Hugo Munsterberg’s Criticism of Sigmund Freud

Name

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Hugo Munsterberg was a German psychologist known for contributions to industrial psychology. He introduced the concept of applied psychology at a time when other psychologists were mostly concerned with experimental psychology. Munsterberg is known for being a vocal critic to Sigmund Freud’s unconscious theory. Munsterberg believed that mental illnesses had a physical cause as psychological processes had a parallel physical process in the brain. Munsterberg indicated that the unconscious and subconscious were fictional means to explain phenomena that did not exist (Alvarado, 2019). Munsterberg rejected psychic research and adopted a reductionist approach. The reductionist approach emphasizes on reducing complex phenomena to the most basic parts (Krakauer et al., 2017). Munsterberg’s viewed attracted criticism from psychology scholars who had accepted theories on the presence of an unconscious mental life.

With regards to the mind, Munsterberg held the view that emotions surpass our conscious control and that they affect human psychology and physiology. He posited that conscious experience is the result of behavior and that behavior predetermines ideas. His theory on behavior was in contrast to previous schools of thought that believed that ideas led to behavior. Munsterberg held the view that physical processes in the body occur parallel to brain processes, a concept he termed as psychological parallelism (Punt, 2019). As a result, Munsterberg indicated that the study of the mind could be used in other fields such as industrial, clinical, educational, and law enforcement settings. He believed that psychological principles could be used to solve practical problems in the society (Fordjour & Chan, 2020). Therefore, Munsterberg’s remarks on the connection between the mind and behavior were controversial and overshadowed important contributions he made in the field of applied psychology.

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