

400:118g History & Systems of Psych - Exam I, Part III Sample Answers (Gilpin, Sp 2008).

1. Which view of historical perspective--"old" history or "new" history--do you think would have assigned greater value to developments associated with Nineteenth Century psychophysics, and why?

*Perhaps the main theme in the psychophysics research done by Nineteenth Century researchers such as Hermann von Helmholtz, Ernst Weber, and Gustav Fechner was that although people follow lawful processes in perceiving and interpreting external events, those perceptions are constructed actively and do not correspond in a direct way to reality measured objectively with physical instrumentation. The Weber/Fechner Law relating perceived amount of change as an exponential function of objective stimulus level illustrates the inherently subjective nature of perception as described by psychophysicists. The historian/philosopher Furumoto described the "New History" as embracing the notion that understanding of historical events is similarly subjective. Whereas "Old History" authors hoped to arrive at a complete description of events, accurate in an absolute sense, "New History" authors suppose that history inevitably involves subjective judgments and permits of diverse, possibly discrepant, but equally valid, interpretations. Given the central role of subjectivity in psychophysics research and in the "New History" view, it's logical to suppose the latter would assign greater importance to psychophysics than the "Old History", other things equal.*

Or

2. Do you think Rene Descartes would have approved of David Ferrier's research on monkey brains? Support your position.

*Mathematician/philosopher Rene Descartes preceded David Ferrier by two and a half centuries chronologically, but in many senses they appear to have been simpatico. Ferrier's innovative (for the turn of the Twentieth Century) use of electrical currents delivered to monkeys' motor cortexes in order to stimulate contractions of specific muscles was important not only by virtue of its social significance (like Descartes, Ferrier experienced public resistance and persecution because his work challenged established beliefs) but also because of its contribution to what was by that time a long-standing interest following from Descartes' own speculation about brain specialization--although the cortex seems more relevant than the pineal gland from modern perspective. The connection is more impressive viewed in philosophical context. Had Descartes not legitimized scientific study of animal bodies in positing mind/body dualism, there would have been less basis for studying animal nervous systems in hopes of gaining applications for human medicine and psychology. So I think Descartes would probably have seen Ferrier's work as a rather logical continuation of his own ideas.*

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Scoring of essays will be based on ratings of 0, 1, or 2 points on each of the following aspects:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Clear answer to the question (you stated a specific position)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Appropriate use of terms (defined precisely, accurately, and relevant)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reference to course content (generally noting relevant concepts or principles)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Consistency (your arguments support your position and don't contradict themselves)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clarity (answer is well organized, grammar is conventional, spelling is accurate)

Total: \_\_\_\_\_ points of 10 possible