APPROACHES TO PSYCHOLOGY

The Psychoanalytic Approach to Psychology

Strengths
- Freud’s idea made a large impact on psychology and psychiatry and are still discussed and used today, around a 100 years after he started developing them.
- Freud regarded case studies like “Little Hans, and Anna O’ as firm empirical support for his theory, and thought his belief in determinism and detailed collection of data were scientific.
- Freud’s theory has had some experimental support in certain areas, such as repression and fixation.
- Psychoanalysis is had enormous explanatory power and has something to say on a huge variety of topics.

Weaknesses
Many psychologists today reject psychoanalysis because
- It has been accused of being irrefutable (incapable of being proved wrong) and so theoretically unscientific – it seems to explain everything but predicts very little.
- Freud’s methods have been regarded as unscientific because he based his theory on studying an “abnormal” sample of people, using the case study method and techniques that were not fully objective and, therefore, open to bias.
- Much experimental research carried out on Freudian hypotheses has failed to support his theory and ideas.
- The success of psychoanalytic therapy has been criticized.

The Humanistic Approach to Psychology

Strengths
The humanistic approach has contributed top psychology by
- Re-emphasizing the need to study consciousness and human experience for a complete study of the subject.
- Serving as a valuable agent of criticism against the extremes of the earlier major approaches.
- Highlighting the value of more individualistic and idiographic methods of study, particularly in the areas of personality and abnormality.
- Emphasizing the importance of self-actualization, responsibility, freedom of choice, and social context in therapy.

Weaknesses
Humanistic psychology has not, however, had the significant impact on mainstream academic psychology that the other approaches have. This is probably because humanists deliberately take a less scientific approach to studying humans since.
- Their belief in free will is in opposition to the deterministic laws of science
- They adopt a more idiographic approach, seeking the more unique aspects of individuals, rather than producing generalized laws of behavior that apply to everyone.
• The issues they investigate, such as consciousness and emotion, are amongst the most difficult to objectively study.

The Behaviorist Approach to Psychology

Strengths
Behaviorism contributed to psychology in many ways
• Behaviorism was very scientific and its experimental methodology left a lasting impression on the subject.
• It provided strong counter-arguments to the nature side of the nature-nurture debate.
• The approach is very parsimonious, explaining a great variety of phenomena using only a few simple (classical and operant) principles.
• Behaviorism has produced many practical applications, some of which have been very effective.

Weaknesses
Behaviorist views have been criticized by other approaches for a number of reasons
• Ethnologist argued that the behaviorists ignored innate built in biases in learning due to evolution, but also disagreed with the behaviorist’s use of animal laboratory experiments, saying that there is a biologically qualitative difference between humans and other animals and that experiments only demonstrate artificial, not natural learning.
• Cognitive psychologists think that behaviorism ignores important mental processes involved in learning; while the humanistic approach disliked their rejection of conscious mental experience.

The Cognitive Approach to Psychology

Strengths
Cognitive psychology is probably the most dominant approach today
• It investigates many areas of interest in psychology that had been neglected by behaviorism; yet, unlike psychoanalysis and humanism, it investigates them using more rigorous scientific methods.
• In contrast to the biological approach, it bases it explanations firmly at a functional, psychological level, rather than resorting to reductionism to explain human behavior.
• The approach has provided explanations of many aspects of human behavior and has had useful practical applications.
• The cognitive approach has combined with other approaches to strengthen its explanations and usefulness, e.g. cognitive neuropsychology.

Weaknesses
Cognitive models have been accused of being
• Over simplistic