

Willy Mora

How did James's view of consciousness differ from Wundt's view? And what did James believe was the purpose of consciousness?

James opposed Wundt's view that consciousness should be examined in terms of its individual elements. James believed that individual elements of consciousness may not be present if they were not observed by a trained observer. In James's opinion consciousness could not be observed in the way that Wundt was observing it, because the observer could become biased as they observed individual elements of their own thoughts. He argues that our experiences are not of individual sensations, which is the way that it was being seen in Wundt's laboratories. Consciousness was composed of whole, unitary experiences. He looked at experiences as they occurred and not as they may have been reported on as a result of introspection. In James's opinion, the observations obtained by trained observers may not speak at all to the experiences of a person in a normal situation. James believed that the purpose of consciousness was to help a person to survive in its environment. He believed that mental operations developed according to evolution, and that consciousness was present because it served a utilitarian purpose. James felt that psychology should be the study of experiences just as they occur.