimate authority for the logical positivists. If the theories helped explain what was observed only then they were considered useful. Logical positivism had a powerful influence on psychology. By allowing theory without sacrificing objectivity, it allowed much more complex forms of behaviourism to emerge. As a result of this psychology entered into what Koch called the *age of theory*, which can be said to have occurred from about 1930 to about 1950. A member of the Vienna Circle, **Herbert Feigl**, along with **Rudolph Carnap** named logical positivism and did the most to bring it to the attention of psychologists.

It was believed that if psychology followed the dictates of logical positivism, it could be on par with physics. For that to happen, however, psychology would need to adhere to the principles of operationism.

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## 9.2 OPERATIONISM

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In 1927, the Harvard physicist **Percy Bridgman** published the book, *The Logic of Modern Physics*. In the book he elaborated Mach's proposal that every abstract concept in physics be defined in terms of the procedures used to measure the concept, which he called *operational definition*. Thus, concepts like *force* and *energy* would be defined in terms of the operations or procedures used to measure the quantity of force or energy that is present. In other words, operational definitions tie theoretical terms to observable phenomena. There would be no ambiguity about the definition of the theoretical term due to this. The insistence that all abstract scientific terms be operationally defined was called *operationism* or *operationalism*.

The purpose of operationalism was to render the language and terminology of science as being more objective and precise and to get rid of science of "pseudo-problems," that is, those problems that are not actually observable or physically demonstrable. Operationism took hold in psychology almost immediately along with logical positivism. To convert theoretical terms like *drive*, *learning*, *anxiety*, and *intelligence* into empirical events operational definitions could be used. It would, thus, strip them of their metaphysical connotations.

This kind of an approach was clearly in accordance with psychology's new emphasis on behaviour. For example, learning could be operationally defined as making  $x$  number of successive correct turns in a T-maze, and anxiety and intelligence could be operationally defined as scores on appropriate tests. These definitions had no excess "mentalist" meaning and were completely in terms of publicly observable behaviour. Most psychologists soon agreed with the logical positivists that a concept is scientifically meaningless unless it can be operationally defined. Logical positivism had no aversion to theory, unlike the earlier positivism. To show how science could be theoretical without sacrificing objectivity was in fact one primary goal of logical positivism. Logical positivism dominated experimental psychology by the late 1930s.

All sciences being viewed as essentially the same, was one outcome of logical positivism. It was suggested that all the sciences should use the same terminology, as they all followed the same principles, made the same assumptions, and attempted to explain empirical observations. It was, further, suggested that a language database be created in which all terms would be defined in reference to publicly observable, physical objects and events. There was a push for the unification of and a common vocabulary among the sciences, including psychology, which came to be known as *physicalism*. In psychology, this proposal that all scientific propositions refer to physical things had profound implications. A physical concept is the same as the set of operations or procedures by which it is determined. A number of psychologists believed that this principle would work well for them and were eager to apply it.

Behavioural psychologists were particularly appealed by Bridgman's insistence on discarding pseudo-problems, that is, those questions that defy answer by any known objective test. Propositions such as the existence and nature of the soul that cannot be put to experimental test, something that

cannot be observed in a laboratory, and cannot be measured and manipulated, do not have any meaning for science.

Due to the same reasons, as mentioned above, the concept of individual or private conscious experience is also a pseudo-problem for the science of psychology. Objective methods cannot be used to determine or even investigate the existence or characteristics of consciousness. Thus, consciousness has no place in a scientific psychology, according to operationism. When physicists openly accepted the idea of operationism, many psychologists also felt like doing the same. Since the times of Wilhelm Wundt, psychology had longed for the respectability of physics. Eventually, psychologists used operationism more extensively than did physicists. In the late 1920s and 1930s, all this resulted the neo-behaviourists to incorporate operationism in their approach to psychology.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) How did logical positivism prove to be helpful in using theoretical concepts, without encountering the dangers of metaphysical?  
.....  
.....
- 2) How did operationism play a role developing a unified language for science, including psychology?  
.....  
.....

## 9.3 CONTRIBUTIONS OF NEO-BEHAVIOURISTS

When behaviourism was combined with logical positivism, it resulted in neo-behaviourism. This also reflected the triumph of behaviourism over the mentalistic psychology of consciousness. Additionally, the identification of psychology as a positive science proceeded in a similar manner as the physical sciences.

Each of the neo-behaviourists had their own distinct approach, they however, agreed on several points about the systems they designed to explain their data:

- 1) The core of psychology is the study of learning. This is because learning is the primary mechanism by which organisms adjust to changing environment, making it to be of high importance.
- 2) Most of the behaviours, no matter how complex they may be, can be accounted for by the laws of conditioning.
- 3) If theory is used, it must be used in ways demanded by logical positivism.
- 4) Psychology must adopt the principle of operationism.
- 5) Nonhuman animals should be used as research subjects. The reasons for this are firstly, relevant variable is easier to control in nonhuman animals as compared to human subjects. Secondly, perceptual and learning processes that occur in nonhuman animals differ only in

degree from those processes in humans. The information gathered from nonhuman animals can, therefore, be generalized to humans.

Neo-behaviourism mainly constitutes the work of the psychologists Edwin Guthrie, Clark Hull, Edward Tolman, and B. F. Skinner.

### 9.3.1 Edwin Guthrie

Edwin Guthrie's approach is called *contiguity theory*. Guthrie advocated a psychology of observable behaviour consisting of muscular movements and glandular responses elicited by environmental stimuli, just like Watson. His theory of associations asserted a single principle to account for learning, which was in the tradition of Pavlov and Thorndike. Thorndike's reinforcement principle based on the law of effect was not accepted by Guthrie but he rather viewed Thorndike's secondary notion of associative shifting as the basis of learning.



**Figure 9.1: Edwin Ray Guthrie  
(1886-1959)**

Source: www.

behaviouranalysishistory.pbworks.com

#### Box 9.1: Edwin Guthrie

The most influential theoretical work of Edwin Guthrie is *The Psychology of Learning*, initially published in 1935, and later revised in 1952. His writing style was non-technical, humorous, and full of anecdotes. He felt that scientific theory should be written in such a way that students at the undergraduate level can easily understand it. He also emphasized a lot on the practical application of ideas. Guthrie's most influential experimental work was written along with George Horton. In that he studied the problem-solving behaviour of cats. It was published as *Cats in a Puzzle Box*, in 1952.

Even though Guthrie himself was a behaviourist, he had disagreements with other influential behaviourists such as Watson, Hull, Tolman, and Skinner. He felt that their theories were not as parsimonious as it should be, and that their approach is too subjective.

The single principle that contiguity is the foundation of learning is the key to Guthrie's associationistic theory. Behaviour was viewed in terms of movement rather than responses by Guthrie. By this distinction, he meant that movements are the components of larger response units, or behavioural acts. Accordingly, skilled behaviours may be viewed in terms of a gross response composed of smaller units of movements that are largely muscular. Likewise, stimuli were viewed as a complex situation consisting of smaller elements. Given the presence of similar stimulus elements, Guthrie's principle of contiguity stated that when a combination of stimulus elements is accompanied by movement, the movement sequence will recur. Guthrie suggested that learning is a pattern or chain of discrete movements elicited by both environmental and internal stimulus cues.

The role of reinforcement received a unique interpretation in this because Guthrie's view of associations relied on stimulus and response contiguity. Guthrie believed that learning takes place in one-trial. This means that the contiguous relationship between stimulus and response elements immediately produces the associative bond at full strength. The effects of a reinforcing reward or punishment serve to feed back on the stimulus situation, which alters the situation and requires a new bond between the altered stimulus situation and movement. Therefore, reinforcement brings

about a change in the stimulus context, requiring movement. With this the learning proceeds within the behaviour act.

Extinction or forgetting takes place due to interference from new associations rather than the decay of stimulus-response bonds caused by the absence of reinforcement. In the same manner, practice effects were seen as improving the coordination of established bonds within the gross behavioural act instead of affecting stimulus movement association. Accordingly, Guthrie viewed drives as energizers of behaviour act and not as causal motivational agents.

The later behaviouristic psychologists were influenced by Guthrie's arguments and interpretations. **F. D. Sheffield** defended Guthrie's views and extended them to include the use of positive reinforcement as a means of refining behaviour. Similarly, many of the implications of Guthrie's writings were demonstrated by **Virginia Voeks** with the use of carefully designed experiments. A major criticism against Guthrie's approach was that it is incomplete and that it does not deal with complex learning and memory problems, in a comprehensive manner. Despite this criticism, Guthrie has been appreciated in explaining complicated systems parsimoniously.

### 9.3.2 Clark Hull

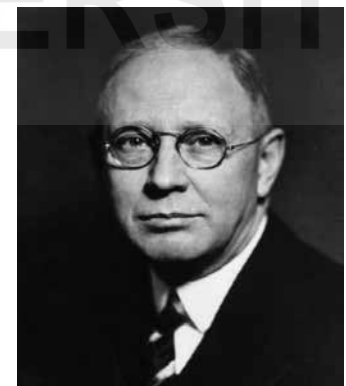
Clark Hull's systematic approach is called *hypothetico-deductive* theory. This theory came closest to a comprehensive treatment of behavioural issues governed by common principles. The central idea of Hull's approach is habit formation, which is the accumulations of experiences for effective adaptation. Hull's scientific approach was truly systematic. He advocated a hypothetico-deductive structure to guide research as he recognized the importance of observation and experimentation. Following the approach of Euclidian geometry, in this strategy a behaviour principle or formulation is first deduced from postulates and then rigorously tested. A belief is supported by a successful test to form the postulates, and a failure results in revision of the postulates. Following a logical progression, Hull's approach was positivist and verified through empirical demonstration.

#### Box 9.2: Clark Hull

Clark Hull was devoted to the problems of the scientific method, like no other psychologist, at that time. He was very well versed in mathematics and formal logic, and applied them to psychology, like no one else before him. His form of behaviourism is said to be more sophisticated and complicated than that of Watson. He and his followers dominated American psychology from the 1940s to the 1960s.

In 1936, Hull was elected as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of American Psychological Association (APA). In his presidential address, he talked about his goal to use mechanistic and lawful principles in explaining purposive behaviour. Hull had a huge influence on the discipline of psychology. He inspired a whole lot of research and influenced a large number of psychologists, indicating his stature in psychology. He propagated and extended the idea of an objective behaviourist approach, like no one else.

Today, based on his interest in machine learning, Hull is viewed as the forerunner of artificial intelligence. Hull viewed humans as machines that can learn and think, and therefore, comparing and contrasting machines with learning was compatible with his approach.



**Figure 9.2: Clark L. Hull  
(1884-1952)**

Source: [www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com)

Hull's system relied heavily on mathematical predictions and was intricate. As his experimental tests progressed over time, he made detailed modifications. Hull's theory of learning is defined in terms of the reduction of drives arising from motivational states as essentially it is focused on the necessity of reinforcement. A homeostatic model seeking equilibrium from drive forces is the context used to view the behaving organism.

The core of Hull's analysis is the idea of intervening variables. Intervening variables are unobservable entities that psychologists employ to account for observable behaviour. Thus, from a purely behaviouristic perspective, Hull extended Watson's conceptualization of behaviour in terms of the peripheral (S–R) events to a consideration of central, organismic factors, stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R), intervening variables. It was Woodworth who had suggested this expansion of the behavioural model, in 1918, but it was Hull who systematically articulated organismic variables.

In Hull's theory, Habit strength, ( ${}_sH_R$ ), is the chief intervening variable for learning. It depends on two factors for associations. Contiguity is the first principle, which means that a close temporal relationship must exist between stimulus and reinforcement. Reinforcement is the second principle, which is defined in its primary form as drive reduction. There are also secondary reinforcements, which are cues that are reliably associated with the primary reinforcement and take on the reinforcement properties. For instance, if in the presence of light, a hungry rat is repeatedly given food for correct responses, the light takes on some of the rewarding characteristics of the food.

In order to get the basic procedure in which learning occurs as contiguity of stimulus and response under conditions of reinforcement, Hull attempted to integrate Thorndike's law of effect with Pavlovian conditioning. Habit strength ( ${}_sH_R$ ) and drive (D) interact to produce what Hull referred to as *reaction potential* ( ${}_sE_R$ ). Reaction potential is defined as the "tendency to produce some reaction under the effect of the stimulus."  ${}_sE_R$  is a theoretical concept, which is not synonymous with observable responses. It is the product of  ${}_sH_R$  and D:

$${}_sE_R = {}_sH_R \times D$$

Hull's intervening variables, therefore, represents a qualitative conceptualization along with an attempt to define quantitative relationships. For example, on the basis of the aforementioned expression, little performance would be observed from a hungry but naive rat. In such cases, drive will be high, and habit strength is not, which shows a low tendency to respond. Similarly, a rat with a well-established response to bar-press for food reward would not perform if it is not hungry, accounting for the distinction between learning and performance. In such a case, habit strength is high, but drive is low, which will produce little expectation of reaction potential.

In order to complete his framework for intervening variables that mediate performance, Hull included negative, inhibiting factors (I) that result from fatigue and boredom, as a by-product of performance. Hull also included the contributions of stimulus magnitude (V), such as, a faint versus a loud CS; the magnitude of reinforcement (K), such as, one versus four food pellets

per correct response; and the oscillating, momentary threshold of reaction for an individual subject ( $S-O_R$ ). All of these intervening variables are related in the following manner:

$$S-E_R = S-H_R \times D + V + K - I - S-O_R$$

As Hull's theory developed this summary equation was itself articulated into more refined components. Hull's entire detailed structure was applied to the quantification of all possible influences on the acquisition of adaptive behaviour. His conceptualization has been supported by laboratory tests that have been largely conducted on rats. This analytic approach assumed that more complex forms of behaviour could be derived from these intervening variables.

