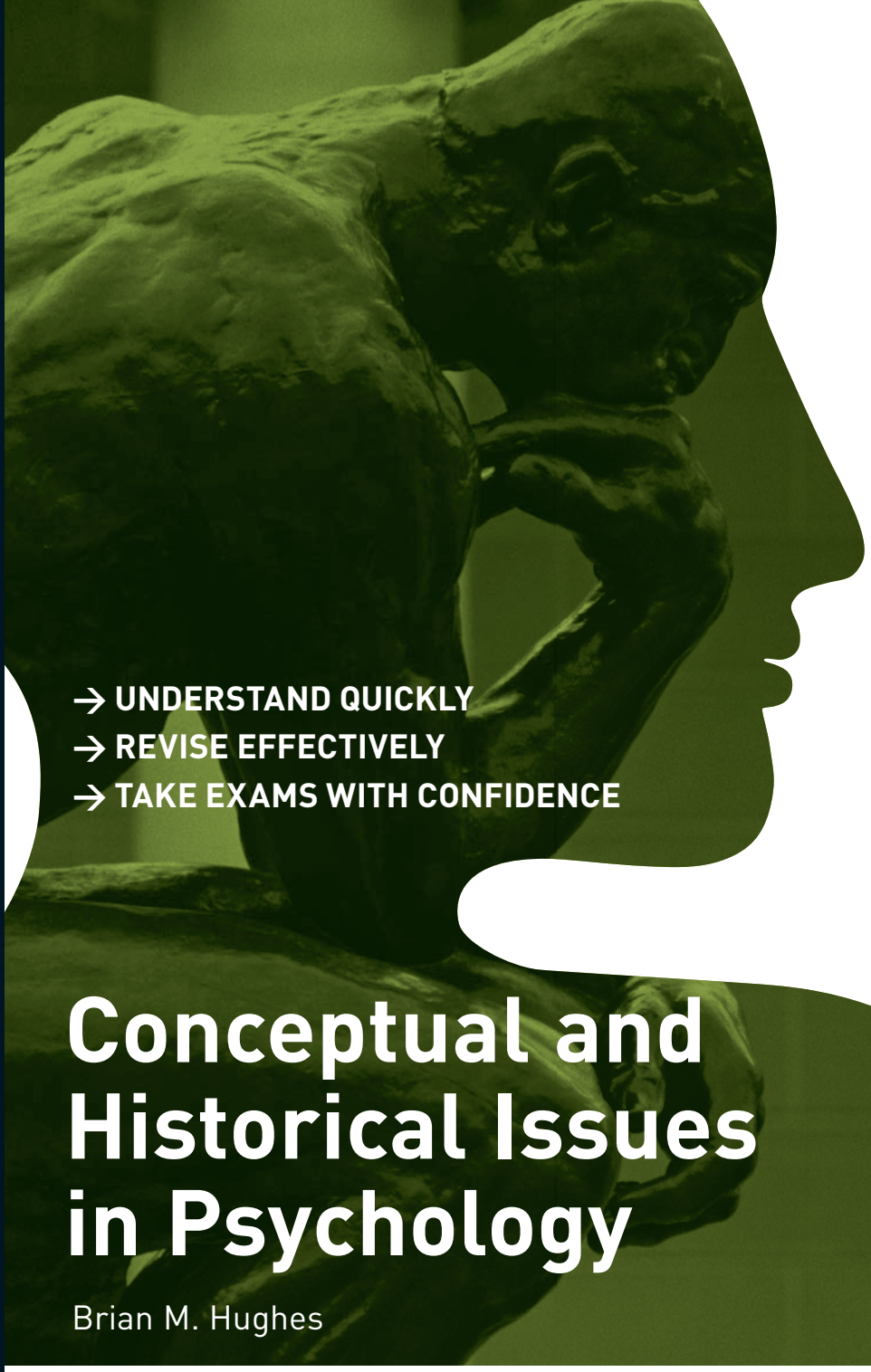

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Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology

