

Welcome to The Philosophy Café, Brisbane, Queensland

Your opinion is valued, but The Philosophy Café is an educative process. It is not about 'mere opinion', it is about learning.

Please offer your thoughts according to the structured discussion.

As moderator, I will be endeavouring that the group remains on-topic.



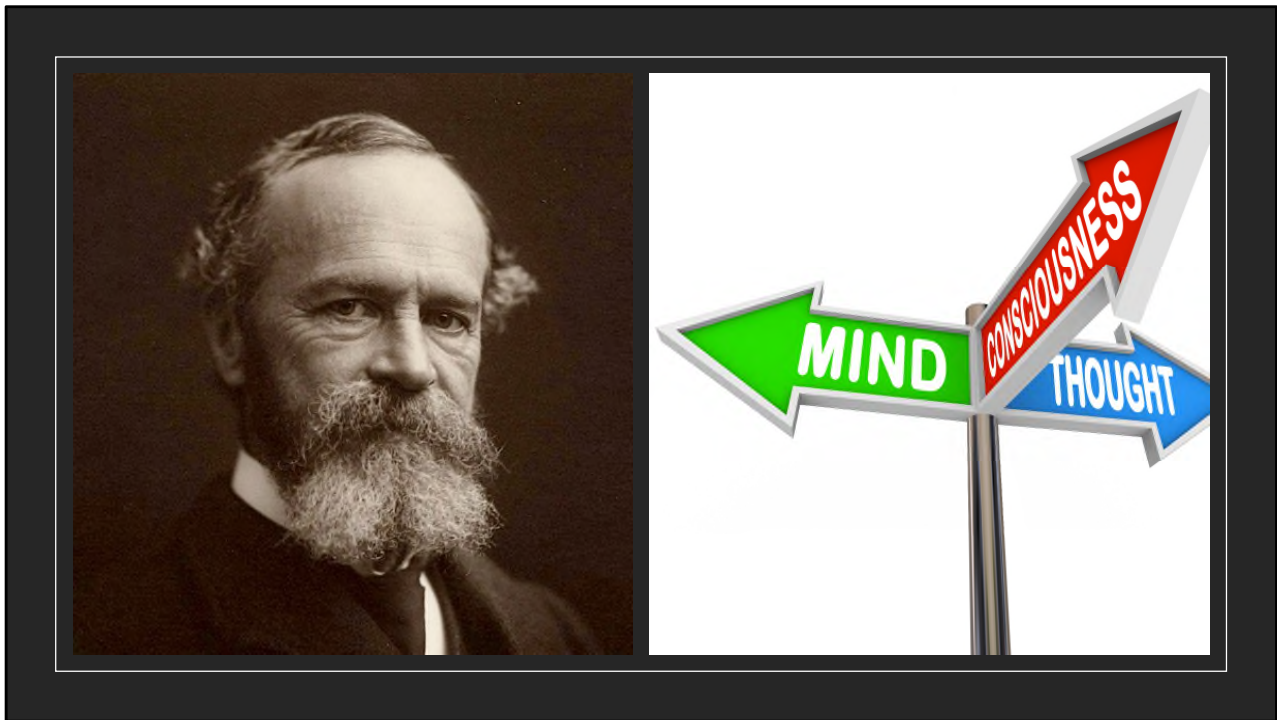
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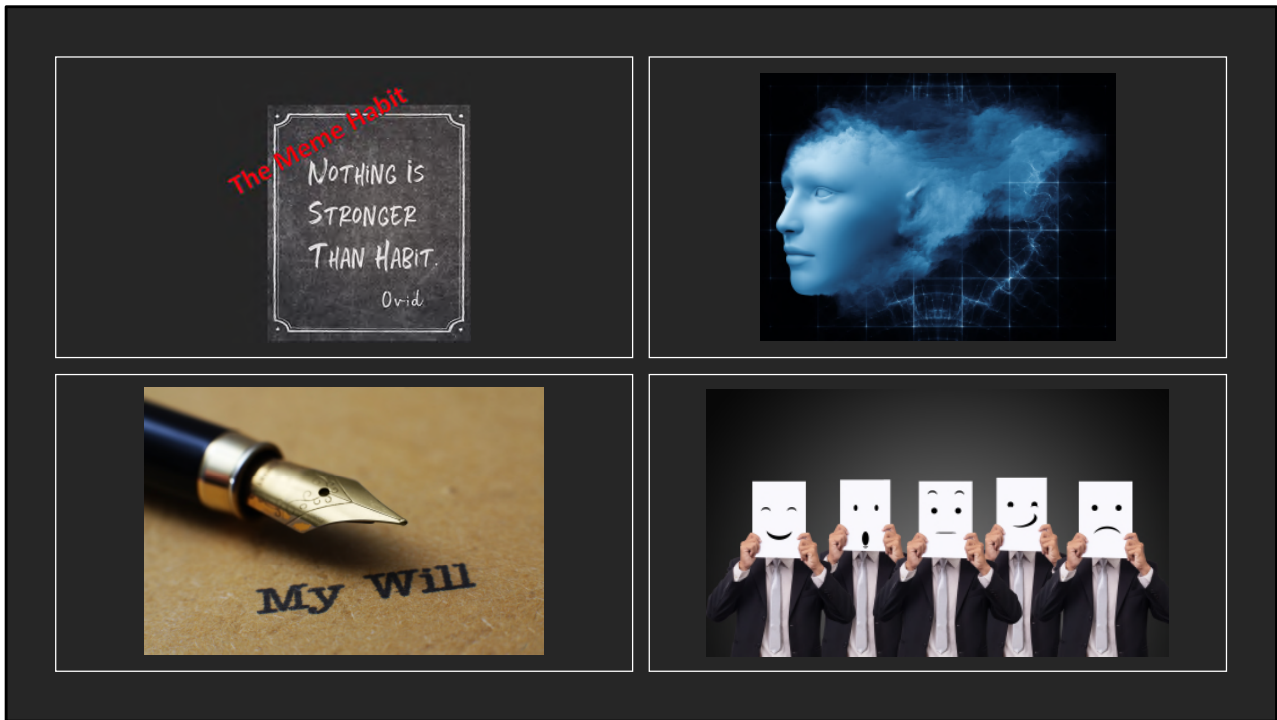
Pop psychology has a history of distorting a fair understanding of the practice in psychology. Even worse, Jordan Peterson's showman-style psychology is destructive for a fair understanding of the person in the political world, and, even while Peterson's psychology is aimed against the Trump post-truth world, his cherry-picking style of thinking twists every theoretical frame, such as empowering demagoguery. It is not Peterson's problem alone. Too many people want easy answers.