Despite being supported by experimental tests, Hull's theory as a whole was not found to be very successful. Empirical discrepancies were found in Hull's system, in that it was unable to deal with insightful and rapid acquisition of behaviour. Hull had stressed upon on the importance of practice during training, which produced continuous but gradual improvement during acquisition. More importantly, the theory failed in its attempt to quantify the conceptual relationships among intervening variables. Hull's views have also been found to be premature. His system is often suggested to be a fixed, rigid structure that is perhaps not suitable for the variability of human and animal behaviour. Nevertheless, Hull's system has been found to be superb as a model for research. Much of the contemporary jargon to describe learning is because of Hull.

#### Check Your Progress 2

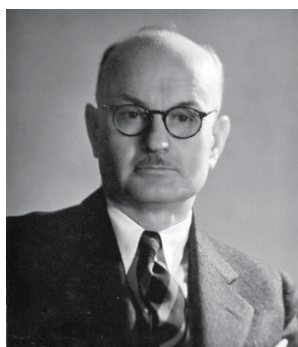
- 1) How did Guthrie distinguish between movements and responses?  
.....  
.....
- 2) How did Hull extend Watson's conceptualization of behaviour?  
.....  
.....

### 9.3.3 Edward Tolman

Edward Tolman's approach is called cognitive behaviourism. His theory further expanded the idea of Watson's behaviourism, more than Guthrie and Hull. Tolman proposed a consideration of behaviour that was *molar*, as opposed to molecular in his major work, *Purposive Behaviour in Animals and Men* (1932). According to him, molar behaviour is a unified and complete act, which provides the proper unit for psychology. He suggested that underlying molecular elements like neural, muscular, or glandular processes are not good enough to be considered as a molar act.

In doing so, Tolman can be viewed as departing from Watsonian behaviourism by incorporating the study of higher cognitive processes in psychology. His approach to molar behaviour was not reductionistic. Tolman argued that explanations based on molecular components is following a reductionist approach, which becomes inadequate, because it results in the loss of the purely psychological level. It said that explanations based upon molecular





**Figure 9.3 Edward  
C. Tolman (1886-1959)**

Source: [www.consciousnessandculture.com](http://www.consciousnessandculture.com)

components are not adequate. Therefore, according to Tolman, molar behaviour is more than the sum of the molecular elements.

### Box 9.3: Edward Tolman

Edward Tolman is considered to be the forerunner of modern cognitive psychology. His work on the problems of learning and his concept of the intervening variable had a great impact on the discipline of psychology. Tolman used intervening variables as a way of defining unobservable internal states. This made such internal states to get respect in scientific study.

Tolman believed that organisms are active processors of information, which is in accordance with contemporary cognitive psychology. Tolman's theory in way is a precursor to the information processing theory and the social-cognitive theory of Bandura. Tolman was also a pioneer of behaviour genetics, which is very popular in the present-day scenario. In 1937, Tolman was elected as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the American Psychological Association (APA). Additionally, he received APA's Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award.

Tolman relies heavily on many of the premises of Gestalt psychology. He used the term Gestalt to describe holistic, insightful learning experiences. Further, his notion of molar behaviour and adoption of mental isomorphism were directly taken from Gestalt psychology. He used the term *mental isomorphism* to describe the central product of learning in terms of the acquisition of field maps, which exist in the brain as cognitive representations of the learned environment.

Tolman's *laws of acquisition* mainly focused on practice that builds up sign Gestalts, or expectancies. For instance, in his maze learning experiments with rats, Tolman described the acquisition of *place learning*, which he inferred as the acquisition of relationships or *cognitive maps* in the subject. In the same way, he demonstrated expectancy of reinforcement, when he found that rats that were trained to one kind of reward switched to a more appealing food. Finally, he demonstrated the idea of *latent learning* in rats, which suggests different effects on performance levels can be exerted, depending on the quality of reinforcement. In all these experiments, Tolman clearly showed that organisms are guided by central, mediating processes that are beyond the environment. In doing so, he used cognitive explanations as intervening variables.

The theoretical orientation of Tolman has not been to be very systematic, when compared to the approach of Hull. Further, Tolman explanations of the central mediation of cognitive learning have been found to be vague. Despite these criticisms, Tolman is credited with bringing about a new perspective of behaviourism. He enabled behaviourism to move away from the reductionist, molecular view of Watson. Additionally, his discovery of performance being different from learning, which he even repeatedly demonstrated, showed that learning is not something that can simply be reduced to elements of stimulus-response-reinforcement. He was able to firmly establish the notion of molar behaviour, and stimulated a great deal of research in it. Tolman, unlike Hull, may not have behind a large number of followers or a systematic school of thought, but he certainly did

anticipate the research theme of cognitive learning, which is predominant in contemporary psychology.

### 9.3.4 Burrhus Fredrick Skinner

B. F. Skinner, in 1950, published his paper, *Are Theories of Learning Necessary?* This paper brought about what is called the end of the *theory-building phase* of the behaviourism. Skinner felt that theory building had a number of limitations. He felt that theories are based on a-priori assumptions that are questionable and misrepresent behavioural sciences. Instead of theories, Skinner suggested a system of behaviourism that is guided by data. For Skinner, theory should only be used in making descriptive generalizations that are made on the basis of facts, using a positivistic approach.

Skinner's approach had more of a methodological emphasis. He propagated a return to the study of behaviour with respect to peripheral events. He, thus, was completely against the usage of central mediating agencies of behaviour, whether they were cognitive or physiological. Instead of central mediating agencies, Skinner strongly believed that behaviour is only determined by the environment. Many-a-times, because of this, Skinner's approach has been referred to as radical environmentalism. Due to his strong emphasis on environmental determinacy, Skinner believed that if the environment is controlled, then behaviour can also be controlled. For this reason, he gave preference to exhaustive single subject studies, comparing the subject in different environmental conditions. He believed that organisms differ due to differences in the environment and not individual differences inherent in them.

#### Box 9.4: Burrhus Fredrick Skinner

B. F. Skinner was considered to be the most influential psychologist, for many decades. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Skinner remained the major figure associated with behaviourism. During this time, he shaped American psychology more than any other psychologist. Unlike other neobehaviourists, Skinner's approach was more in line of positivism rather than logical positivism. After the second World War, Skinner's behaviourism not only rivalled other versions, but even surpassed them all.

Skinner had a number of achievements throughout his life. He attracted a large number of loyal and enthusiastic followers. He developed a program for the behavioural control of society, promoted behaviour modification techniques, and invented an automated crib for tending infants. His novel, *Walden Two*, remained popular decades after its publication. In 1958, Skinner was awarded the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award by the American Psychological Association (APA). His book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971) was a national best-seller, which also gave him the opportunity to appear on television talk shows, to discuss his views. He was even featured on the cover of *Times Magazine*, in 1971. He had become more of a celebrity. His name became very familiar to the general public. The magazine *Psychology Today*, in 1972 noted that Skinner being a professor in psychology had also acquired the celebrity status of a movie star.

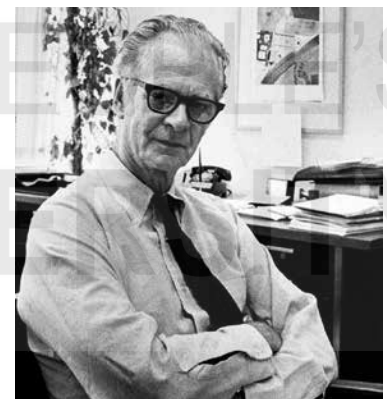


Figure 9.4: B. F. Skinner (1904-1990)

Source: [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)

Despite following the mechanistic principle stringently, Skinner was a humanitarian, and his overall goal was the betterment of society. This was vividly reflected in his efforts to modify behaviour in real-life settings such as homes, schools, and other organizations. He strongly believed that his methods could relieve humans from many of the sufferings, and wanted his approach to be applied in a more widespread manner.

For his efforts in developing the behaviour modification technique, which was used to enhance the quality of life of the mentally retarded, Skinner was presented with the Kennedy International Award, in 1971. He was named the Humanist of the Year by American Humanist Association, in 1972. In 1990, Skinner was presented the Lifetime Contribution to Psychology Award. Just eight days after that, at the age of 86, Skinner passed away. As a tribute to Skinner, the November 1992 issue of the journal *American Psychologist* was entirely dedicated his ideas.

The study of *operant behaviour* was the basis for Skinner's research. This made his approach different from Pavlov, who studied respondent behaviour. When responses are caused by specific stimuli, then it is referred to respondent behaviour. In contrast to that, operant behaviour is something that is ongoing, without any apparent stimulus. Operant behaviour is also about the organism operating on the environment. To study operant behaviour, Skinner developed an environmental chamber in which birds could engage in pecking, or rats in bar pressing. Skinner felt that using such an apparatus makes it easier to control the environment enabling to record ongoing, operant rates of responses.

According to Skinner, learning takes place when the operant behaviour is controlled by reinforcement from the environment. Initially, the operant responses are shaped by reinforcement of approximations of the desired operant behaviour. In order to increase the probability of the operant, a reinforcing event is introduced after the initially refined operant. For example, bar pressing in a rat being defined as an operant can be increased if food is presented after the act of bar pressing. Therefore, for Skinner reinforcement is the probability of changes in the operant rate. This makes his idea of reinforcement to be different from that of Thorndike and Hull. Thorndike saw reinforcement in terms of satisfiers or annoyers, and Hull saw reinforcement in terms of drive reduction. Skinner avoided these two ways of defining reinforcement.

Skinner showed that specific response rates can be obtained for particular schedules of reinforcement, demonstrating the power of reinforcement. In the same way, he translated conditioning processes such as *generalization* and *discrimination* to a reinforcement contingency framework. He also extended the principles of operant control to a consideration of verbal behaviour. Skinner used his experimental data for his argument that behaviour is controlled. Accordingly, he suggested that psychologists should define the parameters of effective control that may be suitable for social implications.

Skinner has been heavily criticised for his approach. His idea of behavioural control and his mechanical conception of human nature have not gone down well with a lot of people. Skinner, however, felt that human activity

does not involve personal freedom or self-determinacy. He argued that the humanistic characteristics that are assigned to human beings, making them different from other species is more of an illusion that has been created throughout history. According to Skinner, to be truly human means to be in control, understanding and using the environment for benefitting the self.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) How is Tolman's approach different from Watsonian behaviourism?  
 .....  
 .....
- 2) What is the role of environment in behaviour, according to Skinner?  
 .....  
 .....

## 9.4 BEHAVIOURISM IN TODAY'S TIME

All the neo-behaviourists have been highly influential in one way or the other. Tolman's cognitive behaviourism, emphasising on purposive behaviour and mental constructs has been the forerunner of contemporary cognitive psychology. Hull's emphasis on deriving mathematical equations has led a number of psychologists to develop mathematical models of different types of behaviours.

Among all the neo-behaviourists, the influence of Skinner has been really strong. The popularity of Skinner's behaviourism is reflected in the followers of Skinner establishing a separate division in the American Psychological Association (APA), which directly associated with Skinner. Division 25, in the APA, known as the division of the Experimental Analysis of Behaviour is all about Skinner's approach. The division has its own journal to publish all related research in the area.

Advances in psychological research, however, over the years, have led the influence of behaviourism to diminish. Contemporary psychology emphasizes a lot on cognitive aspects, which, except for Tolman, can be viewed as completely against the whole idea of behaviourism. Research in evolutionary psychology has given a lot of evidences that much of animal behaviour, which includes human social behaviour, is genetically determined. This is also completely against the idea of behaviourism.

Additionally, the insistence of neo-behaviourists to operationally define theoretic terms has been found to be problematic. Many of the logical positivists have themselves abandoned the idea of strict operationism as it seems to be too restrictive. Due to the emphasis on operationism, scientific concepts that were too complex, yet useful in giving new pathways of research, had to be excluded, hampering scientific progress.

Nevertheless, there is one legacy of behaviourism and neo-behaviourism that still dominates the discipline of psychology. Psychologists, mostly agree that the subject of psychology should be overt behaviour. Even cognitive and neuropsychological processes are largely examined in terms of overt behaviour, under different specific situations. In that sense, most of the experimental psychologists in today's time are behaviourists.

## 9.5 SUMMARY

Now that we have come to the end of this Unit, let us list all the major points that we have learnt.

- Behaviourism, as a school of psychology, went through different phases, continuously evolving. The evolution of behaviourism can be traced in three different stages – Watsonian behaviourism (1913 – 1930), Neo-behaviourism (1930 to about 1960), and Neoneobehaviourism (from about 1960 to about 1990).
- During the later phase of Watsonian behaviourism, one major development in philosophy in form of logical positivism, and one major development in science, in the form of operationism was taking place. These two developments directly had an impact on behaviourism, leading to the emergence of neo-behaviourism.
- When behaviourism was combined with logical positivism, it resulted in neo-behaviourism. Neo-behaviourism mainly constitutes the work of the psychologists Edwin Guthrie, Clark Hull, Edward Tolman, and B. F. Skinner.
- Guthrie advocated a psychology of observable behaviour consisting of muscular movements and glandular responses elicited by environmental stimuli, just like Watson. The single principle that contiguity is the foundation of learning is the key to Guthrie's associationistic theory.
- Hull's theory came closest to a comprehensive treatment of behavioural issues governed by common principles. The central idea of Hull's approach is habit formation, which is the accumulations of experiences for effective adaptation. He advocated a hypothetico deductive structure to guide research as he recognized the importance of observation and experimentation.
- In Hull's theory, Habit strength, ( ${}_sH_R$ ), is the chief intervening variable for learning. In order to get the basic procedure in which learning occurs as contiguity of stimulus and response under conditions of reinforcement, Hull attempted to integrate Thorndike's law of effect with Pavlovian conditioning.
- Tolman's theory further expanded the idea of Watson's behaviourism, more than Guthrie and Hull. Tolman proposed a consideration of behaviour that was *molar*, as opposed to molecular. He used the term Gestalt to describe holistic, insightful learning experiences. Tolman's *laws of acquisition* mainly focused on practice that builds up sign Gestalts, or expectancies.
- Tolman anticipated the research theme of cognitive learning, which is predominant in contemporary psychology.
- B. F. Skinner, in 1950, published his paper, *Are Theories of Learning Necessary?* This paper brought about what is called the end of the *theory-building phase* of the behaviourism. Due to his strong emphasis on environmental determinacy, Skinner believed that if the environment is controlled, then behaviour can also be controlled.

