

Question: What are the seven main contemporary perspectives in psychology?

■ The Role of Biology

The Biological Perspective

- The **biological perspective** of psychology emphasizes the influence of biology on our behavior.
- Biologically oriented psychologists focus on connections between the brain and behavior.
- They also focus on the influences of hormones and genes.

The Evolutionary Perspective

- The **evolutionary perspective** focuses on the evolution of behavior and mental processes.
- Evolutionary psychologists suggest that many kinds of behavior patterns are examples of adaptive behavior.

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▣ The Role of the Mind

The Cognitive Perspective

- The **cognitive perspective** emphasizes the role that thoughts play in determining behavior.
- The cognitive tradition has roots in Socrates' maxim "Know thyself."
- Many cognitive psychologists have been influenced by information processing and computer science.

The Humanistic Perspective

- The **humanistic perspective** stresses the human capacity for self-fulfillment and the importance of consciousness, self-awareness, and the capacity to make choices.
- According to this perspective, personal experiences are the most important aspect of psychology.

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The Psychoanalytic Perspective

- The **psychoanalytic perspective** stresses the influence of unconscious forces on human behavior.
- Psychologists who follow this approach focus on conscious choice.
- Psychoanalytic thought no longer dominates the field, but its influence continues to be felt.

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▣ The Role of Experience

The Learning Perspective

- The **learning perspective** emphasizes the effects of experience on behavior.
- In contrast, **social-learning theory** suggests that people can change their environments or create new ones.
- Psychologists who take the learning perspective believe that behavior is learned either from direct experience or by observing other people.

The Sociocultural Perspective

- The **sociocultural perspective** focuses on the influences of ethnicity, gender, culture, and socio-economic status on behavior and mental processes.

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■ The Biopsychosocial Perspective

- **The biopsychosocial perspective holds that mental processes are influenced by the interaction of biological processes, psychological dispositions, and social factors.**
- **This is a holistic approach that dates back to ancient Greece.**
- **The modern model was developed by American physician George Engel.**
 - It was developed in relation to the treatment of heart disease.
 - Cultural, social, and psychological factors and genetic disposition as well as diet, exercise, stress levels, and financial status all have a bearing on heart disease, according to Engel.

Contemporary Psychological Perspectives

QUICK
FACTS

These eight broad perspectives are the most common ways that contemporary psychologists view behavior today.

Perspective	Subject Matter	Key Assumption	Influenced By
Biological	Nervous system, glands and hormones, genetic factors	Biological processes influence behavior and mental processes.	Associationism and neuroscience
Evolutionary	Physical traits, social behavior	Adaptive organisms survive and transmit their genes to future generations.	Charles Darwin and evolution
Cognitive	Interpretation of mental images, thinking, language	Perceptions and thoughts influence behavior.	Structuralism, functionalism, and Gestalt psychology
Humanistic	Self-concept	People make free and conscious choices based on their unique experiences.	Introspection and belief in free will
Psychoanalytic	Unconscious processes, early childhood experiences	Unconscious motives influence behavior.	Sigmund Freud
Learning	Environmental influences, learning, observational learning	Personal experiences and reinforcement guide individual development.	John B. Watson and behaviorism
Sociocultural	Ethnicity, gender, culture, religion, socio-economic status	Sociocultural, biological, and psychological factors create individual differences.	Social, environmental, and cross-cultural psychology
Biopsychosocial	Biology, psychology, social factors	Mental processes are influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors.	Holistic health and social psychology