**2 The science of psychology**

What psychology is not!

Psychology as science

* Psychology is a science—the science of mind, brain, and behaviour. This means that psychologists use the scientific method to discover and explain psychological phenomena and treat claims about human, mind, brain, and behaviour with scepticism.
* Psychologists regard themselves as scientists because they conduct and take note of research, they attempt to be objective in their observations, and they are critical of their own and others’ interpretations of findings.
* There is a trade-off between the study of ‘impeccable trivia’, which are straightforward to study using the methods of science, and more meaningful but harder to study phenomena.
* A small minority of psychologists take more critical stances towards traditional views of science in psychology. These include humanistic and critical social psychologists.
* It is important to distinguish between science and pseudoscience in psychology. Pseudoscience is designed to appear scientific but actually lacks evidence.

Academic and applied psychology

* Academic psychology involves conducting psychological research, sharing this through conferences and journals, and teaching psychology.
* Academic psychology can be divided into categories—for example, social and cognitive psychology—however, in practice there is often overlap between these categories.
* Applied psychology involves using psychological theory, research, and techniques in a range of professional settings. Branches of applied psychology include clinical and educational psychology.
* Academic and applied psychology are both ‘proper’ psychology and enjoy equal status in the eyes of professional bodies like the British Psychological Society and the European Federation of Psychological Associations.

A brief history of the mind

* The first pre-scientific systems of psychology appeared around 2,600 years ago, and are notable for the overlap of ideas with modern psychology.
* The backdrop to the existence of scientific psychology lies in European philosophers of the sixteenth century.
* Psychology emerged as a discipline in its own right from philosophy and biology in the mid-nineteenth century.
* The early scientific psychologists used introspection as their main research method but this was superseded by the behaviourists’ focus on observable behaviour.
* Behaviourism, the study of learned behaviour under controlled conditions, dominated American psychology, though not so much European psychology, throughout the first half of the twentieth century.
* In parallel with behaviourism, psychoanalysis developed a more theoretical approach to psychology, based largely in European hospitals and private training institutes.
* In the 1950s, humanistic psychology was an attempt to make psychology kinder and simpler. It was briefly influential as a ‘third force’ in academic psychology and its principles still underlie some practice in applied psychology.
* Cognitive psychology, with its focus on mental processes, also emerged as a major force in psychology in the 1950s, dominating psychology for the rest of the twentieth century.
* Neuroscience has emerged as both a separate discipline and an approach to psychology over the last two decades, providing very exciting insights into the relationship between brain, mind, and behaviour, but there are also controversies around what some consider overblown claims.
* Evolutionary psychology is another modern biology-based approach to psychology. It has great explanatory It has great explanatory power but is controversial for appearing to justify some immoral behaviours.
* There are cultural differences in the psychology of different countries. American psychology thus tends to be particularly experimental and mainland European psychology is typically rather more theoretical.

Theory and perspective in psychology

* Theory has an important role in psychology. A theory is a series of interconnected ideas that aims to explain a phenomenon. Theories generate hypotheses.
* An hypothesis is different from a theory, being a simple and testable statement about a phenomenon. Hypotheses are very important in formulating some kinds of psychological research.

Different theories explaining the same phenomenon can coexist if they operate at different levels of explanation.