- Skinner believed that organisms differ due to differences in the environment and not individual differences inherent in them. The study of *operant behaviour* was the basis for Skinner's research. This made his approach differ from Pavlov, who studied respondent behaviour. When responses are caused by specific stimuli, then it is referred to as respondent behaviour. In contrast to that, operant behaviour is something that is ongoing, without any apparent stimulus.
- Contemporary psychology emphasizes a lot on cognitive aspects, which, except for Tolman, can be viewed as completely against the whole idea of behaviourism. Research in evolutionary psychology has given a lot of evidence that much of animal behaviour, which includes human social behaviour, is genetically determined. This is also completely against the idea of behaviourism.

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## 9.6 KEY WORDS

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**Logical Positivism:** The name given to the view of science developed by a small group of philosophers in Vienna (the Vienna Circle) around 1924. The older positivism of Comte and Mach was taken up by these philosophers and combined with the rigors of formal logic. According to them, abstract theoretical terms were allowed only if such terms could be logically tied to empirical observations.

**Operational Definition:** Defining abstract concepts in terms of the procedures used to measure that concept.

**Operationalism:** Insistence that all abstract scientific terms be operationally defined.

**Physicalism:** The push for unification of and a common vocabulary among the sciences, including psychology.

**Principle of Contiguity:** When a combination of stimulus elements is accompanied by movement, the movement sequence will recur. Learning is a pattern or chain of discrete movements elicited by both environmental and internal stimulus cues.

**Hypothetico-deductive:** Following the approach of Euclidian geometry, in this strategy a behaviour principle or formulation is first deduced from postulates and then rigorously tested. Belief is supported by a successful test to form the postulates; failure results in revision of the postulates.

**Habit Formation:** The accumulations of experiences for effective adaptation.

**Intervening Variables:** Unobservable entities employed by psychologists to account for observable behaviour

**Habit Strength:** The chief intervening variable for learning in Hull's theory. It depends on two factors for associations. Contiguity principle is the first one, meaning that a close temporal relationship must exist between stimulus and reinforcement. Reinforcement itself is the second principle, defined in its primary form as drive reduction. There are also secondary reinforcements, cues that are reliably associated with primary reinforcement and take on reinforcement properties.

**Reaction Potential:** The tendency to produce some reaction under the effect of the stimulus.

**Molar Behaviour:** A unified and complete act, which provides the proper unit for psychology. Tolman argued that reductionism results in the loss of the purely psychological level in adhering to the molar level. It said that explanations based upon molecular components are not adequate. Thus, molar behaviour is more than the sum of the molecular elements for Tolman.

**Place Learning:** The acquisition of relationships in a maze or cognitive maps.

**Latent Learning:** Different effects on performance levels can be exerted, depending on the quality of reinforcement.

**Environmental Determinacy:** Behaviour being determined by the environment.

**Operant Behaviour:** Behaviour that is ongoing without any apparent stimulus in contrast to respondent behaviour, where responses are elicited by specific stimuli.

**Skinner's reinforcement:** Probability of changes in the operant rate.

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## 9.7 REVIEW QUESTIONS

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- 1) What are the three stages of evolution of behaviourism?
- 2) How did logical positivism have an influence on psychology?
- 3) In what ways did operationism influence psychology?
- 4) Describe the different points on which the neo-behaviourists agreed upon.
- 5) Describe the role of contiguity in learning, according to Guthrie.
- 6) Describe the different intervening variables used by Hull, in his framework of reaction potential.
- 7) Explain the cognitive components that Tolman incorporated in his approach.
- 8) How did Skinner use the idea of operant behaviour in describing learning?
- 9) How is Skinner's idea of reinforcement different from Thorndike and Hull?
- 10) Why did the influence of behaviourism diminish, over the years?

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## UNIT 10 GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY\*

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### Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Antecedent Forces
- 10.2 Basic Principles of Gestalt Psychology
  - 10.2.1 Principles of Perceptual Organization
  - 10.2.2 Thinking
  - 10.2.3 Learning
  - 10.2.4 Memory
  - 10.2.5 Developmental Concepts
  - 10.2.6 Isomorphism
- 10.3 Kurt Lewin and Field Theory
  - 10.3.1 Lewin's Vector Psychology
- 10.4 Group Dynamics
- 10.5 Criticisms of Gestalt Psychology
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Keywords
- 10.8 Review Questions
- 10.9 References and Further Reading
- 10.10 References for Figures
- 10.11 Web Resources

### Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the context and forces that led to the emergence of Gestalt Psychology;
- Identify the various principles which formed a basis of Gestalt system; and
- Describe Kurt Lewin's contribution of field theory.

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### 10.0 INTRODUCTION

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In 1912, **Max Wertheimer** published experiments on apparent motion which served as the foundation of a new orientation called a Gestalt psychology. It was led by Wertheimer and two of his close associates **Wolfgang Köhler** and **Kurt Kofka**.

The term *Gestalt* does not have a literal English translation, and the words 'form', 'shape', 'configuration', 'structure', and 'pattern' are commonly used to provide a functional translation. Gestalt psychology emerged as a revolt against the Wundt's structural psychology and its elementary dimensions and also criticized American Behaviourism. It was a revolt against the idea

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\* Ms.Vrushali Pathak, Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

that few bits and pieces of ‘experience’ together glued to form ‘the whole’. Gestalt believed that it could never be the complete experience. Thus, Gestalt expresses that a system of psychology should conceptualize psychological events as organized, coherent and unified phenomena. For instance, when we smile, it’s not just the muscles acting in a certain way. It also depends on what’s going on around the individual, it correlates with the event, then the mind processes it and the muscles respond a certain way to smile.

Gestaltists believe that an entity loses its identity if analysed in a pre-conceived framework. This does not limit the range of experiences of the individual or the event to make it adaptable to the researcher’s mold. Accordingly, the goal of Gestalt psychology was to investigate the organization of mental activity and thereby, determine the exact nature of person-environmental reciprocal actions (Brennan & Houde, 2017).

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## 10.1 ANTECEDENT FORCES

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Some of the forces that had an influential impact on Gestalt psychology are discussed below:

a) **Immanuel Kant**

According to Kant, perception could not be analyzed after dividing it into parts and this particular notion became the most important tenet of the Gestalt school. Organization was understood as a natural ongoing process and meaning would be given in the experience itself, that is, the meaning would emerge as the way we would internally experience the event. Another important aspect that Gestaltists borrowed from was Kantian belief that our ability to perceive space and time is not wholly dependent upon learning rather it is native or inborn.

b) **Wilhelm Wundt and J.S. Mill**

Both Wundt and Mill (his concept of ‘mental chemistry’) recognized that certain new characteristics may emerge from the combination of two or more elements of consciousness, thus, acknowledging that there could be difference between wholes and sum of their parts. This view had a direct impact on Gestalt psychology which believed that the whole may have characteristics different from the characteristics of its individual parts.

c) **Franz Brentano and Carl Stumpf**

Both Brentano and Stumpf objected to the psychology which was defined using elemental content. Their act psychology was not amenable to the experimental method of controls imposed over certain variables, rather it was more suited to the observational nature of Phenomenology. Both Phenomenology and Gestalt psychology had different views regarding the content of psychology, but were the products of same intellectual forces in Germany. Both the systems also had their doubts regarding the analytical character of the controlled laboratory methods and thus were looking for a formulation that acknowledged the innate organization and activity of the mind.

d) **Ernst Mach**

Mach discussed two types of sensations– space-form and time-form, which he believed to be configural. Though Mach’s empiricism was

disagreeable to Gestalt psychologists but his work on sensations was an inspirational source for them. He considered the space-forms and time-forms to be independent of their element. For example, a melody, although comprises of individual notes (its element), is different from its elements and has an identity of its own. When transposed further to a different key signature, the individual notes will change but the melody will still remain the same.

e) **Laboratory work at Gottingen University**

The research work that was being pursued at Gottingen University laboratory worked as a major antecedent force. Muller's work resembled the Gestalt phenomenological approach. Wertheimer, Kofka, and Köhler supported his work and were also highly influenced by Jaensch (visual perception), Katz (perception of color) and Rubin's (perception of figure ground) work which proved to be instrumental for the foundations of Gestalt psychology.

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## 10.2 BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

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Max Wertheimer started experiments on **phi phenomenon** in 1910 which marked the formal beginning of Gestalt psychology. The phi phenomenon or apparent movement (as it is called sometimes) can be exemplified using two discrete lights. When two stationary objects (lights) are flashed on the retina (at different locations), and if one succeeds the other by a brief interval, then the subject notices a sweeping movement in a direction from one flash of light to another. Thus, the subject does not see two discrete elements, that is two separate lights but rather a complete event which is radically different from its elements. It was very clear to the Gestalt psychologists that the piecemeal examination of the individual elements can never explain the whole experience. They also took the position that the parts put together do not make a whole, rather whole exists prior to its parts. According to Köhler (1947), "One of the main tasks of Gestalt Psychology is that of indicating the genuine rather than any fictitious parts of the whole." (p.168), indicating that paying attention only to the individual and isolated parts could be fictitious.

### 10.2.1 Principles of Perceptual Organization

Wertheimer (1923/1938) found that the basic gestalt principle remained true in various intellectual and sensory domains. Whatever we do, we perceive our world in unified wholes and the organization is already given in the experience. Gestalt psychologists articulated some principles that govern the basic organization of perceptual wholes. These were also called as the principles of primitive organization due to the understanding that they were native and natural. Some of the important principles are as follows:

- a) **Principle of similarity:** The principle states that the elements that are similar to each other in any way (color, orientation, size etc.) tend to be perceived as a unified group. In Figure 10.1, two separate groups based on shape can be seen– the circles and the squares.

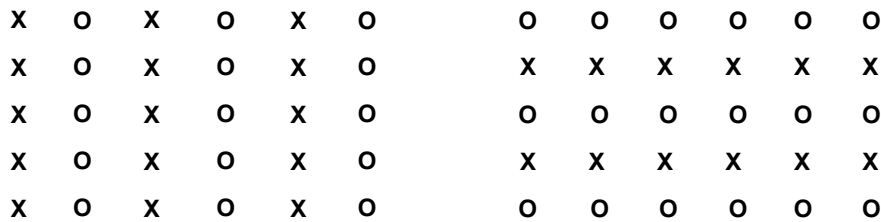


Figure 10.1: Law of similarity

Source: <https://healthywaymag.com/psychology/gestalt-psychology-principles-theory>

- b) **Principle of proximity:** Elements that are close together either in time or space are perceived as a unified group. In Figure 10.2, we see two pairs of vertical lines rather than four vertical lines.

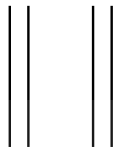


Figure 10.2: Law of proximity

- c) **Principle of closure:** The principle states that, if there are certain parts that are missing or left out in the perceptual object, we tend to complete it psychologically, thereby filling the gaps. In Figure 10.3, we would see a circle and star instead of disconnected lines.

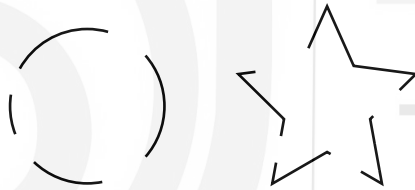


Figure 10.3: Principle of closure

Source: <https://uxpro.cc/publications/using-gestalt-laws-of-perceptual-organization-in-ui-design/>

- d) **Principle of continuity:** The objects that have a continuity with each other are perceived to be flowing in the same direction and are perceived as a figure (as seen in Figure 10.4). It is also known as principle of good continuation (Field et al. 1993). We tend to follow the contours whenever the elements of a pattern imply a direction.

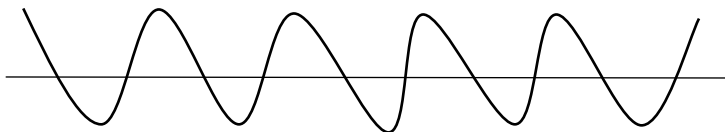


Figure 10.4: Principle of continuity

- e) **Principle of figure and ground:** It asserted that information is not organized perceptually alone, some contrast is also required to gather knowledge from the data. **Edgar Rubin** (1886-1951) explained that the element that stands out is the *figure*. Other thing that seems to retreat in the background is called as *ground*. It basically argues that it is vital to recognize figure from its ground. A major characteristic of *figure* is that it is distinct in comparison to the *ground* which is vague

and indistinct. In a reversible figure, the figure and ground seem to shift back and forth as an individual tries to fixate eyes on it.



Figure 10.5: Man and crane, Mimbres culture pot, c. 1000 -1150 AD

Source: [Figure-ground \(perception\) - Wikipedia](#)

- f) **Law of Prägnanz:** According to Wertheimer, all the above principles contribute to law of prägnanz or the principle of good form. It states that we would assume the best possible form of the objects even if the physical objects may not be in their symmetrical and developed form. Thus, it allows us to see our world in a coherent and orderly way.

Certain other principles were also added to the original principles of perceptual organization. Three of them are as follows:

- g) **Principle of common region:** Elements with equal as size and shape are perceived into a group if they share an area with a clearly defined boundary. We tend to separate it from the set that is not enclosed. The circles given in the figure below are spaced apart equally, yet we separate them into two groups.

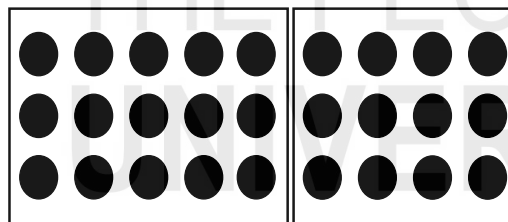


Figure 10.6: Principle of common region

Source: [https://www.usertesting.com/sites/default/files/inline-images/common-regions\\_0.png](https://www.usertesting.com/sites/default/files/inline-images/common-regions_0.png)

- h) **Principle of common fate:** This principle applies to moving elements only and this makes it different from the principle of common region. When elements move in the same direction, brain perceives it as a part of the group, they are also separated from the rest of elements in the whole image.



