

Chapter 7 Essay

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

Wundt's view of consciousness was about understanding the structure of consciousness. He believed you could break down the pieces and parts of the conscious experience. His theory was to give people a sensory experience to be conscious of and to measure consciousness. Further, he believed that image is the basis of consciousness.

James's approach to psychology rebelled against the pretentious and narrowness of Wundt's position. He believed conscious experiences are simply what they are, not groups or collections of elements. James firmly believed consciousness must be considered in its natural setting, in the physical human being. In addition, James was against Wundt because he thought there were no conscious moments or breaks in a person's consciousness but rather just a stream of consciousness. James's analogy of the prepared food taster learns to discriminate individual elements in a flavor that an untrained person might not perceive. An untrained person experiences a fusion of flavor elements, a total blend of ingredients incapable of analysis.

Same with the trained observer of analysis of their consciousness in the laboratory setting, the fact that some trained observers can analyze their conscious experiences in a psychology laboratory does not mean that the elements they report are present in the consciousness of anyone else exposed to the same experience; James coined the phrase stream of consciousness to express this idea. Because consciousness constantly changes, we can never experience the same thought or sensation more than once. Neither individual experience the same as another's experiences of consciousness. All are different and always in motion. James emphasized the function and the purpose of consciousness. He believed that consciousness must have some biological utility. Each time a person encounters a new problem and needs to choose a new coping method, consciousness comes into play. His emphasis on the purposefulness of consciousness reflects the impact of evolutionary theory.