**Approaches: Origins of Psychology – Wundt & Introspection**

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| AO1 | | | |
| **Wilhelm Wundt** | | **Introspection** | |
| Wilhelm Wundt opened the Institute for Experimental Psychology at the University of Leipzig in Germany in 1879.  This was the first laboratory dedicated to psychology, and its opening is usually thought of as the beginning of modern psychology. Indeed, Wundt is often regarded as the father of psychology.  Wundt was important because he separated psychology from philosophy by analysing the workings of the mind in a more structured way, with the emphasis being on objective measurement and control.  This laboratory became a focus for those with a serious interest in psychology, first for German philosophers and psychology students, then for American and British students as well.  All subsequent psychological laboratories were closely modelled in their early years on the Wundt model.  Wundt's background was in physiology, and this was reflected in the topics with which the Institute was concerned, such as the study of reaction times and sensory processes and attention. For example, participants would be exposed to a standard stimulus (e.g. a light or the sound of a metronome) and asked to report their sensations.  Wundt's aim was to record thoughts and sensations, and to analyse them into their constituent elements, in much the same way as a chemist analyses chemical compounds, in order to get at the underlying structure. The school of psychology founded by Wundt is known as voluntarism, the process of organizing the mind.  During his academic career Wundt trained 186 graduate students (116 in psychology). This is significant as it helped disseminate his work. Indeed, parts of Wundt's theory were developed and promoted by his one-time student, Edward Titchener, who described his system as Structuralism, or the analysis of the basic elements that constitute the mind.  Wundt wanted to study the structure of the human mind (using introspection). Wundt believed in reductionism. That is, he believed consciousness could be broken down (or reduced) to its basic elements without sacrificing any of the properties of the whole.  Wilhelm Wundt | German physiologist and psychologist | Britannica | | Wundt argued that conscious mental states could be scientifically studied using introspection. Wundt’s introspection was not a causal affair, but a highly practiced form of self-examination. He trained psychology students to make observations that were biased by personal interpretation or previous experience and used the results to develop a theory of conscious thought.  Highly trained assistants would be given a stimulus such as a ticking metronome and would reflect on the experience. They would report what the stimulus made them think and feel. The same stimulus, physical surroundings and instructions were given to each person.  Wundt's method of introspection did not remain a fundamental tool of psychological experimentation past the early 1920's.  His greatest contribution was to show that psychology could be a valid experimental [science](https://www.simplypsychology.org/science-psychology.html).  Therefore, one-way Wundt contributed to the development of psychology was to do his research in carefully controlled conditions, i.e. experimental methods. This encouraged other researchers such as the behaviourists to follow the same experimental approach and be more scientific. However, today psychologists (e.g. [Skinner](https://www.simplypsychology.org/operant-conditioning.html)) argue that introspection was not really scientific even if the methods used to introspect were.  Skinner claims the results of introspection are subjective and cannot be verified because only observable behaviour can be objectively measured.  Wundt concentrated on three areas of mental functioning; thoughts, images and feelings. some of these areas are still studied in cognitive psychology today. This means that the study of [perceptual processes](https://www.simplypsychology.org/perception-theories.html) can be traced back to Wundt.  Wundt’s work stimulated interest in cognitive psychology.  On the basis of his work, and the influence it had on psychologists who were to follow him, Wundt can be regarded as the founder of experimental psychology, so securing his place in the history of psychology.  At the same time, Wundt himself believed that the experimental approach was limited in scope, and that other methods would be necessary if all aspects of human psychology were to be investigated.  Be An Addict Of Introspection - Behind the Peel | |
| AO3 | | | |
| P: It is argued that introspection is not particularly accurate.  E: For example, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) claim that we have very little knowledge of the causes of, and processes underlying our behaviour and attitudes.  E: Nisbett and Wilson found this problem was particularly acute in the study of implicit attitudes, i.e. attitudes of stereotypes that are unknown to us, for example, a person may be implicitly racist, which influences the way they react to members of a different ethnic group.  L: Because such attitudes exist outside of conscious awareness, self-reports through introspection would not uncover them. This challenges the value of introspective reports n exploring the roots of our behaviour. | P: Some believe that introspection is still useful in scientific psychology.  E: Despite the fact that introspection rapidly fell out of favour as a research tool, it has not been entirely abandoned by psychologists, and in recent years it has made something of a comeback.  E: Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter (2003) used introspective methods as a way of making ‘happiness’ a measurable phenomenon. They gave a group of teenagers beepers that went off during random times throughout the day, requiring them to write down their thoughts and feelings in the moment before the beep. Most of the entries indicated that the teens were unhappy rather than happy, but when their energies were focused on a challenging task, they tended to be more upbeat.  L: Introspection therefore offers researchers a way of understanding more clearly the momentary conditions that effect happiness, and as such may help them too improve the quality of our lives. | | P: Wundt’s methods have been accused of being unreliable.  E: A criticism of Wundt’s structuralist approach, mainly from behaviourists, was that this approach relied primarily on ‘non-observable’ responses.  E: Although pps could report on their conscious experiences, the processes themselves (e.g. memory, perception) were considered to be unobservable constructions. Wundt’s approach ultimately failed because of the lack of reliability of his methods. Introspective ‘experimental’ results were not reliably reproducible by other researchers in other laboratories.  L: In contrast, the early behaviourists such as Pavlov and Thorndike were already achieving reliably reproducible results and discovering explanatory principles that could be easily generalised to all human beings. |