Figure 10.7: Principle of common fate

Source: <https://uxpro.cc/publications/using-gestalt-laws-of-perceptual-organization-in-ui-design/>

- i) **Object constancy:** The tenet says that organized figures are stable and retain their stability as wholes despite certain changes in the characteristics of the stimulus. For instance, a man standing very far does not appear short to us, rather we perceive him to be of the same size as we would when he is near.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Trace some key influences on Gestalt theory and elaborate upon its antecedent figures.  
.....  
.....
- 2) Explain phi phenomenon.  
.....  
.....
- 3) List all the principles of perceptual organization.  
.....  
.....
- 4) What is law of Prägnanz?  
.....  
.....

### 10.2.2 Thinking

Wertheimer (1980) acknowledged that the earliest Gestalt orientation can be found in “in the psychology of thinking or in ‘Volkerpsychologie’ rather than in perception” (p. 13). Thus, many of Wertheimer’s contributions to psychology of thinking can be found in his book (published posthumously in 1945) *Productive Thinking*.

Productive thinking has been found to be the one that results in new, innovative, and breakthrough idea. Reproductive thinking, on the other hand is concerned with repetition, conditioning, usual drills, and routine affairs. Wertheimer concluded that although logic is important but it cannot lead to productive thinking on its own. Thus, being logical and being creative can be two different things. He emphasized that while solving a problem, one should pay attention to the whole or take the broader view into consideration rather than getting lost in the details. Productive thinking is more likely to result when more attention is paid to the structural truths rather than the fragmented or piecemeal portions. The book (*Productive Thinking*) illustrates it with many examples. For instance, a school teacher asked his young students to work on a problem involving simple addition. The problem was:  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 = ?$  One of the students, came up with solution of the problem, 55, almost instantaneously. The teacher asked him for the explanation and found that when others when adding  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4$  and so on, this student looked at the complete series and found a pattern of 5 11s in it. He actually combined  $1 + 10$ ,  $2 + 9$ ,  $3 + 8$ , and so on. Thus, this novel way to reach the solution to this particular problem is demonstrative of the fact that productive thinking is more likely a result of

comprehensive examination of the whole rather than fragments. It would be interesting to note here that this student **Karl Friedrich Gauss**, who later became a famous mathematician.

Another type of thinking that has been discussed is the one with trial- and-error. Here, one reaches to a solution (if so), that is by chance. One of the most important features of productive thinking is *centering and recentering* (Singh, 2011). Centering refers to a shift from personal or subjective view to a detached view of situations, it's like a 'bird's eye view', viewing it objectively and as a whole. Recentering is taking a new and a penetrating perspective. It can provide a new outlook to reach a creative solution. Wertheimer believed that this process of productive thinking enters into different problems representing many areas of human life- schemas, plans, and knowledge structures.

### 10.2.3 Learning

Gestalt psychologists had attacked behaviourism and its tenets and criticized how it was based on the atomism and mechanism of 19<sup>th</sup> century physics. They opposed the S-R psychology of Watson, connectionism of Thorndike and the reflexological focus of Pavlov.

One of the noteworthy research in this area was done by Köhler. The subjects were trained to select the darker of the two shades of gray color. The subjects were rewarded for selecting the darker of the two objects that were presented. In the phase 2 of the experiment, the previously rewarded object was paired with another object that was darker than this particular object. The brightness interval between the two objects in phase 1 and the two presented in phase 2 was the same. Now, when they faced two other objects (previously rewarded and another darker one), the subjects chose the darker object. It is important to note that this darker object that they had selected in phase 2 had never been rewarded. Such a finding goes against connectionism, S-R theory, and even reinforcement principles. Köhler interpreted that in total configuration, the subjects learnt to relationally discriminate "darker than" rather than a response to an absolute stimulus. Thus, it was concluded that the subject sees the pattern of the relationships rather than a particular isolated element. If the perception of a relationship is established then the subject may just *transpose* it from one situation to another. For instance, in this case, it is "darker than" that wins in transposition. The recognition and understanding of the relationship and transfer of that knowledge from one event to another is called as *transposition* and was also demonstrated with various species tested under varying conditions (Brennen & Houde, 2017).

Another major contribution of Gestalt psychologists to the field of learning was the idea that learning occurs by insight. When an individual is faced with a problem, he/she sets up many hypotheses as possible solutions. As he/she reaches the correct solution (which solves the problem), it is believed that the insight occurs and simultaneously learning is also seem to have occurred. Insight has been defined as a sudden shift in the perceptual field (Marx & Cronan-Hillix, 1987). Since insight is sudden, learning is also considered to be sudden here and not something that gradually improves with practice.

Köhler demonstrated through his studies with animals that they often solve problems by visualizing a complete situation and then restructuring various parts of it to attain a desired goal/solve a problem. For instance, a banana was suspended by a string above the head of a chimpanzee. He had to obtain the banana. Jumping was eliminated as the suspended banana was higher than a typical jump of a chimpanzee. There were boxes lying on the ground in the vicinity and through them the chimpanzee could find a solution to the problem (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 2006). The situation was restricted by the chimpanzee by arranging the boxes, one on top of another to a point where he could reach the banana. One of the Köhler's chimpanzees named Grande could also achieve a four-story structure of boxes.

In another experiment with a chimpanzee named Sultan (considered to be one of the most intelligent chimpanzees) there were two bamboo sticks that were kept in the cage with Sultan, neither of the sticks was long enough to reach the banana kept outside the cage. However, the sticks were made in a way that they could be joined together and would fit each other very well. When Sultan tried reaching the banana with the help of either of the two sticks, he remained unsuccessful. Thus, he started playing with the sticks and during the play by chance he was able to join both the sticks together. Suddenly he was found running towards the banana with the now joined (longer) stick and thus he got the banana. The now-longer stick gave him insight to solve the problem and learning occurred as on the following day, Sultan could solve the problem without any needless angling. Köhler (1925) stated the criterion for insight, "the appearance of a complete solution with reference to the whole layout of the field".

**Box 10.1: Four behavioural indices of insightful learning**

- Sudden transition from helplessness to mastery
- Quickness and smoothness in performance after grasping of principles
- Sound retention
- Readiness to transfer the solution to similar problems involving the same principle

Both Köhler and Koffka based their criticism of behavioural studies on the fact that they were too structured and would impede the possibility of animals viewing layout of the whole field. The possibilities of visualization in a maze are limited and only trial- and- error is possible there. But a difference could be made if the entire maze was viewed even for a brief moment. Although they rejected Thorndike's trial-and-error learning, Köhler's experiments appeared to be trial-and-error to many, at least before insight occurs.

### 10.2.4 Memory

Gestalt principles have also been applied to memory. One of the common ways to understand memory in those times was that after perceiving something, we could recall it successfully because of the trace that was left in the brain. The trace gradually is wiped out leading to forgetting. Memory has been understood as a dynamic process by the Gestalt psychologists in which trace undergoes various changes due to time lapse.



In an experiment conducted by **Wulff (1922)** it was demonstrated how changes in memory traces took place in accordance with the principles of perceptual organization. The subjects were presented with simple but irregular geometrical figures for a period of five seconds only. They were then asked to draw the figures they had seen after an interval of thirty seconds, twenty-four hours and one week. It was found that the subjects happened to sharpen the figures, making it appear in good Gestalt. Further support was also found (Gibson, 1929; Bartlett, 1932; Allport & Postman, 1947) for the same, stating that further reproduction of previously seen figure may result in distortion but it is in the direction of good form.

### 10.2.5 Developmental Concepts

Koffka's work provided a wide application of Gestalt principles to developmental processes with emphasis on evolution of child's mind. Koffka (1924/1980) illustrated upon the sensorimotor learning in children, "the burnt child shuns the flame" (p.302). The burnt hand was pulled back by the child as a natural reflex, but in this process what the child learns is not pulling the hand back rather to avoid fire in future, relating fire and pain is learnt, not a reflex that occurs naturally. Thus, it can be concluded that the child does not learn mere connections but a constructive achievement which has a future adaptive implication.

Koffka also believed that a major aspect of learning in children involved imitation which usually occurs in natural flow of events or settings rather than the artificial or simulated settings. The highest type of learning according to Koffka was ideational learning- that would make use of language. Grasping the fact that things have names is a crucial phase and understanding for children. Initially they believe that the name exists in the thing itself. But following this stage they enter a phase marked by flexibility with respect to language. They may apply the same word to various other things. For instance, Hilda Stern learnt the word *nose* and applied it to tip of her shoes. Karen Wertheimer generated his own word *flutterby* for *butterfly*. It can be noted here that the word *flutterby* is descriptive in a way that butterfly as a word is not. This verbal rearrangement can be a tool in extending our capacity to learn and solve problems.

### 10.2.6 Isomorphism

The Gestalt viewed isomorphism as a solution to the mind-brain problem. The word isomorphism means having the same form or appearance. It has been defined in the following terms: "Experienced order in space is always structurally identical with a functional order in the distribution of underlying brain processes" (Köhler 1929/1947; p.61). It is the "structural correspondence between experience and underlying brain processes" (Brennen, 2017; p.381). For instance, if we experience a rhythm (which is an auditory temporal sequence), we may expect a pattern of events in the brain that is isomorphic (similar in form or appearance) with the experience. Isomorphic representation is a parallel process between the perceptual and physiological levels- how perceptual field (elicited by stimulus activity) is related to the brain field (comprises of electrochemical activity).

The principle of isomorphism has also been widely misrepresented. One of them being, pictures similar to the physical structure are formulated in

our heads. For instance, questions were raised if the color the way it exists in the external world is isomorphic with a part of brain which is a match to that color. The most important aspect that is being missed here is *functional*. Köhler (1938/1966; p.195) pointed that, “the functional cortical counterpart of a color would not have to be a color; neither would the functional cortical counterpart of a sound such as the sound of a violin have to replicate the physical features of such a sound.” Woodworth (1948) used an analogy to explain isomorphism. He showed the relationship between a map and the country which the map represents. The two are not the same but share similarity in the sense that the characteristics of the country can be read from the existing map. Thus, it would be safe to say that it is not a theory about relationship between physical events and processes in the brain but rather about the relationship between brain processes and experience.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Distinguish between productive and reproductive thinking.  
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- 2) Explain insight learning with example.  
.....  
.....
- 3) What was the contribution of Gestalt psychology towards developmental processes?  
.....  
.....
- 4) Explain the Gestalt approach to the mind-brain problem. Is “pictures in the head” a misrepresentation of Isomorphism?  
.....  
.....

### Box 10.2: System of Gestalt psychology in a nutshell

#### *Definition*

Wertheimer, Köhler and Koffka pointed that psychology is a study of immediate phenomenal experience influencing functions like perception, thinking, memory, learning etc. Later Gestaltists like Lewin took behaviour also under the subject matter of psychology— relating perception and behaviour. Thus, psychology is to be considered as both the study of immediate phenomenal experience and behaviour of the organism.

#### *Methods*

They used experimentation and introspection. Although, their usage of introspection was unlike the one followed by Structuralism.

#### *Postulates*

Primary postulate: whole is not the sum of its parts. The characteristics of whole are different from those of its parts.

Secondary postulates: Principle of isomorphism

Principle of perceptual organization

Non-continuity view (with regard to learning, that it can be sudden)

The growth of learning (developmental concept)

Ideational learning (developmental concept)

*Mind-brain problem*

They took the position of isomorphism- perceptual experience and brain experience do not correspond on a one-to-one basis, rather correspond in terms of relations.

*Nature of data*

Data is to be obtained from immediate, 'not analyzed' experience. Gestalt psychologists called data based on the experiences as 'given'. In accepting the data based on immediate unanalyzed experience they were similar to structuralists but they were different from them as they rejected the analysis provided by the structuralists.

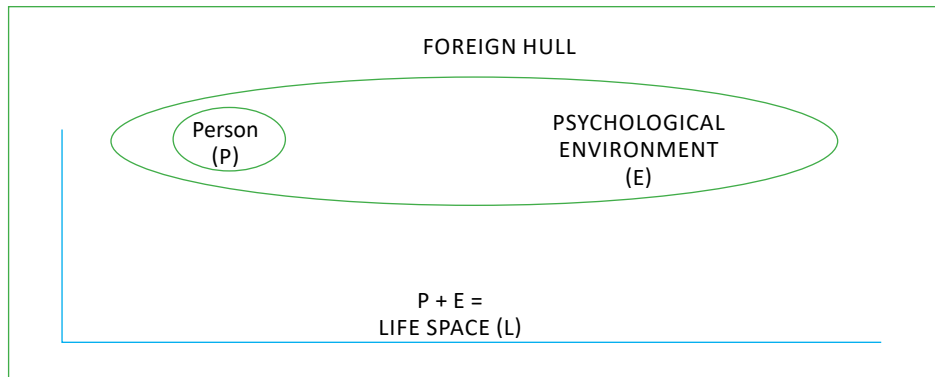
*Principles of selection*

For Gestaltists, how a figure is organized is more important than how the elements are selected for perception, because they believed that all the parts of the field have a role to play in perception. Though, they have also pointed that some parts of the perceptual whole are selected as figure and some as background.

### 10.3 KURT LEWIN AND FIELD THEORY

Kurt Lewin was a prominent figure who had a major contribution in broadening Gestalt psychology. Lewin described his field theory as a topographical and vector psychology. He had borrowed both these terms- 'topography' and 'vector' from Mathematics. In this section, we will discuss Lewin's **topographical or structural concepts**. The previously existing systems placed a lot of emphasis on traits, predispositions, intrapsychic processes and thus were individualistic in nature. Lewin, on the other hand, emphasized the interdependence of the person and the environment. He believed that behaviour is a function of person and the environment, and gave his characteristic formula (in Figure 10.8),  $B = f(p, e)$ . In order to develop a holistic psychology, it is important to acknowledge the full scope of forces that have a role to play in human life, and that includes his psychological environment as well.

