

50 Years of SPP

The Role of SPP in the Dialog between Philosophers and Psychologists

Psychology, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science: Reflections on the History and
Philosophy of Experimental Psychology
Gary Hatfield
Mind and Language 2002

- From Aristotle through the early 20th Century psychology was one subdiscipline of philosophy.
- There were laboratories of philosophy from 1750's. Leading edge of experimental psychology.
- From 1890's on there were separate positions for experimentalists within philosophy departments in the US.
- Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology founded 1904; all sessions were joint; 24/27 of the first presidents were experimental psychologists.
- American Psychological Association founded in 1892.
 - both promoted both philosophy and psychology, intellectually, professionally within university, and with respect to teaching the disciplines in universities..
 - often only 1 department that included both within universities.
 - same *individual often* taught both subjects

WHY?

- The central, foundational, theoretical issues in experimental psychology, cognitive science, and cognitive neuroscience simply *are* important issues addressed by philosophers.

Separation of the disciplines

- Starting in 1931 SSPP began having separate sessions for psychology and for philosophy. Started alternating presidents between psychologists and philosophers.
- In 1936, SSPP reintroduced one joint symposium on topics of interest to both disciplines. Continues to today. To a large extent, separate meetings going on concurrently, sessions with philosophy papers and sessions with psychology papers.
- SPP WAS FOUNDED CONTRA THIS MODEL

Enter SPP

- First meeting 1974 at MIT—organized by Jerry Fodor, Ned Block and me.
- Why needed?
- Early days of SPP. Growing pains.

SPP was Fodor's Creation

- Fodor was a philosopher in the pre 2000 mode; i. e., he was seamlessly a philosopher and a psychologist/cognitive scientist.

WHY SPP?

- The central, foundational, theoretical issues in experimental psychology simply are among the important issues addressed by philosophers.
- Psychologists ignore the progress made on these issues since Aristotle at their peril.
- Empirical progress made on these issues bear on philosophical discourse.

Fodor showed how philosophers can contribute to psychology/cognitive science.

First, (and extremely unusually for the time), by collaborating on empirical work.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

AN INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLINGUISTICS AND
GENERATIVE GRAMMAR · FODOR · BEVER · GARRETT



Cognition

Volume 8, Issue 3, 1980, Pages 263-367



Against definitions

J.A. Fodor, M.F. Garrett , E.C.T. Walker, C.H. Parkes

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Linguistic Inquiry Volume VI Number 4 (Fall, 1975) 515-531.

*J. D. Fodor,
J. A. Fodor,
M. F. Garrett*

The Psychological Unreality of Semantic Representations

It is one of the consolations of philosophy that the benefit of showing how to dispense with a concept does not hinge on dispensing with it. W. V. Quine on definition without elimination.

How philosophers contribute to psychology/cognitive science

By doing empirical work.

Today, and thanks to SPP (and similar organizations such as The Society for the Scientific Study of Consciousness), collaborations in empirical work by philosophers is **widespread**. And of course, some philosophers are again running their own labs (e.g., Josh Knobe, Mach). Especially in ethics/moral reasoning and in studies of consciousness, but also on many other topics within psychology/cognitive science, such as causal representations (Jonathan Kominsky/Jonathan Phillips/Thomas Icard/Toby Gerstenberg), generics (Sandeep Prasada, Susan Gelman, Sarah Jane Leslie, Marjorie Rhodes)...

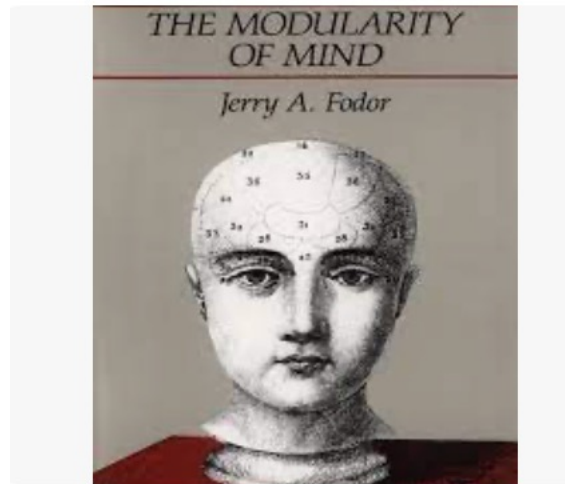
Some people have PhDs in both (e.g., Jonathan Phillips, Brian Leahy, Rosa Cao...). Or have PhDs in one and now do primarily the other. For example, Josh Greene has a PhD in philosophy, now mainly does psychological and cognitive neuroscience research.