Brian M. Hughes

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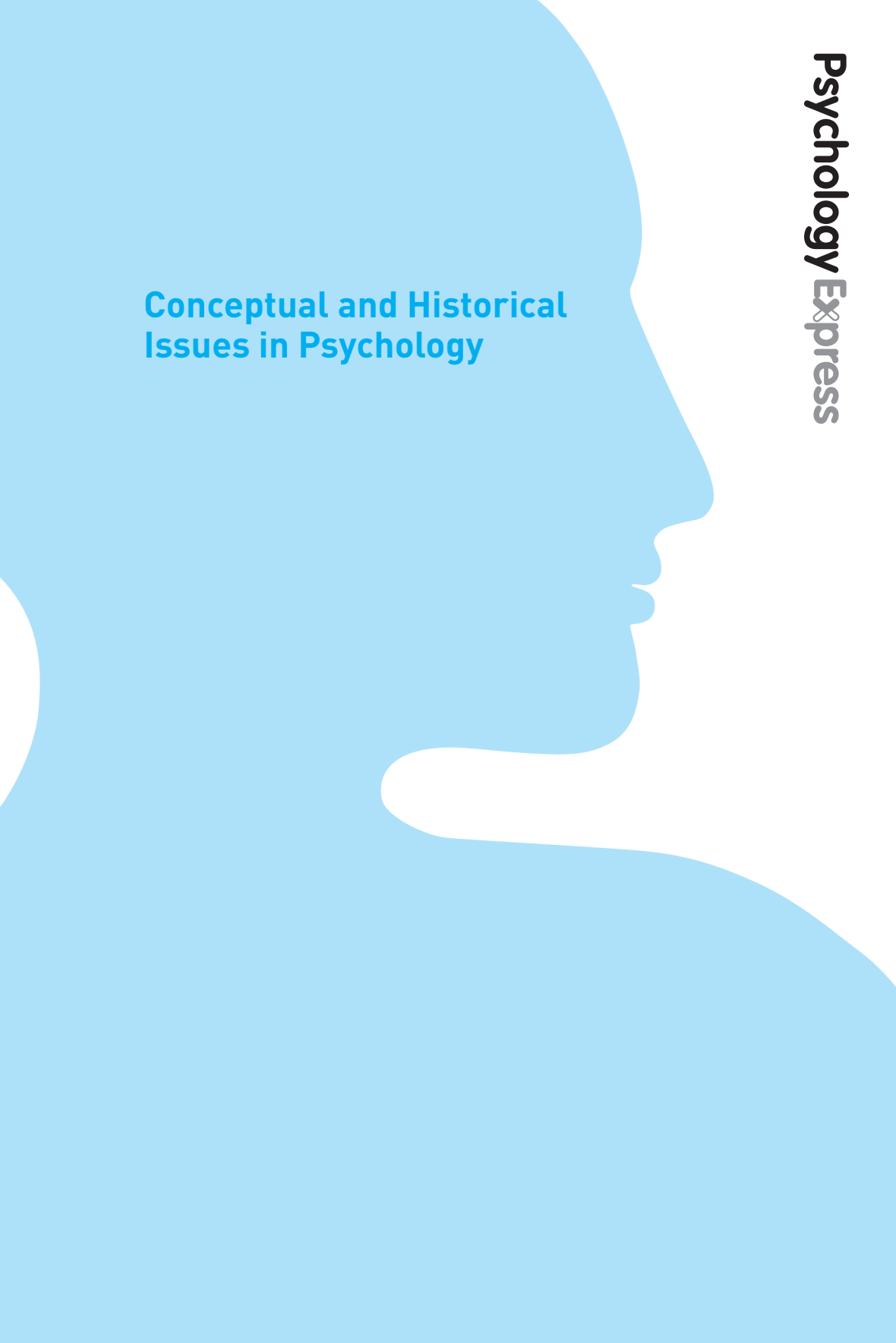
Conceptual and Historical Issues in Psychology



Topic	*Key reading*
Biases in psychology	Guthrie, R. V. (2003). *Even the rat was white: A historical view of psychology*, (2nd edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
Race in psychology	Richards, G. (2007). '*Race*', *racism and psychology: Toward a reflexive history*. London: Routledge.
The 'Bell curve'	Rushton, J. P. (1997). Review essay: *The Bell Curve Debate* and related books. *Society*, *34*, 78–82.
Psychometrics and eugenics	Gould, S. J. (1996). *The mismeasure of man*, (Revised and expanded edition). London: Penguin.

Answer guidelines

Sample question — *Essay*

Examine the influence of physiognomic theories on the historical development of psychology. To what extent (if any) is this influence detectable today?