Lewin started his system with the description and analysis of *life space*. It consists of various psychological facts that are influential and have a role to play in the life time of an individual at a given time. Life space consists of physical events, personal and biological facts, and social facts. Lewin believed that education has an important role to play in extending the life space of a child which is otherwise limited (both spatially and temporally).



**Figure 10.8: Illustration of the formula  $B = f(p, e)$ ; concept of life space**

Source: Singh (2011)

In Figure 10.8, *Person (P)* is denoted in an enclosed circle. Person is included within the life space but is differentiated from the environment. According to Lewin (1936), person is not only differentiated from the environment but has also separated him/her from within. Person has been divided into two regions- the perceptual-motor region and the inner-personal region (Singh, 2011). The perceptual region is the one that lies on the periphery of the circle labelled P and controls the perceptual and motoric function of an individual. The inner personal region is the core or the central part of the circle that is surrounded by the perceptual motor region, and controls motivational aspects of the individual. This inner region is not in direct contact with the environment. Lewin believed that other psychologists previously had ignored the role of motivation and other social forces and thus, included them in his system.

Another important feature of the life space is *Psychological Environment (E)*. Lewin divided it into several regions. He argued that some regions may have permeable boundaries and through which we can influence others or get influenced by them and then there are certain regions with impermeable boundaries. Thus, human behaviour is a function of person and the environment or the life space in totality.

Another term that has been explained by Lewin is *Foreign Hull*. The external environment that is outside the life space of an individual is called as foreign hull. These are physical and social facts in the background and not a part of the life space. He described the boundary between foreign hull and psychological environment to be permeable and thus, a two-way exchange between these is possible. Through this it can be concluded that, psychological environment can bring about changes in the physical world and the events happening in the physical world are capable of influencing the psychological environment and the individual by extension.

The positive and negative features of objects in the life space are called as valences in Lewin's system. Positive valence refers to the desirable and attractive qualities in an object, whereas negative valence includes the unattractive or repulsive qualities of the object. It is important to note here that the valence may change with the need of the individual. For instance, food as an object will have positive valence for a hungry child, but once fed, its valence may reduce and then perhaps Television set or some toy may have a higher positive valence (King, Woody, & Viney, 2015).

It has already been discussed that different regions of life space interact with each other and influence each other. Now the question is how do these various regions interact? When any two aspect or regions of the life space interact with each other, it is called as an *event*. These regions impact each other through two processes– *communication* and *locomotion*. Communication is the event through which one region of life space comes in contact or communicates with the other one. Locomotion involves physical or psychological movement of the individual from one aspect of life space to another. This can also lead to changes in attentional or perceptual processes (in the psychological realm). It was suggested that a fixed pathway is necessary for locomotion to take place and this was called as the *hodological space*. Lewin (1936) pointed out three major principles governing communication and locomotion. First one, is the *principle of relatedness*, which states that the reason for occurrence of any event is interaction of two or more facts that are related to each other. Second, is the *principle of concreteness*, the facts that actually exist in the life space of the individual have an effect on him/her. Third one is the *principle of contemporaneity*, it states that only the facts in the present have the capability of producing the present behaviour. The events related to childhood can only impact the behaviour if they have also been present in the contemporary times or else they will not have a major impact on the present behaviour (Singh, 2011). Although, he did emphasize that our perception, thoughts and feelings about the past and future and the present attitude impact our present conduct and takes up the present life space (Lewin, 1951).

Another major contribution of Lewin within the life space structure is the concept of conflict. Three types of conflict were identified, that are responsible of producing frustration in us. They are: *approach-approach conflict*, *avoidance-avoidance conflict*, and *approach-avoidance conflict*. We encounter an approach-approach conflict in our daily life when we are caught between two positive valences or events and only one can be achieved. This is considered to be a fairly easy situation to deal with. In the avoidance-avoidance conflict we are surrounded by two negative valences. Approach-avoidance conflict is the one when an object has both positive and negative valences, so the person is attracted and is also repelled by the goals. Resolution in such situations is complex and depends on the relative weights of positive and negative valence in context of the individual. For instance, being offered a job with a very good salary package and perks but with a condition of living in a remote area and consequentially living away from the family.

### 10.3.1 Lewin's Vector Psychology

This part of Lewin's system involved the concepts that were related to motivational aspects of human behaviour and thus have a major role to play in understanding human behaviour fully. According to Lewin, an individual is a complex energy system. Psychological energy is the one that is used to accomplish psychological work. A state of disequilibrium may arise due to increase in tension in one or the other part of the system. When a person wishes to achieve equilibrium that results in creation of psychological energy and when the tension equalizes the system halts.

Need has been described either as physiological condition (such as hunger, thirst, sex) or a psychological condition (such as desire to be rich). A

distinction was also made between a need and a quasi-need. A quasi-need is one with specific intentions shaped by social factors (Lewin, 1951). For instance, need to eat a specific pizza at a particular restaurant.

Lewin also believed that needs are highly associated with tension systems and dissipation of tension is only possible with satisfaction of a particular need. Tension has been described as a state of disequilibrium between two or more states of the inner-personal region. This idea was tested by **Bluma Zeigarnik**. The subjects in this research were given a series of simple tasks to carry out. In some instances, they were interrupted before the completion of the task and in others, they were allowed to finish the task to completion. It was hypothesized that the tension would dissipate when a task is completed, but tension persists for a longer duration if the task is interrupted. This assumption was tested by asking the subjects to recall different tasks they had performed. It was predicted that there would be a better recall for interrupted tasks in comparison to the completed ones. The findings supported this prediction and this phenomenon was called the **Zeigarnik effect**. An explanation offered for this was that tension persisting from an unfinished task may be a reason for the subjects to rehearse the material associated with that task. Later more evidence was found for this effect (Alper, 1948; Deutsch, 1954).

Another important concept discussed by Lewin was *vector*. It refers to the psychological forces influencing the person to an extent that he/she moves in a particular direction. Three properties of vectors have been highlighted. They are— *direction* (it may be towards or away from the goal object), *strength* (vector is said to be correlated with the valence of the object- attraction or repulsion, defining its strength), and a *point of contact*. A vector is represented by an arrow when related to a person (P). The longer is the line of arrow, greater is the strength of the vector.

## 10.4 GROUP DYNAMICS

Lewin also paid attention towards the concept of group dynamics or collective interactions such as leadership, group formation, power shift, cohesiveness, decision making etc. taking place in a group. Although he said it is difficult to define group dynamics but referred to it as a social process through which people interact face-to-face with each other in a group. It included study of effects of groups on individuals and vice-versa. Lewin was of the view that group of the person and its environment constitute the social field of an individual. It also included studies of the structures of the groups especially in the context of leadership (democratic vs. authoritarian leaders) and its effectiveness. These studies were conducted with industrial work groups, educational groups, and even community action programs.

During World War II, Lewin (1943) conducted researches to understand how decision making can be altered. Due to shortage of certain food products such as meat, the housewives were persuaded to buy and use certain unpopular meats such as kidneys, brains, livers and other organs which are generally excluded etc. Six groups of housewives were recruited and two persuasion methods were used. With the first three groups, through lecture method they were told about the nutritional value of these meats along with tastier and healthier ways to prepare them. For the other three

groups, group discussion method was used where the members themselves discussed about the pros and cons of cooking and eating these meats. Later it was found that from the first group (persuaded through lecture method) only 3 percent of the housewives used these meat substances whereas, 32 percent of the housewives persuaded through the group discussion method used these meat substances. A series of experiments conducted by Lewin (1958) later also yielded similar results.

Lewin and his system have also been criticized especially for the fact that the constructs discussed by him such as tension systems, energy, etc. are difficult to test and thus unverifiable. Brolyer (1936-37) has called it 'pictorial analogies and illustrative metaphors'. Terms used in the system have been taken from the context of Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry but have been wrongly applied to psychology (Hall & Lindzey, 1978). Another major criticism against Lewin's system has been that the explanations of the constructs for instance, relation of life space to environment, is not exhaustive (Cartwright, 1959; Leeper, 1943; Tolman, 1948).

Despite these criticisms, it is important to note that Lewin's system generated some incredible research in various areas of Psychology and has also delivered a promise of further development.

## 10.5 CRITICISMS OF GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

Gestalt psychology has been heavily criticized for being too dependent upon theory and lacking sufficient concrete evidences to support it (Marx & Cronan-Hillix, 1987). For instance, the term insight has been theoretically inferred and the empirical explanation is quite weak. Thus, the system has been considered vague and imprecise. The physiological assumption related to isomorphism has also been criticized. It is definitely a unique explanation and the Gestalt psychologists could only indirectly explain it. The experiments and studies conducted by them have been considered poorly controlled, non-quantitative, and ill-designed (Singh, 2011). Some have also raised questions stating that unnecessary cues were provided to the subjects affecting their problem-solving ability and thus, unknowingly impacting the results. Harrower (1932) stated that Gestalt psychologists did not empirically define their key term, organization. The difference between organization and non-organization should have been clearly stated so that the experimental studies would have been carried out only to understand organization properly.

Despite these criticisms, the contribution and continuing relevance of Gestalt psychology cannot be ignored. Its impact in the field of perception of certainly provided a new perspective to the theory of perception. They were responsible for a shift from the part to whole, a shift from structure to process and a shift from "objective science" to "epistemic science".

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Explain the concept of life space and its importance to the approach of psychology.

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2) What is Zeigarnik effect? Also explain some of its practical implications.

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 .....

3) Outline the criticisms of Gestalt psychology.

.....  
 .....

## 10.6 SUMMARY

Now that we have come to the end of this Unit, let us list all the major points that we have learnt.

- Gestalt psychology was founded and led by Max Wertheimer and two of his close associates Köhler and Koffka in Germany. Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Wundt, John Stuart Mill, Franz Brentano, Carl Stumpf, and Ernst Mach were some of the antecedent forces instrumental in laying down the foundation of Gestalt psychology.
- In a series of experiments conducted on apparent movement, Wertheimer concluded that if an appropriate time interval is given between two discrete but stationary flashes of light, a movement is perceived from one light to another. This was called as phi phenomenon.
- Gestalt psychology was a revolt against the idea that few bits and pieces of experience when glued together can form a whole. Thus, whole is much more than the sum of its individual and isolated parts.
- Gestalt psychology had a huge contribution to the field of perception. They highlighted a few principles governing the basic organization of perceptual wholes, such as, similarity, proximity, closure, continuity, figure-ground, prägnanz, common region, common fate, and object constancy.
- Gestalt psychology also expanded in the areas of learning, memory and thinking. In the area of learning, emphasis has been placed upon sudden insight learning rather than the trial-and-error. Wertheimer emphasized on productive thinking and stated that one should consider a broader view or the whole while solving a problem. While discussing the aspects of memory, they emphasized that memory traces undergo several types of changes as per the principles of perceptual organization especially with the lapse of time.
- Lewin's Field theory has elements of both topographical psychology and vector psychology. According to his topographical psychology, concept of life space is of utmost importance. It includes the person and his/her environment. It was considered that human behaviour is a function of both the person and the environment. Through his vectoral psychology, he has directed the attention towards motivational concepts such as energy, need, tension and vector.



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## 10.7 KEYWORDS

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**Phi Phenomenon:** Apparent movement exemplified by successive stimulation of two discrete but stationary lights. In this situation what is seen is a movement from first to second light rather than two discrete lights.

**Closure:** Psychological tendency to complete something that is incomplete, filling the gaps and see the whole even when it is not present in that way.

**Figure-Ground:** Perceptual tendency to see something as standing out-figure and other things at the backdrop forming background.

**Prägnanz:** Refers to the idea that perceptual organization tends to be as coherent, good, and orderly as possible under the prevailing conditions.

**Insight:** Ability to see a problem in a larger context and perceptually restructuring relationships to reach to a solution of the problem.

**Isomorphism:** It was the gestalt position on mind-brain problem. It refers to a functional relationship between the experience and underlying brain processes involved in it.

**Field Theory:** Examines the pattern of interaction and interdependence between the person and the environment or the total field.

**Life space:** It refers to all the physical events, biological, social facts and psychological influences impacting an individual at a given point in time.

**Foreign Hull:** Physical and social facts that are not a part of the life space currently and are just in the background.

**Approach-Approach conflict:** Conflict due to the presence of two positive and attractive goals.

**Avoidance-Avoidance conflict:** Conflict due to the presence of two unattractive and undesirable goals.

**Approach-Avoidance conflict:** Conflict occurs as a positive goal is also associated with some unattractive or undesirable aspect.

**Zeigarnik effect:** Tendency to recall interrupted, incomplete tasks better than the uninterrupted, and complete ones.

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## 10.8 REVIEW QUESTIONS

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- 1) What were the major forces that led to the emergence of Gestalt Psychology?
- 2) Discuss the various principles of perceptual organization.
- 3) What was the contribution of Gestalt psychology in the fields of thinking, memory, and learning?
- 4) Critically examine the role and contribution of Gestalt psychology.
- 5) Examine the importance of Lewin's topographical psychology in understanding human behaviour.
- 6) Elucidate the concepts of Lewin's Vector psychology.
- 7) Critically evaluate Lewin's system of psychology.

