

William James was a pioneer of the new scientific psychology in the United States. He had a different perspective about consciousness than Wundt and Titchener. When James wrote "The Principles of Psychology" he stated that "psychology is the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and their conditions." The term phenomena means that the subject matter of psychology is to be found in immediate experience. And the term conditions mean the importance of the body in mental life, especially the importance of the brain. James was against the artificiality and narrowness of the Wundtian position and believed that conscious experiences are not a group or collection of elements as Wundt claimed, but he believed that conscious experiences are simply what they are. Finding of the elements of conscious experience by a trained observer through introspective analysis does not show that these elements exist. Instead psychology may read into an experience as they are being experienced whatever their systematic positions are and whatever their viewpoints are they should be read into the same as they experienced. For instance, a trained food tester can eat a food and can analyze its elements in a way that an untrained person cannot do that. A person who is not trained would eat the food and experience a fusion of flavor elements, a blend of ingredients but he won't be able to describe every element of that food. It can be the same as a trained person who can describe the elements of his experience in a psychology laboratory, but an untrained person might not be able to describe the same experience to its elements as the trained one can do. That is why James considered such an assumption to be the "psychology fallacy."

James declared that simple sensation does not exist in conscious experience but exist only as the result of some convoluted process of inference or abstraction. James strongly believed in mental life and for him mental life was a unity and a total experience that constantly changes. His belief was against analysis and reduction of conscious experience to its alleged elements. He said consciousness is a continuous flow and any attempt to divide it into temporally distinct phases can only distort it and he coined this phrase as "stream of consciousness". Consciousness is always changing we would not be able to experience the same thought or sensation more than one time. We would think about an object or about an experience more than one time but each time our thoughts would not be identical. It means each time our thoughts would differ because of the effect of intervening experiences. Our thoughts can be described as cumulative and not as recurrent because we cannot have the same thought or sensation about an object or experience.

Such as the consciousness, mind is also continuous. If we consider consciousness, we may notice gaps in time such as when we are asleep but when we are awake, we may have no difficulty in making connection with our ongoing stream of consciousness. But there is no sharp disruption in the flow of consciousness. If we consider mind, we see that mind is selective. For instance, we can pay attention to only a small part of our experiences at a time, it means that mind can choose from among different stimuli to which it is exposed. Mind can choose one experience over the other, it can combine or separate experiences and even can select or reject one experience over the other. Mind can select relevant stimuli to attend to and that is how our consciousness can operate logically and a series of ideas can lead to a rational conclusion.

James emphasized on the function or purpose of the consciousness. He also believed that consciousness has biological utility, or it would not have survived over time. When we are able to choose one experience over the other by the functions of the consciousness, it makes us able to adopt our environment.

Later James distinguished between habit and the conscious choice. He believed that habits can be involuntary and nonconscious. When a person faces a new challenge in his life or he encounters

a new problem and need to choose a new way for coping that challenge, consciousness comes into play and make him to choose one way over the other. “This emphasis on purposefulness reflects the impact of evolutionary theory.”