Approaching the question

The question is in two parts. The first part asks you to 'evaluate' a proposition. This instruction invites you to set out the positive and negative aspects of the proposition (e.g. its strengths and weaknesses, its advantages and disadvantages, or – as in this case – reasons for supporting the proposition and reasons for rejecting it). The second part asks for a directional response (e.g. 'to a great extent' or 'to a little extent'), but also invites an explanation (e.g. 'to a great extent, because...').

Important points to include

A thorough treatment of physiognomic theories should certainly include the works (and beliefs) of Lavater, and almost certainly also Lombroso. A thorough treatment should also refer to the presence of physiognomic beliefs throughout cultural history, including in the writings of the ancient philosophers. To be especially comprehensive, it would be legitimate (and perhaps helpful) to identify fields such as craniometry and phrenology as essentially physiognomic theories. Note that the question refers to 'the historical development of psychology'. While this certainly includes the subject matter of psychology, it also includes the practice of psychology as a scientific discipline. Therefore, when considering the influence of physiognomic theories, it would be desirable to address both aspects. Firstly, it would be helpful to describe how physiognomic beliefs influenced the knowledge base of psychology (e.g.,

beliefs relating to specialisation of function in the brain). Secondly, it would be helpful to note how physiognomic approaches influenced the nature of research in psychology by encouraging data collection, statistical analysis, hypothesis testing, the development of formal psychometrics, and so on.

Make your answer stand out

To make your answer stand out, consider ways of explaining the psychological appeal of physiognomy (for example, evolutionary processes that might encourage people to judge others by their appearances) and how these processes might have influenced not only the public at large, but also psychometricians themselves. Many prominent psychometricians retained physiognomic-style beliefs even after having developed standardised methods of objective measurement, while others used psychometrics to further their polemical agendas regarding racial segregation. While there are reasons to have ethical reservations regarding psychometric tests, such reasons tend to relate more to the people who use psychometrics rather than to the methods themselves. As such, to make your answer stand out, try also to emphasise ethical arguments in favour *of psychometric approaches.*

Explore the accompanying website at **www.pearsoned.co.uk/psychologyexpress**

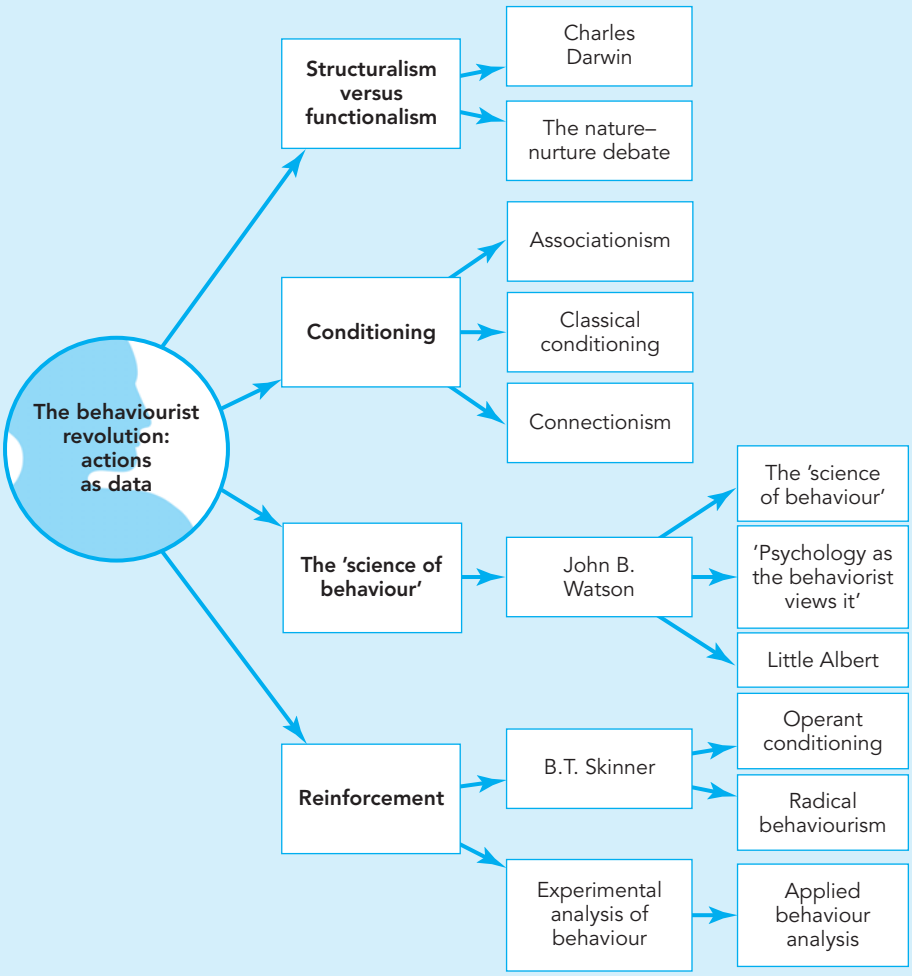
- → Prepare more effectively for exams and assignments using the answer guidelines for questions from this chapter.
- → Test your knowledge using multiple choice questions and flashcards.
- → Improve your essay skills by exploring the You be the marker exercises.

