

International Baccalaureate: Perspectives in Psychology

ISSUES AND DEBATES IN PSYCHOLOGY

There are five major approaches in Psychology:-

Biological, Behaviourist, Cognitive, Psychoanalytic, Humanist

Over the last few weeks you have learnt something about each of these approaches and at various points these approaches have been placed in the context of some of the major debates in psychology. We can sum up the major issues and debates that arise from these different approaches as follows:

- Ψ **Freewill vs. Determinism**
- Ψ **Reductionism vs. Non-reductionism**
- Ψ **Structuralism vs. Functionalism**
- Ψ **Nature vs. Nurture**
- Ψ **Objectivity vs. Subjectivity**
- Ψ **Nomothetic vs. Idiographic**

The main arguments of these debates are summarised in the following table:-

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Free will</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have the ability to choose their own course of action, to determine their own lives - we have the freedom to choose (within certain limits) • People have responsibility for their actions - they are the cause of what they do 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Determinism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour is determined by external events or stimuli or by internal, unconscious drives • People are passive responders - therefore we do not have freedom to choose • Behaviour occurs in a regular, orderly manner which is totally predictable (in principle)
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Reductionism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour can be reduced to minute units of analysis such as stimulus-response connections, neuron activity, muscle movements and any larger units of analysis are pointless. • Explanations of complex wholes in terms of the units of which those "wholes" are composed are the only explanations that are worthwhile 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Non-reductionism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough knowledge of organisms cannot be gained through knowledge of nerve activity and muscle movement or through knowledge of stimulus-response connections. • There is a hierarchy of levels of explanation, from the sociological to the psychological down, eventually, to the physical and chemical. No one level can account for the whole of behaviour and all levels are needed for a complete explanation • A human cannot be reduced to stimulus-response connections. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Structuralism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychology should concern itself with the elementary processes of conscious experience. • The <i>structure</i> of consciousness and immediate mental experience can be broken down into basic elements • The elements of conscious experience are <i>sensations and feelings</i> • Introspection is a valid way to investigate conscious experience 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Functionalism</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour should be studied in terms of its functional value (what the behaviour is for) in adapting the person or animal to its environment. • Based on Darwin's ideas of evolution • Function of consciousness is to enable humans to behave in ways in which will aid survival through adaptation to the environment