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Chapter 3

I found Hermann von Helmholtz to be more interesting than his fellow German scientists Weber and Fechner. Helmholtz was born in Potsdam, Germany in 1821 and died 73 years later (Schultz 54). Although he attended medical school, Helmholtz ended up becoming a professor of physics and physiology. In addition to being a lecturer, he is also recognized as an accomplished researcher and inventor. The ophthalmoscope, which he designed in 1852, is currently still used to diagnose and treat individuals with retinal ailments. However, the eye was not his only interest. Helmholtz studied a wide range of subjects from geometry to glaciers, and even hay fever. Furthermore, he was given credit posthumously for contributing to the invention of the radio and the telegraph.

In the field of psychology, Helmholtz was instrumental in the development of the experimental approach to topics which would later become relevant in the field of psychology. Specifically, his interest in nerve impulses which was considered revolutionary at the time, is now established as scientific law. He theorized and later backed with empirical evidence that impulses between nerve and muscle were not instantaneous as was the popular belief in his day. Helmholtz demonstrated his findings using a frog's leg muscle to measure the speed and which a nerve stimulation could travel. This later led to the understanding that thoughts also had intervals between the mind and the actual motion. Helmholtz wanted to do more than just study. He wished to have his knowledge applied to real world problems. This is the reason why I chose Herman von Helmholtz and the more fascinating of the three German scientists in this week's reading selection.