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## 10.10 REFERENCES FOR FIGURES

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Law of similarity: <https://healthywaymag.com/psychology/gestalt-psychology-principles-theory>

Law of closure: <https://healthywaymag.com/psychology/gestalt-psychology-principles-theory>

Principle of Figure and Ground: [Figure-ground \(perception\) - Wikipedia](#)

Principle of common region: [https://www.usertesting.com/sites/default/files/inline-images/common-regions\\_0.png](https://www.usertesting.com/sites/default/files/inline-images/common-regions_0.png)

Principle of common fate: <https://uxpro.cc/publications/using-gestalt-laws-of-perceptual-organization-in-ui-design/>

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## 10.11 WEB RESOURCES

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- Gestalt Principles of Perception with examples, visit;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWucNQawpWY>
- Insight learning in Chimpanzee (Köhler study footage), visit;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-YWrPzsmEE>
- Zeigarnik Effect, visit;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKtzot7U4hY>

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# UNIT 11 HUMANISTIC-EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY (THE THIRD- FORCE MOVEMENT)\*

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## Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Antecedents of the Third-Force Movement
- 11.2 Humanistic Psychology
  - 11.2.1 Abraham Maslow
  - 11.2.2 Carl Rogers
- 11.3 Existential Psychology
  - 11.3.1 Viktor Frankl
  - 11.3.2 Rollo May
- 11.4 Humanistic and Existential Psychology: Similarities and Differences
- 11.5 Summary
- 11.6 Key Words
- 11.7 Review Questions
- 11.8 References and Further Reading
- 11.9 References for Figures
- 11.10 Web Resources

## Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the third-force movement in psychology;
- Discuss the common features of the different expressions within the third-force movement;
- Describe the perspectives of humanistic psychology and existential psychology; and
- Summarise the contributions of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Viktor Frankl, and Rollo May.

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## 11.0 INTRODUCTION

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In the twentieth century, a new movement in psychology, broadly, referred to as the *third-force movement* emerged. The term third-force is a general categorization for a number of orientations in psychology. It is any approach that differed from psychoanalysis and behaviourism, which are referred to as the first force and second force, respectively.

The third force movement emphasized on the method of phenomenology. *Phenomenology* is the study of phenomena that is experienced by the

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\* Dr. Saif R. Farooqi, Department of Applied Psychology, Vivekananda College, University of Delhi

individual, emphasizing on how that phenomenon revealed itself. As a methodology, phenomenology is about whatever may be significant to the understanding of a phenomenon. The individual who experiences the phenomenon is required to attend to it exactly as it appears in consciousness, without prejudice, bias, or any preconceived notion.

There are different expressions for the third-force movement, mainly, humanistic psychology and existential psychology. *Humanistic psychology* comprise a group of psychologists who suggest that humans are always seeking to develop their full potential. They also disregard mechanistic explanations of human behaviour. *Existential psychology* is the application of existential philosophy to psychological issues.

The third-force movement, even though, being represented in different forms, has some common shared aspects. One of the things that the perspectives under the third-force movement have in common is that they give emphasis to personal freedom and personal responsibility in the fulfilment of human potential. For the third force movement, the mind is active and dynamic. This active and dynamic mind enables humans to express their unique abilities. In addition to this, the third-force movement rejects the idea of reductionism in order to explain psychological processes. Psychologists of the third-force movement give emphasis to the self, which leads to the development of personality fulfilment that is unique for each individual. For this, psychologists of the third force movement suggest that individuals need to go beyond hedonistic satisfaction. In this Unit, you will learn about the events that led to the emergence of third-force movement and finally establishing as humanistic psychology and existential psychology. The contributions by Maslow, Rogers, Frankl and May will be discussed.

## 11.1 ANTECEDENTS OF THE THIRD-FORCE MOVEMENT

The antecedents of the third-force movement can be found in the work of other psychologists. One of the earlier antecedents of the third-force movement can be traced to **Franz Brentano**, the founder of act psychology. Brentano had opposed Wundtian psychology, and in doing so, anticipated Gestalt psychology. Brentano completely disagreed with the elementism and reductionism of Wundt. He instead suggested that consciousness should be studied as molar quality, that is, as a whole, without breaking it down into smaller elements.

In the same light, **William James**, in suggesting the idea of a stream of consciousness, opposed elementism, and emphasized on studying conscious experiences as a whole. Further, **Gestalt psychology** also emphasized that the discipline of psychology should view consciousness as a whole.

The roots of the third-force movement can also be found in the works of psychoanalysts like **Adler**, **Horney**, and other **post-Freudian** theorists. Unlike Sigmund Freud, they suggested that humans are conscious beings. According to them, individuals have the creative power to shape their personality. The direct influence on the third-force movement can be found in the philosophy of *romanticism*. The romantics opposed the empiricists, suggesting that human beings are more than just machines that behave in a

mechanical way. They also disagreed with the rationalists, suggesting that human behaviour cannot be restricted to logical and rationalistic processes. For the romantics, human nature should be viewed in terms of personal, subjective feelings and experiences. According to them, human beings are naturally good in nature. Given the freedom, they believed that human beings can be social-minded, and live a fulfilling life. The romantics, further suggested that if people indulged in self-destruction, it was only due to the societal forces interfering with natural impulses.

It was these earlier thoughts and ideas in philosophy and psychology that provided the thrust towards what came to be known as the third-force movement.

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## 11.2 HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

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Humanistic psychology, emerging in the 1940s and 1950s, opposed the two existing dominant schools of psychology – psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Humanistic psychologists felt that behaviourism is too narrow and artificial in its approach to study human behaviour. For them, focusing simply on overt behaviour is something that is dehumanizing and makes human beings to be perceived as equivalent to animals and machines. They disagreed with the idea that human behaviour is deterministic, and that suggesting that humans only responding to environmental stimulus, limits the nature of human behaviour. They also argued that human behaviour cannot be viewed as objective, it cannot be quantified and reduced to units of stimulus and response. Due to this, they felt, humans should not be studied in a laboratory setup.

Humanistic psychology opposed psychoanalysis for focusing only on mental illness. The humanistic psychologists felt that by studying only neurotics and psychotics, psychoanalysis is disregarding many of the positive attributes of human beings and is limiting personality to the darker side of human nature. By doing so, humanistic psychologists believed that psychoanalysis is ignoring many of the strengths and virtues of human beings.

Therefore, by pointing out the aforementioned limitations in behaviourism and psychoanalysis, humanistic psychologists intended to study what they felt are the neglected or ignored aspects of human nature. Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers are regarded as the pioneers of the humanistic movement in psychology.

### 11.2.1 Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow was the major thrust behind the humanistic movement in psychology. He was also responsible in giving it an academic respectability. Due to this, Maslow is often referred to as the founder of humanistic psychology. Maslow believed that every individual has an innate tendency to completely develop his or her abilities and realize one's true potential. This tendency is referred to as *self-actualization*. This is, according to Maslow, the highest human need, and is a state that involves the active usage of the individual's abilities, and is the fulfilment of the individual's potential. It is the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is and it is to become everything that one is capable of becoming.



**Figure 11.1: Abraham Maslow  
(1908-1970)**

Source: [www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com)

### **Box 11.1: Abraham Maslow**

Abraham Maslow, considered to be the founder of humanistic psychology, was initially highly influenced by Watsonian behaviourism. His interests changed after he began reading about Gestalt psychology, and psychoanalysis. The Pearl Harbor attack, in 1941, turned out to be a life changing event for Maslow. He was deeply affected by it. He then decided to develop a psychology that will be about improving humanity, and show that human nature is not only about hate and war.

At first, his ideas were considered to be too unorthodox. But, he later, got a wide range of acceptance. He refined his approach during his time spent at Brandeis University, US. He even presented his approach in a series of popular books. By the 1960s, Maslow became more of a celebrity. In 1967, he was elected the president of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Even though Maslow's ideas have been well received, there have been some criticisms against him. The research method and data used by Maslow has faced criticism. It has been argued that the sample size used by Maslow is too small to be generalized. It has also been argued that Maslow used a very subjective criteria to select his participants to be categorized as psychologically healthy. There has also been a very vague manner in which Maslow defined his terms.

Maslow agreed with these criticisms, but also argued that there was no other way to study self-actualization. He also argued that his research is preliminary and felt that his findings will be proved some time in the future. Maslow's theory has had limited empirical evidence, but that did not stop it to get a large following. His approach has had a significant impact, even beyond psychology. His theory has been applied in corporate sectors, education, medicine, and psychotherapy. Many executives and managers believe that self-actualization is an important concept for the workplace, and can be viewed as a useful motivating force for job satisfaction.

Maslow has, often, also been credited to be the forerunner of the contemporary approach known as positive psychology. Some aspects of his approach can be found in the positive psychology movement. This shows that the legacy of Maslow has continued for many decades.

Maslow suggested that to satisfy the self-actualizing need, each individual must first satisfy the needs that are lower in the hierarchy. Once one need is satisfied only then the individual gets motivated for the next need on the hierarchy. Thus, the needs are hierarchical. Lowest on the hierarchy of needs are physiological needs, which include hunger, thirst, sleep, and sex. Next on the hierarchy are the safety needs. These include needs for security, stability, and protection. Next on the hierarchy are the belongingness and love needs, which include need for care and affiliation. Next on the hierarchy are the needs for esteem from others and oneself, which include needs for self-esteem, honor, prestige, and achievement. Finally, at the highest level is the need for self-actualization.



Figure 11.2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: [www.medium.com](http://www.medium.com)

A major feature of the concept of self-actualization, as described by Maslow is that it moves away from the causal tradition as proposed by both psychoanalysis and behaviourism. In place of that, it is denoting a teleological perspective. Both psychoanalysis and behaviourism suggest that behaviour has a specific cause – unconscious and childhood experiences, in terms of psychoanalysis, and environmental stimuli and reinforcement, in terms of behaviourism.

Maslow, clearly, differed from these two perspectives, suggesting that the behaviour of individuals is not driven by a cause, but by what they want to achieve in the future, that is, individuals strive towards future states, and not something that has already taken place. This perspective is known as *teleology*. The teleological perspective, as emphasized by Maslow, is about explaining behaviour with respect to a future state, a purpose that individuals strive for. This teleological perspective breaks away from the traditional physical sciences that psychology had been following. Teleological explanations, according to Maslow, are completely psychological in nature, and cannot be found in the physical sciences.

Another feature about the concept of self-actualization is the assumption of each individual being unique in their own way. The state of self-actualization, according to Maslow, is not about being a better person. It is actually about being the person that one is supposed to be. This indicates that every individual is unique, in the sense as they were genetically determined, and not shaped by nurturance.

Maslow described self-actualization as an individual's need to develop into the real person that he or she is. That real person for one individual will differ from the other, which makes the process of achieving self-actualization unique for every individual. Self-actualization, therefore, can be only viewed with respect to behaviours related to a particular person. Maslow studied individuals who, according to him, had satisfied the need for self-actualization. Maslow called such people as *psychologically healthy individuals*. For his research, Maslow found that such people share a number of characteristics. Maslow found that such people have an objective perception of reality, full self-acceptance, commitment to work, simplicity,



a need for autonomy and independence, having peak experiences, empathy, non-conformism, creativity, and a high degree of social interest. Maslow also added that self-actualizing people are free from neurosis and form less than one percent of the population.

By emphasizing on studying psychologically healthy individuals, Maslow did not work with people who are considered to be mentally ill. In doing so, he was emphasizing on aspects of improvement rather than cure. He was, thus, focusing on the positive aspects of human behaviour. The emphasis on the positive aspects of human beings, later, had an influence on the modern movement, known as positive psychology. *Positive psychology* focuses on the good of life, instead of changing the things that are bad. In the 1950s, Maslow had even used the term “positive psychology”. Even though Maslow did not work with people who had mental illness, his ideas were used by others in that context. One person who took forward his ideas and used them with respect to people with mental illness, is Carl Rogers.

### 11.2.2 Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers developed an approach called *person-centered approach*. From this approach, Rogers derived his theory of personality that gives emphasis to a single motivating factor, which is in some ways similar to Maslow’s idea of self-actualization. However, Rogers did not base his theory by studying psychologically healthy individuals, like Maslow. He, instead, based his theory by studying individuals who had come to his counselling center for treatment.

The name of the approach proposed by Rogers - person-centered - indicates that the responsibility for change is centered on the person rather than the therapist. Rogers strongly believed that individuals have the capability to alter their thoughts and behaviour, bringing about a positive change, leading to personal growth. According to Rogers, individuals are not always guided by the unconscious or childhood experiences, like the psychoanalysts had suggested. He felt personality can be shaped by conscious processes, how the individuals perceive the present.



Figure 11.3: Carl Rogers (1902-1987)

Source: [www.verywellmind.com](http://www.verywellmind.com)

#### Box 11.2: Carl Rogers

Carl Rogers completed his PhD in 1931, from Teachers College of Columbia University, in clinical and educational psychology. He began his academic career in 1940. It was during that time that Rogers began to develop his theory and method of psychotherapy.

Rogers’s approach has been highly influential in the discipline of psychology. With a lot of emphasis on the self, his theory has been well received with respect to both psychotherapy and personality. A major criticism against Rogers has been his lack of specificity. Rogers, in his theory, does not give specificities about the innate potential that individuals have in attaining self-actualization. Rogers has also been criticized for emphasizing a lot on subjective conscious experiences and completely excluding unconscious forces. Nevertheless, the theory and therapy have been supported by substantial research evidence and are widely used in clinical settings. Rogers has been an influential figure in what is said

to be the human potential movement. His work comes under the overall trend of what is suggested to be the humanizing of psychology.

The approach of Rogers has been applied in many other areas, and not just for the treatment of the emotionally disturbed. His approach has been majorly used for enhancing the self-image of people. It has also been used for training managers, clinical psychologists, social workers, and counsellors. Rogers has majorly contributed in what is known the humanizing of psychology. In 1946, he was elected as the president of the American Psychological Association (APA). He later, received the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award, and the Distinguished Professional Contribution Award.

Rogers suggested that the *self* is something that is perceived. The self is an organized conceptual gestalt, which means it is an organized whole, and not made of smaller elements. Further, the self can grow and develop, and yet retain its identity. The self, according to Rogers, can be distinguished as the *real self* or *actual self* and the *ideal self*. The real self is what the individual feels he or she is, and the ideal self is what the individual wants to be.

The real self and the ideal can either be similar or they can be very different from each other. When there is a discrepancy between the real and ideal self, it can also be said that there is discrepancy between what the individual perceives himself or herself to be and the actual experience. This state is known as *incongruence*. According to Rogers, the state of incongruence is psychologically unhealthy, and leads to anxiety. In order to deal with the anxiety of incongruence, people use defense mechanisms. Rogers suggested two types of defense mechanisms – distortion and denial. *Distortion* involves developing an alternative view of oneself, to maintain the consistency between what one feels to be and the actual experience. This may lead the individual to have either irrational positive views or irrational negative views about himself or herself. The defense mechanism of *denial* involves completely denying the experience.