How philosophers contribute to psychology/cognitive science

By doing empirical work.

Much more commonly, by bringing philosophical analysis to bear (often critically) on the current state of the art within psychology/cognitive science/cognitive neuroscience. Doing the philosophy of particular sciences contributes to the theoretical foundations of those sciences. This involves deep knowledge of the empirical literature.

Philosophy of Perception





Origins of Objectivity

TYLER BURGE



OXFORD

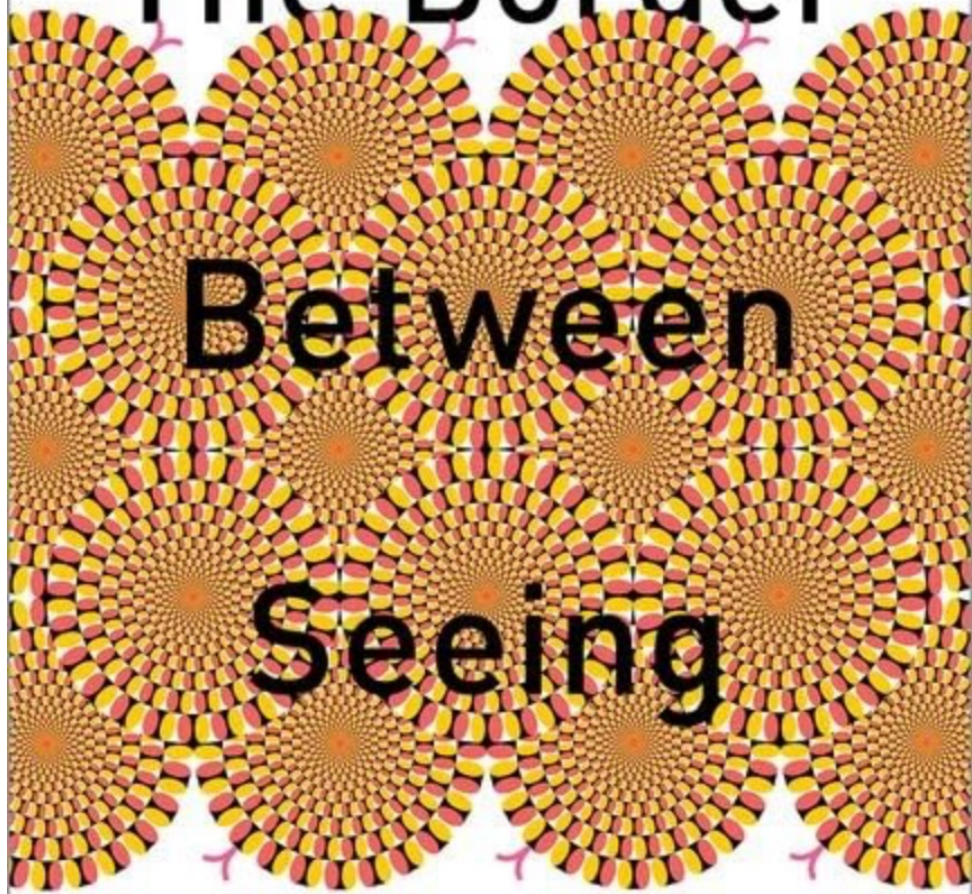
Ned Block

The Border

Between

Seeing

and Thinking



Too many other examples to list; I know only a fraction of them. Ubiquitous.

- work on IQ and Heritability, Imagery, Innateness. Ned Block.
- Work on concepts, mental representations, and language of thought: Fodor, Laurence, Margolis, Weiskopf, Machery, up to today's Quilty-Dunn, Porot, and Mandelbaum....
- Wonderful example from this conference: papers in John Morrison's symposium on foundational issues in cognitive neuroscience: Computation and Neural Mechanisms.

Psychologists making use of philosophical literature to inform theories of mental representations, and in turn contributing to the joint enterprise

- Moral psychology. Starting from trolley problem (Judy Thomson, Phillipa Foote, John Mikhail) and beyond.
- Psychological work on concepts: Rosch inspired by Wittgenstein, Keil/psychological essentialism inspired by Putnam.
- Prasada's work on the formal structure of kind representations inspired by Aristotle (and subsequent work in philosophy and linguistics drawing on Aristotle).

....

How does empirical work contribute to the enterprise?

- Many of the questions of interest simply ARE empirical questions.
- E.g Berkeley and Descartes on depth perception.
- Empirical findings often show that the question being asked was well framed.
- The theoretical work of scientists and of philosophers is the same enterprise with respect to some of the issues within philosophy