Notes

Notes

5

The behaviourist revolution: actions as data



A printable version of this topic map is available from
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Introduction

By the late 19th century, scientific psychology had developed ways of exploring human experiences relating to perception and sensation, as well as approaches to the measurement of qualities such as intelligence and personality. However, many psychologists felt that such research addressed concepts that were abstract rather than tangible, the implications of which were philosophical rather than pragmatic. Some feared that this threatened the standing of psychology as a science. It was also noted that while these approaches helped us to describe people's feelings and attitudes, they did not help us to understand or explain why people acted in the way that they do. This was a problem because many psychologists felt that the capacity to explain (and thus predict) people's actions was a fundamental requirement for the new discipline of psychology. Therefore, it is little surprise that psychology quickly developed ways of studying human behaviour. This field of research became known as behaviourism.

Revision checklist

Essential points to revise are:

- ❑ How functionalism emerged as an alternative to structuralism
- ❑ How behaviourists viewed the need for a more scientific approach to psychology
- ❑ The nature of epistemological and humanistic disputes that the behaviourist approach raises

Assessment advice

- Essay questions on this topic will often focus less on the nuts and bolts of how behaviourism seeks to explain behaviour, and more on the philosophical implications of the behaviourist worldview. Such implications relate both to the human condition and to the way science is practised in psychology.
- With regard to the human condition, behaviourism has implications regarding free will, consciousness and the nature–nurture debate. With regard to science, behaviourism argues strongly for the application of strong scientific rigour to psychology.
- In both contexts, debates are often highly charged as the relevant concerns are widely acknowledged to be finely balanced. Thus, in approaching assessments in this area, it is important to ensure that such controversies are dealt with in a balanced way, with treatments of both arguments and counter-arguments regarding each dispute.
- Of course, strong scholarship will allow (if not indeed expect) a commentator to take a particular side on these debates, assuming that arguments are supported with pertinent information and fair reasoning.

Sample question

Could you answer this question? Below is a typical essay question that could arise on this topic.

Sample question *Essay*

To what extent did the emergence of behaviourism represent the introduction of evolutionary theory to psychology?

Guidelines on answering this question are included at the end of this chapter, whilst further guidance on tackling other exam questions can be found on the companion website at: **www.pearsoned.co.uk/psychologyexpress**

Structuralism versus functionalism

Much of the early empirical, quantitative, laboratory-based research in psychology had been based on an agenda of setting out the dimensions and parameters of the human mind, such as its capacities for sensation and perception. The British psychologist Edward Titchener (1867–1927), who studied under Wundt in Leipzig before emigrating to the United States to establish a psychology laboratory at Cornell University, argued that all complex mental experiences could be understood in terms of combinations of small discrete perceptions and sensations. This view became known as structuralism, and is sometimes credited as being the first major school of thought in American academic psychology. However, the structuralist movement did not last long. Titchener argued that the fundamental subject matter of psychology was personal experience, and so was a strong advocate of introspection. Accordingly, structuralism attracted severe criticisms from psychologists who considered objectivity and verifiability to be essential features of scientific data. Other critics, such as Max Wertheimer (1880–1943), complained that structuralism failed to take account of how the combination of experiences can often be just as important as the individual experiences themselves, and so accused structuralists of reductionism.