Rogers clearly states that using defense mechanisms are unhealthy. The greater the incongruence, the more defense mechanisms are used, and the greater unhealthy state the individual becomes involved into. Therefore, a major aim of Rogerian therapy is to reduce the discrepancy between what the person feels like to be and the actual experience – a lesser discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self. The lesser the discrepancy, the more the individual will be in the state of *congruence*, which is a psychological healthy condition. Further, greater the state of congruence, the more likely the individual will achieve self-actualization.

Rogers suggested that the drive to self-actualize is the major motivating force in personality. This tendency to self-actualize is innate, but childhood experiences and learning can play a role in it. According to Rogers, the relationship of the child with his or her parents plays a very important role in self-actualization. It is the parent-child relationship that becomes significant in the growth of the self of the child. If the child's need for love is satisfied by the parent in an unconditional manner, the child experiences *unconditional positive regard*. This enables healthy development of the child.

If the love of the parent for the child is conditional on proper behaviour, then the child experiences conditional positive regard. Because of this, the child then internalizes the attitude of the parent and will develop a tendency to avoid disapproval of the parent. This leads the self not to develop fully. The child does not express all aspects of the self, fearing that some may bring about rejection. Therefore, for Rogers, unconditional positive regard from the parent towards the child is the primary requisite for healthy psychological development. The parents should demonstrate love and acceptance towards the child irrespective of the behaviour of the child. If the child receives such unconditional positive regard, the individual is more likely to achieve self-actualization.

Rogers suggested that self-actualization is the highest level of psychological health. Such an individual is also called a *fully functioning person*. According to Rogers, a fully functioning person has the following characteristics:

- 1) An openness to all experience
- 2) A tendency to live fully in every moment
- 3) An ability to be guided by one's own instincts rather than by reason or the opinions of others
- 4) A sense of freedom in thought and action
- 5) A high degree of creativity.

Instead of describing the fully functioning person as actualized, Rogers described the person as “actualizing”. This is to indicate that self-development is a continuous process and that it never ends.

**Box 11.3: Humanistic Psychology: Not a School of Psychology**

Humanistic psychology had a huge impact on the discipline of psychology. Despite its widespread influence, humanistic psychology is not considered to be as a proper school of psychology. One of the reasons for this is that most of the humanistic psychologists were involved in clinical practice, and were not academicians. Due to this they were not involved in too much of research and could not publish a lot of papers. Because of not working in universities, they could not train the next generation of students to take forward their tradition. The approach of humanistic psychology is also considered to be non-scientific, which has received heavy criticism from many psychologists.

A major reason why humanistic psychology is not considered to be a school of psychology, because it is said that humanistic psychologists were a little late in proposing their ideas. The ideas propagated by the humanistic psychologists, were actually being written about extensively much before them by the later psychoanalysts. Ideas and concepts of humanistic psychology such as *free will*, *ideal self*, *positive relationships*, *love*, *affiliation*, etc. had been talked about much earlier by neo-Freudians and post-Freudians like Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, Heinz Kohut, and Erich Fromm.

A number of historians of psychology also suggest that instead of Maslow, Adler should be considered the first humanistic psychologist.

It was Adler's concept of *social interest* that brought about the positive aspects of human behaviour, which the humanistic psychologists were later emphasizing upon.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Name two different expressions of the third-force movement.  
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- 2) Who is the major thrust behind the humanistic movement in psychology?  
.....  
.....
- 3) Why is the approach of Rogers referred to as the person-centered approach?  
.....  
.....
- 4) What is the difference between real self and ideal self?  
.....  
.....
- 5) Differentiate between congruence and incongruence.  
.....  
.....  
.....

Answer: (1) Humanistic psychology and Existential Psychology; (2) Abraham Maslow

## 11.3 EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The core of existential psychology holds that the individual is free to define life's direction through a continued succession of choices, but that this freedom also gives the individual responsibility for the outcomes of personal decisions, so that freedom is a source of anguish and dread.

Existential psychology began to emerge in Europe and the United States of America shortly after the Second World War. Existential psychology is rooted in the philosophy of existentialists such as **Søren Kierkegaard**, **Friedrich Nietzsche**, **Martin Heidegger**, and **Jean-Paul Sartre**. The first existential psychologists and psychiatrists were also Europeans, and these included **Ludwig Binswanger**, **Medard Boss**, and **Viktor Frankl**. For nearly 50 years, the foremost spokesperson for existential psychology was **Rollo May**.

### 11.3.1 Viktor Frankl

Viktor Frankl suggested that human behaviour is guided by striving towards specific goals. He did not agree with the earlier hedonistic theories. He



**Figure 11.4 Viktor Frankl**

Source: [www.brainpickings.com](http://www.brainpickings.com)

suggested that human beings are not motivated to reduce a state of drive. He specifically disagreed with Sigmund Freud's theory of individuals reducing the id impulses, being guided by the pleasure principle. Frankl suggested that instead of reducing drive, and being pushed by internal discomfort, individuals are actually pulled towards a future state.

#### **Box 11.4: Viktor Frankl**

Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist and psychotherapist, developed the approach of logotherapy. Logotherapy came to be known as the third school of Viennese psychotherapy. The first school of Viennese psychotherapy is known as Sigmund Freud's approach, and the second school of Viennese psychotherapy is known as Alfred Adler's approach. According to Frankl, the main motivation of individuals is to find meaning in life, and thus, he suggested that the main purpose of his approach is to help people find that meaning in life.

After completing his doctorate in medicine, in 1930, Frankl first worked in Am Steinhof psychiatric hospital, at Vienna, till 1938, after it was forced to be closed because of the Nazi annexation. He then became the chief neurologist at Rothschild Hospital, at Vienna. In 1942, when anti-Semitism was on the rise, Frankl being a Jew, he with his family were taken to Nazi concentration camps. These were the most troubling times for him, because along with the suffering that he himself faced, his family members, first his father, then mother, and then later his wife, could not survive the sufferings, and they all passed away.

It was during these times that Frankl realized the significance of meaning in life, and came up with the idea of logotherapy. Based on his observations, and his own experiences in the Nazi camps, Frankl suggested that those who can find meaning in suffering, are the ones who can survive it. After liberation, Frankl returned to Vienna. In 1946, Frankl published the classic book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he wrote about his experiences at the Nazi camps and described his approach of logotherapy. This work of Frankl has become one of the most widely read books that has sold millions of copies in many different languages.

Frankl taught at the University of Vienna, till 1990. He also taught at a number of universities in America as well. A few months before his death, in 1997, Frankl published his book, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, in which he describes the ideas of meaning in life, and will to meaning, in a lot more depth than he had done previously. In 1992, at Vienna, the Viktor Frankl Institute was founded, which is meant to carry forward the legacy of Frankl.

According to Frankl, one of the goals that people are striving towards is having meaning in life, referred to as *will to meaning*. Frankl categorized meaning in life in three different ways. The first type of meaning, according to Frankl, is the meaning derived from one's accomplishments, and what one gives to the world. This also includes creative endeavors, and works of art, according to Frankl. Frankl suggested that the work that a person does, gives meaning to life. The second type of meaning is derived from the different experiences with the world. These can include having all kinds of scenic experiences, enjoying nature, as well as the experiences associated

with the feelings of love. The third type of meaning, according to Frankl, is the meaning that comes from the individual's approach to suffering, and the things that cannot be changed. This type of meaning is related to the experiences that Frankl had when he was at the Nazi concentration camp.

Frankl found that in such conditions of suffering, the people who derived meaning were the ones who survived in the best way. He observed people deriving meaning in suffering by developing compassion, humor, and even the feeling of revenge. Frankl felt that the third type of meaning is associated with the feeling of dignity in suffering. According to Frankl, this type of meaning is related to the transcendental nature of human experience. In relation to meaning in life, Frankl originated the idea of *logotherapy*. Logotherapy is a therapeutic approach that helps individuals to find meaning in life.

### 11.3.2 Rollo May

The approach of Rollo May is based on his clinical experiences rather than the experiment method. He saw people living in the world of current experiences and finally being accountable for who they become. May believed that many people do not have the bravery to confront their fate and escape from it and negate their freedom. By doing so, they escape from their responsibilities. When they are unwilling to make choices, they lose sight of themselves and develop a sense of meaninglessness and isolation. In contrast to that, healthy people confront their fate, treasure their autonomy, and are trustworthy to other people. They realize the certainty of death and have the audacity to live life in the present day.

#### Box 11.5: Rollo May

Rollo May has been one of the major proponents of existential psychology. At a young age, in 1932, May had one of his earliest profound influences. He had attended one of Alfred Adler's summer seminars, and developed a deep admiration for him. He believed that he learned a lot about human behaviour from Adler.

May later studied psychoanalysis at the White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology, New York. Over there he met Harry Stack Sullivan, neo-Freudian and the pioneer of the interpersonal approach to psychology. May was highly impressed by Sullivan, who was the president and founder of the institute. May was also highly influenced by Erich Fromm, post-Freudian and one of the most well-known psychoanalysts, who was a faculty member at the White Institute.

In 1949, May earned his PhD at the age of 40, from Columbia University. He was the first PhD in clinical psychology from the university. Before receiving his doctorate, May suffered from tuberculosis, which ended up completely changing his life. In those times there were not any proper medications for tuberculosis. He was uncertain about his life. He was terrified and depressed. It was during this time that he began studying the writings of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, and Soren Keirkegard, the Danish existential philosopher. He mainly read their works about anxiety. May was influenced by both of them, but it



Figure 11.5: Rollo May

Source: [www.brainpickings.com](http://www.brainpickings.com)

was Kierkegaard's perspective on anxiety that moved him completely. After he recovered, he continued his teaching, writing, and practicing of psychotherapy. He wrote a number of influential books. The first one is based on his dissertation, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (1950). Three years later, he wrote *Man's Search for Himself* (1953). This book gave him a lot of recognition. His most well-known book is *Love and Will* (1969), which was then a national best-seller. May won a number of prestigious awards, including the Psychological Professional Gold Medal from the American Psychological Association, for his outstanding, lifetime contributions to professional psychology.

May related this healthy state to what he called *healthy individualism*. Healthy individualism involves self-reliance, competitiveness, and assertiveness. These characteristics helped clear the frontier, guaranteed economic development, and increased the prosperity of everyone. Apart from healthy individualism, May considered another kind of individualism known as unhealthy individualism. *Unhealthy individualism* involves severe mental health issues for individuals due to having no sense of community. He believed that people tend to develop a sense of unfair means of competitiveness, that is, hypercompetitiveness. This makes each individual a strong enemy of his partner, causing deep interpersonal antagonism and hatred. In turn, this increases apprehension and separation from others.

May also believed that unhealthy individualism involves extreme self-reliance, which keeps many people away from asking for help and support when needed the most. Moreover, this corrupted selfishness is exhibited in the behaviour of many individuals, because they persistently pursue their achievements and material properties.

Unhealthy individualism, according to May, makes people encounter complex problems in their life, which results in a feeling of *emptiness*. May suggests that feelings of emptiness do not mean the unfilled or lack of feeling. Instead, this emptiness occurs when someone feels a lack of power, in which, events are perceived beyond one's control. This happens to such an extent that individuals become aimless and directionless. They are unable to motivate others, or to bring changes in their surroundings. Subsequently, there is profound hopelessness and senselessness. Eventually, when behaviour does not produce any change, individuals give up their desire and feelings, and become indifferent.

May, further, suggested that this emptiness is strongly associated with *loneliness*. The feeling of emptiness makes the individual feel confused about what he or she wants, believes, or values. In such a scenario, the individual follows what is called an *unhealthy communal orientation*. In this, the individual may look for others in a meaningless way to deal with the sense of disconnectedness. The more the individual tries to connect with others to release the feelings of separatedness, the more isolated and anxious he or she becomes.

Additionally, this feeling of loneliness also includes looking for offers to gatherings with people. Inherently the person may not wish to be a part of such gatherings, but tends to do so, because individuals feel the pressure of

proving to themselves that they are not isolated and are connected to others. The individual longs for acceptance, and feels that it can only happen if they are always connected with others. This feeling of acceptance by others makes them feel alive. This, initially, gives a sense of comfort, but in the long run the person ends up losing his or her individuality. The person then is unable to develop what May referred to as a *healthy communal orientation*. A healthy communal orientation helps in dealing with loneliness in the long run. It involves developing a strong and genuine concern for the wellbeing of others.

May suggested that the experience of loneliness and emptiness results in the feeling of *anxiety*. People feel anxious when they become cognizant about their survival or some value associated with it might be damaged. According to May, anxiety is the personal condition in which the individual realizes that his or her existence can be destroyed.

Later on, May termed anxiety as a threat to a significant value. Anxiety can, therefore, result either from an awareness of its absence or from a threat to a value essential to its existence. It occurs when one faces the issue of achieving one's capabilities. This confrontation may lead to inactivity and breakdown, but it can also lead to growth and change. When anxiety leads growth and change, then it is called *normal anxiety*. According to May, normal anxiety is equivalent to the threat, but involves no repression and can be faced constructively at the conscious level. As people grow up from early childhood to old age, their values keep changing and during each step, they experience normal anxiety. Normal anxiety can also be experienced during creativity. For example when an artist, a scientist, or a philosopher suddenly experiences an insight. Normal anxiety is experienced by everyone.

However, according to May, anxiety may also become neurotic or ill. He called this neurotic anxiety. May defined *neurotic anxiety* as a disproportionate response to the threat, involving repression and other forms of intrapsychic conflict. While normal anxiety is felt when values are threatened, neurotic anxiety is felt when values become dogma. According to May, being absolutely right in one's beliefs offers temporary security, but that security comes at the cost of repudiating the possibility of new learnings and new growth.

