Approaches to Psychology

Nature ← → Nurture

Biological Approach	Psychoanalysis	Cognitive Psychology	Humanism	Behaviorism
Focus on genetic, hormonal, and neuro-chemical explanations of behavior.	Innate drives of sex and aggression (nature). Social upbringing during childhood (nurture).	Innate mental structures such as schemas, perception and memory and constantly changed by the environment.	Maslow emphasized basic physical needs. Society influences a person's self concept.	All behavior is learned from the environment through conditioning.

Examples of Psychology's "Remedies" to Change Negative Emotions and Behavior

Treat behavior as a disease with use of drugs, lobotomies (in the past), electric shock, diet, exercise.	A trained therapist can unlock the subconscious mind affected by the past. The answers are within self.	Teach how to know negative self-talk and what is real and positive (w/o God's Word). Uncover repressed memories.	Meet the physical needs of mankind. Change society. Redistribute wealth. Increase self-esteem.	Change the environment to give everyone the same positive opportunities.

Where is the mention of God, sin, forgiveness found at the cross of Christ, or the Holy Spirit?

The top chart, "Approaches to Psychology" is from McLeod, S. A. 2007. *Nature Nurture in psychology*. Retrieved from http://www.simplypsychology.org/naturevsnurture.html

The chart above shows how different psychological theories fit into the "Nature versus Nurture" debate. This debate has raged for decades. The term "Nature versus Nurture" was first coined by Francis Galton who was a cousin of Charles Darwin, the father of the theory of evolution. Galton was influenced by Darwin's book "On the Origin of Species." Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, was influenced by Galton and Darwin's godless evolutionary theories. Freud dismissed belief in God as a neurotic obsession and determined that science could explain mankind's emotions and behaviors. Even a casual study of the history of psychology reveals the dismissal of both God and the truths of the Bible.

Freud, and those who followed with their own theories of nature versus nurture, formed the foundation of today's clinical psychology (the branch of psychology that diagnoses and treats mental and behavioral problems). As the chart shows, conflicting theories of behavior range from our biological makeup (nature) to the environment in which we live (nurture). Each theory spawns even more theories, each with competing treatment options. A person seeking help through psychology must first choose the theory they believe in, and then the treatment method they think will help them. Many people end up chasing one therapy after another for years, hoping to find the answer to their problems.

Of all these theories, who are we to believe? For example, should we blame our troubled thoughts and behaviors on a chemical imbalance, believing there is something wrong with our biological makeup? Or, should we blame negative emotions on being raised in a dysfunctional home or poor neighborhood, believing that we were not correctly nurtured as children? Either we need better anti-depressants (which can have dangerous side-effects) or we need to redistribute wealth in our society to give everyone equal opportunities. Abraham Maslow believed that meeting a person's physical needs is the first step to morality. Many of our politicians promote this humanistic view. However, the apostle Paul said, *"Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:11-13). Paul learned to be content because he trusted his life to God and passionately loved others. He was a moral man even when his physical needs were not met.

Another myth that has seeped into our society is that people are born good but negative experiences have altered our subconscious causing us to behave in negative ways later in life (a Freudian theory). Simply put, we are victims of our experiences. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that we are sinners from birth, enticed by our own lusts (Ps. 51:5, Ps. 58:3, Prov. 22:15, Eph. 2:3, Rom. 3:23, James 1:14). The truth is, we don't act out of negative experiences repressed in our subconscious. Adam and Eve had a perfect experience in the Garden of Eden and yet they still sinned!

Many Christians believe psychology has the answer to their brokenness and try the current "remedies" including repressed memory recovery, mind/body therapy, eye movement desensitization reprocessing (EMDR) therapy, hug therapy, adult play therapy, self-esteem therapy, drug therapy, and many others. Well-meaning Christian psychologists pick their favorite therapy and try to Christianize it with a few Bible verses, leaving out the full counsel of God (see Acts 20:27-31). True biblical counseling is based on the promise that the word of God alone provides the knowledge we need to live a life that honors Christ, bringing us spiritual peace that surpasses all comprehension (2 Peter 1:3, Phil. 4:7).

The largest problem with psychological theories is that there is no mention of the sinful heart of mankind or Christ's sacrifice. The weight of guilt and condemnation produces unworthiness, fear of rejection or failure, anxiety, depression, discontentment, anger, and rebellion. It is only through daily acknowledging my sin (selfish attitudes) that I see His great love at the cross and understand the beauty of His forgiveness, freeing me from the dark tomb of guilt. Without Christ, people are trapped in the shame of their sins, causing them to focus on self while they constantly lust for the "good life." Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin"* but then He declared, *"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (John 8:34, 36).

by Linda Pringle