Principles are a useful philosophical tool for clarity. There are many good principles from theorists, designed for practice, but the original 'The Principles of Psychology', a type of handbook, was written by William James in 1890.

James defined the original terms which the 20th century pop psychology had well abused. He was concerned with instincts, instincts understood by empirical study and stated rationally.

It is a turning point, because it overturned the outlook that human beings were beyond instincts, and it brought David Hume's psychology to the fore, that rationality was an instrument driven by passions. None of this original analysis meant overturning rational judgement. Rationality was the driver in language formation.



Furthermore, James concluded, that in any animal with the capacity for memory, association, and expectation, behaviour is ultimately expressed as a synthesis of instinct and experience. Experience, to be understood, had to go to an expression of belief, and although, this judgement is well outside of James' radical empiricism, it is the stage of development in psychology, from the mid-to-late 20th century. To understand James' principles knowledgeably we do have to go beyond James, in our discussion.

James' two volumes of 'The Principles of Psychology' identifies a host of what could be called specific principles in 28 chapters, for a wide discussion of metaphysics and methods without a tidy pop psychology table. Commentators generally agree that the sections on stream of consciousness, emotion, habit, and will, are four important broad principles.



Stream of Consciousness.

This is James' most famous term. It has changed forever the way we view the mind.

Human thought can be characterized as a flowing stream rather than a logical chain of interlocking structures. Every thought or moment of consciousness is unique and unrepeatable, and consciousness is completely continuous.

Critics argue that James is right as the natural condition of human thought. It is the disposition of consciousness. However, James' radical empiricism is wrong. We are not simply what we observe as experience. Thought and consciousness is socially and environmentally conditioned, and that conditioning is a rational schema by which we can only explain our thoughts.

How we get from a stream to rationality, from the instinct as experience to experience communicated in language is still contentious. But the practice of psychology cannot be pure observation.



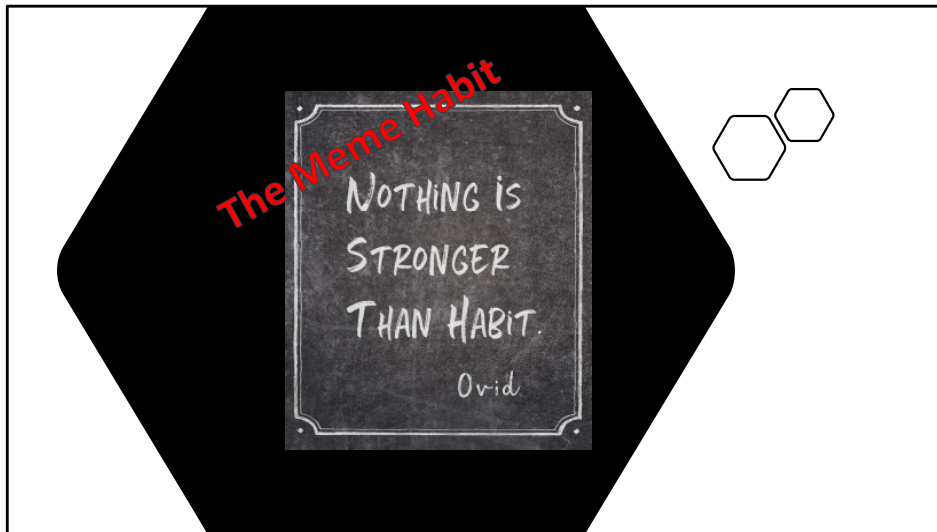
Emotion.