Apart from the aforementioned conceptions, May also, extensively wrote about care, love, and will. According to May, *care* is an active process of becoming aware of the individual's pain, guilt, or pity, and to acknowledge that person as a fellow individual. It can be seen as the opposite to apathy, which is a lack of concern.

May, further, suggested that to think about somebody intends to perceive that individual as a person, to relate to that individual's agony or euphoria, and blame or pity. Care is a functioning cycle. For May, care is a state where something does make a difference.

Additionally, according to May, care is not the same as love, it is rather the source of love. To love means to care, to recognize the essential humanity of the other person, and to have active regard for that person's development. May defined *love* as a delight in the presence of the other person and an



affirming of that person's values and development as much as one's own. Without care, there can be no love.

May also suggested that apart from the source of love, care is also the source of will. May defined *will* as the ability to organize oneself for a movement in a certain direction or purpose to take place. May differentiated between *will* and *wish*. According to May, *will* involves self-consciousness and implies a chance at a decision, which is not associated with *wish*. *Wish*, on the other hand, gives brightness, substance, creative spirit, novelty, and wealth to *will*. *Will* provides auto-guiding, development to *wish*. *Will* secures *wish*, and allows to proceed without taking exceedingly extraordinary risks.

**Box 11.6: Existential Psychology and Psychoanalysis**

Many of the applications of existential psychology have come from people who had been trained in psychoanalysis. Rollo May, himself, was trained in psychoanalysis. His approach is a combination of Freudian psychoanalysis and existentialism. It is due to this that his approach is also referred to as the *existential-analytic perspective*.

Consequently, there have been a number of similarities found between psychoanalysis and existential psychology:

- Both ask essential questions regarding human existence.
- Both focus on rationality as well as irrationality. Freud talked about the significance of death and referred to the death instinct as a self-destructive urge. Similarly, existential psychology talks about how death is inevitable, and suggests ways of coping from nothingness.
- Both have a deep concern about the alleviation of human suffering.
- Both emphasize on how conflict and anxiety can cause disruption within an individual.
- Both have the assumption that individuals often deal with anxiety by avoiding responsibilities. Freud talks about avoiding responsibilities through repression, and existential psychologists talk about avoiding responsibilities with respect to people denying who they really are.
- Both blame society, to a great extent, for people not being able to be true to their nature. Freud talks about the superego causing restraints. Existential psychologists talk about the role of society in people becoming self-alienated.
- Finally, both have a deep concern for understanding human nature.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) How is Viktor Frankl's approach different from that of Sigmund Freud?  
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.....

- |   |
|---|
| 2) According to May, how does unhealthy individualism result in the feelings of emptiness and loneliness?<br>.....<br>..... |
| 3) Differentiate between normal and neurotic anxiety.<br>.....<br>.....   |

## **11.4 HUMANISTIC AND EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

Humanistic and existential psychology emerged out of the phenomenological movement, which is why there can be a number of similarities found between them. However, they are also many differences between the two.

Both humanistic and existential psychology have a number of common tenets, which are:

- 1) Human beings have free will, and thus, are responsible for their actions.
- 2) Phenomenology, the study of subjective experiences is the most appropriate method to examine human beings.
- 3) In order to understand human beings in a proper way, they must be studied as a whole. Elementism distorts the perspectives about human nature.
- 4) Human beings are unique, and very different from animals. Anything that is learned about animal behaviour is of limited use in order to understand human beings.
- 5) All human beings are unique in their own way. The understanding of one human being is of limited use in order to understand other human beings.
- 6) Being able to live an authentic life is better than living an inauthentic life.
- 7) Human beings cannot be effectively studied by using the traditional scientific method. Human beings have unique attributes like free will, which is not suited for the scientific method.

Even though humanistic and existential psychologists have a number of common tenets, they majority differ with respect to their assumptions about human nature. Humanistic psychologists have the assumption that people are basically good, and thus, if placed in a healthy environment, they will live with each other in a harmonious manner. The main motivation of human beings, according to humanistic psychologists, is the actualizing tendency. This tendency is innate and drives individuals towards activities and events that favor self-actualization.

The existential psychologists, instead of assuming that human beings are good-natured, have the view that human beings are essentially neutral. According to existentialists, the only thing that human beings are born with is their freedom to choose the nature of their existence. They suggest that human beings are free to choose their own essence of uniqueness. People, according to existentialists, are what they make of themselves. By making the right kind of choices, human beings are seeking meaning in life. Existential psychologists suggest that without meaning, life has little worth. Finding meaning in life is then a major motivation in life, as per existential psychologists. The existentialist, Victor Frankl, called this need, the will to meaning.

The perspective that humanistic psychologists have makes them to be more optimistic about people. According to them, if societies could be made compatible, then people can live together in a peaceful and harmonious manner.

In comparison to humanistic psychologists, the perspective of existential psychology is more pessimistic. The existential psychologists suggest that all individuals have a freedom of choice; they have free will. Due to this free will, individuals cannot blame anyone or anything else for their actions and behaviours, making them responsible for whatever they do. This sense of responsibility, however, turns out to be more of a curse for individuals. This happens because, instead of asserting their choice, people conform to societal norms and values.

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## **11.5 SUMMARY**

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Now that we have come to the end of this Unit, let us list all the major points that we have learned:

- The term third-force an approach that differed from psychoanalysis and behaviourism, which are referred to as the first force and second force, respectively. The third-force movement emphasized on the method of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena that is experienced by the individual, emphasizing on how that phenomenon revealed itself.
- Humanistic psychology, emerging in the 1940s and 1950s, opposed the two existing dominant schools of psychology – psychoanalysis and behaviourism. It gives emphasis to personal freedom and personal responsibility in the fulfilment of human potential.
- Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers are regarded as the pioneers of the humanistic movement in psychology. Maslow believed that every individual has an innate tendency to completely develop his or her abilities and realize one's true potential. This tendency is referred to as self-actualization.
- A major feature of the concept of self-actualization, is that it denotes a teleological perspective. The teleological perspective is about explaining behaviour with respect to a future state, a purpose that individuals strive for.
- Carl Rogers developed the approach called person-centered therapy. The self can be distinguished as the real self or actual self and the

ideal self. The real self is what the individual feels he or she is, and the ideal self is what the individual wants to be.

- When there is a discrepancy between the real and ideal self, it can also be said that there is discrepancy between what the individual perceives himself or herself to be and the actual experience. This state is known as incongruence.
- In order to deal with the anxiety of incongruence, people use defense mechanisms. Rogers suggested two types of defense mechanisms – distortion and denial.
- If the child's need for love is satisfied by the parent in an unconditional manner, the child experiences unconditional positive regard. This enables healthy development of the child.
- Rogers suggested that self-actualization is the highest level of psychological health. Such an individual is also called a fully functioning person.
- Viktor Frankl suggested human behaviour is guided by striving towards specific goals. One of the goals that people are striving towards is having meaning in life, referred to as will to meaning.
- Frankl categorized meaning in life in three different ways – in terms of accomplishments and creativity, love, and individuals' approach towards suffering. The third type of meaning is associated with the feeling of dignity in suffering. This type of meaning is related to the transcendental nature of human experience.
- In relation to meaning in life, Frankl originated the idea of logotherapy. It is a therapeutic approach that helps individuals to find meaning in life.
- The approach of Rollo May was based on clinical experience rather than the experiment method.
- Healthy individualism involves self-reliance, competitiveness, and assertiveness. These characteristics helped clear the frontier, guaranteed economic development, and increased the prosperity of everyone.
- Unhealthy individualism involves severe mental health issues for individuals due to having no sense of community. Unhealthy individualism makes people encounter complex problems in their life, which results in a feeling of emptiness.

Emptiness is strongly associated with loneliness.

- In an unhealthy communal orientation, the individual may look for others in a meaningless way to deal with the sense of disconnectedness from others. The more the individual tries to connect with others to release the feelings of separateness, the more isolated and anxious he or she becomes.
- A healthy communal orientation helps in dealing with loneliness in the long run. It involves developing a strong and genuine concern for the wellbeing of others.

- May suggested that the experience of loneliness and emptiness results in the feeling of anxiety. When anxiety leads growth and change, then it is called normal anxiety. Neurotic anxiety is a disproportionate response to the threat, involving repression and other forms of intrapsychic conflict.
- Care is an active process of becoming aware of the individual's pain or joy, guilt or pity and to acknowledge that person as a fellow individual. Love is a delight in the presence of the other person and an affirming of that person's value and development as much as one's own.
- May defined will as the ability to organize oneself for a movement in a certain direction or purpose to take place. Will provides auto-guiding, development to wish. Will secures wish, and allows to proceed without taking exceedingly extraordinary risks.
- Humanistic psychologists have the assumption that people are basically good. The existential psychologists, instead of assuming that human beings are good natured, have the view that human beings are essentially neutral.
- The perspective that humanistic psychologists have makes them to be more optimistic about people. In comparison to humanistic psychologists, the perspective of existential psychology is more pessimistic.

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## 11.6 KEY WORDS

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**Third-force Movement:** It is any approach that differed from psychoanalysis and behaviourism, which are referred to as the first force and second force, respectively. The movement emphasized on the method of phenomenology.

**Phenomenology:** The study of phenomena that is experienced (as it appears in consciousness, without prejudgment, bias, or any preconceived notion) by the individual, emphasizing on how that phenomenon revealed itself. It is about whatever may be significant to the understanding of a phenomenon.

**Humanistic Psychology:** The idea that humans are always seeking to develop their full potential.

**Existential Psychology:** The idea that the individual is free to define life's direction through a continued succession of choices, but that this freedom also gives the individual responsibility for the outcomes of personal decisions, so that freedom is a source of anguish and dread.

**Romanticism:** The philosophy that human nature should be viewed in terms of personal, subjective feelings, and experiences, and that human beings are naturally good in nature.

**Hierarchy of Needs:** A theory of motivation suggesting that individual needs can be placed on a hierarchy. Each individual must first satisfy the needs that are lower in the hierarchy. Once one need is satisfied only then the individual gets motivated for the next need on the hierarchy.

**Self-actualization:** An innate tendency to completely develop one's abilities and realize one's true potential. It is to become everything that one is capable of becoming.

**Teleology:** The perspective that explains behaviour with respect to a future state, a purpose that individuals strive for.

**Psychologically Healthy Individuals:** Individuals who have had satisfied the need for self-actualization.

**Person-centered Approach:** An approach that indicates that the responsibility for change is centered on the person rather than the therapist.

**Self:** An organized conceptual gestalt, an organized whole.

**Real Self:** What the individual feels he or she is.

**Ideal Self:** What the individual wants to be.

**Congruence:** The real and ideal self being similar, or having a lesser discrepancy between the real self and the ideal self; a psychological healthy condition.

**Incongruence:** A discrepancy between the real and ideal self, which can also be said to be a discrepancy between what the individual perceives himself or herself to be and the actual experience. This is a psychologically unhealthy state.

**Distortion:** A defense mechanism that involves developing an alternative view of oneself. This may lead the individual to have either irrational positive views or irrational negative views about himself or herself.

**Denial:** A defense mechanism that involves completely denying the experience.

**Unconditional Positive Regard:** Child's need for love is satisfied by parents in an unconditional manner, enabling healthy development of the child.

**Fully Functioning Person:** An individual at the highest level of psychological health, characterized by openness to all experience, tendency to live fully in every moment, ability to be guided by one's own instincts, a sense of freedom in thought and action, a high degree of creativity.

**Will to Meaning:** The tendency of striving towards having meaning in life.

**Logotherapy:** A therapeutic approach that helps individuals to find meaning in life.

**Healthy Individualism:** Characteristic that involves self-reliance, competitiveness, and assertiveness.

**Unhealthy Individualism:** A state involves a severe mental health issues for individuals due to having no sense of community. Such people are hypercompetitive, making them have deep interpersonal antagonism and hatred. This increases apprehension and separation from others.

**Emptiness:** The feeling of lack of power, in which, events are perceived beyond ones control. The person becomes aimless and directionless. It occurs as a result of unhealthy individualism.

**Loneliness:** A sense of disconnectedness, and a longing for acceptance. A state of being confused about what one wants, believes, or values.

**Unhealthy Communal Orientation:** A condition in which the individual may look for others in a meaningless way to deal with the sense of disconnectedness from others. The more the individual tries to connect with others to release the feelings of separateness, the more isolated and anxious he or she becomes.

**Healthy Communal Orientation:** An orientation that helps in dealing with loneliness in the long run. It involves developing a strong and genuine concern for the wellbeing of others.

**Anxiety:** The feeling that is a result of experiencing loneliness and emptiness. It occurs when one faces the issue of achieving one's capabilities.

**Normal Anxiety:** Anxiety that leads to growth and change. It involves no repression and can be faced constructively at the conscious level.

**Neurotic Anxiety:** A disproportionate response to the threat, involving repression and other forms of intrapsychic conflict.

**Care:** An active process of becoming aware of the individual's pain or joy, guilt or pity and to acknowledge that person as a fellow individual. It is contrary to apathy, which is a lack of concern.

**Love:** A delight in the presence of the other person and an affirming of that person's value and development as much as one's own.

**Will:** The ability to organize oneself for a movement in a certain direction or purpose to take place.

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## 11.7 REVIEW QUESTIONS

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- 1) What are the common aspects of the different forms of the third-force movement?
- 2) How does the concept of self-actualization move away from the causal tradition as proposed by psychoanalysis and behaviourism?
- 3) How does Rogers describe the role of unconditional positive regard in self-actualization?
- 4) In what ways did humanistic psychology disagree with psychoanalysis and behaviourism?
- 5) Describe the different needs, from the lowest to the highest hierarchy, as suggested by Maslow.
- 6) How does self-actualization emphasize the uniqueness of individuals?
- 7) Describe the different types of meaning, as suggested by Frankl.
- 8) How does Rollo May differentiate between healthy and unhealthy individualism.
- 9) How do the feelings of emptiness and loneliness develop an unhealthy communal orientation, among people?
- 10) Differentiate between humanistic psychology and existential psychology.

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