The James–Lange theory is a hypothesis on the origin and nature of emotions and is one of the earliest ground-breaking theories within modern psychology. Carl Lange was a Danish physician who separately developed a similar theory to James in the same publication period of 1884 and 1885.

The basic premise of the theory is that physiological arousal instigates the experience of emotion.

This means that emotion is secondary to the primary physiological change. Each specific emotion is attached to a unique and different pattern of physiological arousal and emotional behaviour in reaction due to an exciting stimulus.

The debate on the theory goes to the philosophy of mind rather than psychology. Supporters of the theory argue their case based on understanding the concept of emergence in the brain-mind pattern. The critics argue for a materialism where the concept of the mind is reduced out of the equation.



Habit.

The topic of habit is so habitual that it is hard to see what new information James is providing beyond common sense.

However, James goes beyond David Hume's observations on habit formation in Chapter 4 of the first volume. Using the works of other moral philosophers, James comes up with laws of habit formation which he sees as unbiased. He argues that habits are capable of leading to either good or bad actions.

From William Benjamin Carpenter's 1874 *Principles of Mental Physiology*, James stated:

The first result of the nervous system is that habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them more accurate and diminishes fatigue.

The next result is that habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed.

From Alexander Bain's 1887 *The Moral Habits*, James stated:

The first maxim is, take care to launch oneself with as strong and decided an initiative as possible.

The second maxim is, never suffer an exception to occur till the new habit is securely rooted in your life.

And the third maxim is, seize the very first possible opportunity to act on every resolution you make, and on every emotional prompting you may experience in the direction of the habits you aspire to gain.

Critics are right to raise the question whether the so-called laws or maxims do read as such.



Will.

The major debate of nineteenth century metaphysics was on the nature of 'Will'. The term is too antiquated for contemporary discussion. The contemporary equivalent term is 'agency', and it is James who got us there.

James argued that the most essential achievement of the will, when it is most voluntary, is to attend to a difficult object and hold it fast before the mind. Effort of attention is thus the essential phenomenon of will. It is equivalent to the phenomenological term, intention.

It is then not too far a step to then say the human person is an agent.

From the philosophy as psychology, the debate is set during the 20th century between those who are arguing for a kind of freedom of the person in choice-making, and the behaviourist critics who argue that there is no mental reflection in cognition for choice, and we are only really automates of behaviour.

Discussion...



Title	Citations
Three Principles Mind Consciousness Thought Arrow Signs.	Illustration 31478759 © Iqoncept Dreamstime.com
Psychology Definition	Photo 38421529 © Pixelrobot Dreamstime.com
William James	A black and white photograph of James, Wikipedia, from Notman Studios (photographer) - MS Am 1092 (1185), Series II, 23, Houghton Library, Harvard University
Mind Stream	Photo 41520708 © Agsandrew Dreamstime.com
Five businessman holding a card with drawing facial expressions different emotion feelings face on white paper.	Photo 136344670 © Piyamas Dulmunsumphun Dreamstime.com
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It is at this point that further discussion is warranted, but before launching into a group discussion, it is worth making a few comments on Jordan Peterson's pop psychology, by considering the reception to his book, *12 Rules for Life, An Antidote to Chaos*.

There is general agreement, even among critics, that Peterson presents nuggets of wisdom. Some things he says are insightful. However, he arises the ire of practicing psychologists and philosophers because his thinking is weak. Paul Thagard, professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Waterloo, described the work as flimsy and says Peterson's views fail to stand up to philosophical scrutiny. Although psychologist John Grohol sees no harm in the book, he cannot recommend it because of its rambling tangential anecdotes and the inferred religious dogma. Political philosophers have also condemned Peterson's absurd claim regarding 'cultural Marxists', including conservative scholars, like John Gray, who can speak in the political direction of Peterson's nonsense, with far more thoughtful observations.

Pop psychologist, such as Petersen, just confuse the public on the practice of psychology.