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The Philosophy of Psychology

What is the relationship between common-sense, or ‘folk’, psychology and contemporary scientific psychology? Are they in conflict with one another? Or do they perform quite different, though perhaps complementary, roles? George Botterill and Peter Carruthers discuss these questions, defending a robust form of realism about the commitments of folk psychology and about the prospects for integrating those commitments into natural science. Their focus throughout the book is on the ways in which cognitive science presents a challenge to our common-sense self-image – arguing that our native conception of the mind will be enriched, but not overturned, by science. *The Philosophy of Psychology* is designed as a textbook for upper-level undergraduate and beginning graduate students in philosophy and cognitive science. As a text that not only surveys but advances the debates on the topics discussed, it will also be of interest to researchers working in these areas.

George Botterill is Lecturer in Philosophy and a member of the Hang Seng Centre for Cognitive Studies at the University of Sheffield. He has published a number of essays in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of science.

Peter Carruthers is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Hang Seng Centre for Cognitive Studies at the University of Sheffield. His publications include *Human Knowledge and Human Nature* (1992) and *Language, Thought and Consciousness: An Essay in Philosophical Psychology* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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for
Nick, Alex, and Dan
three's company

and for
Rachael
sugar and spice, and a will of steel

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Preface

Audience

When we initially conceived the project of this book, our first task was to determine what *sort* of book it should be. The question of intended audience was relatively easy. We thought we should aim our book primarily at upper-level undergraduate students of philosophy and beginning-level graduate students in the cognitive sciences generally, who would probably have some previous knowledge of issues in the philosophy of mind. But we also hoped, at the same time, that we could make our own contributions to the problems discussed, which might engage the interest of the professionals, and help move the debates forward. Whether or not we have succeeded in this latter aim must be for others to judge.

Content

The question of the content of the book was more difficult. There is a vast range of topics which *could* be discussed under the heading of ‘philosophy of psychology’, and a great many different approaches to those topics could be taken. For scientific psychology is itself a very broad church, ranging from various forms of cognitive psychology, through artificial intelligence, social psychology, behavioural psychology, comparative psychology, neuro-psychology, psycho-pathology, and so on. And the philosopher of psychology might then take a variety of different approaches, ranging from one which engages with, and tries to contribute to, *psychological* debates (compare the way in which philosophers of physics may propose solutions to the hidden-variable problem); through an approach which attempts to tease out philosophical problems as they arise *within* psychology (compare the famous ‘under-labourer’ conception of the role of the philosopher of science); to an approach which focuses on problems which are raised *for philosophy* by the results and methods of psychology.

We have chosen to take a line towards the latter end of this spectrum, concentrating on cognitive psychology in particular. Our main focus is on

the relationships between scientific (cognitive) psychology, on the one hand, and common-sense or ‘folk’ psychology, on the other. Since humans are such social creatures, one might expect psychology to be a subject in which people would start out with the advantage of being expert laymen. Yet there are various ways in which scientific psychology can easily seem to threaten or undermine our self-image either by raising doubts about the very existence of mental states as we conceive of them, or by challenging one or another cherished picture we have of ourselves (for example, as rational). And various questions can be raised concerning the extent to which folk and scientific psychology are attempting to do the same kind of job or achieve the same kind of thing.

What this means is that there is a great deal less in this book about levels of explanation, say, than certain pre-conceptions of what is required of a text on *Philosophy of X* (where *X* is some science) would suggest. There is also much less on connectionism than will be expected by those who think that philosophy of psychology just *is* the connectionism and/or eliminativism debate. And we say rather little, too, about a number of areas in which much scientific progress has been made, and which have been well worked-over by philosophical commentators – including memory, vision, and language.

Following an introductory chapter in which we review some background developments in philosophy of mind and scientific psychology, the main body of the book begins in chapter 2 with a discussion of the relationships between folk and scientific psychologies, and the proper interpretation of the former. Here we defend a robustly realistic construal of our folk-psychological commitments, which underpins much of what we say thereafter. Chapter 3 reviews the psychological arguments for nativism and modularity, raising the question whether modularism is consistent with our picture of ourselves as *unified* subjects of experience (and indicating a positive answer). Chapter 4 then considers what may be the best *scientific* view of the nature of our folk psychology, and the course of its development in the individual – arguing for a nativist/modularist ‘theory-theory’ approach, as opposed to either an ‘empiricist’ or a ‘simulationist’ one. Chapter 5 discusses the extent to which psychological evidence of widespread human irrationality undermines our picture of ourselves as rational agents, and considers the arguments of some philosophers that widespread irrationality is impossible. Chapter 6 takes up the issue concerning the appropriate notion of intentional *content* required by psychology (both folk and scientific) – that is, whether it should be ‘wide’ or ‘narrow’ – and defends the role of narrow content in both domains. (Here, in particular, we are conscious of swimming against a strong tide of contrary opinion.) Chapter 7 is concerned with the question of the *natural-*

isation of semantic content, discussing the three main programmes on offer ('informational', 'teleological', and 'functional-role' semantics). Chapter 8 discusses the connectionism–Mentalese debate, and considers a variety of ways in which natural language may be more closely implicated in (some of) human cognition than is generally thought. Then finally, in chapter 9, we consider the arguments for and against the possibility of integrating *phenomenal consciousness* into science. Here, as elsewhere in the book, we defend an *integrationist* line.

We think that the prospects for the future survival of folk psychology are good, and also for its relatively smooth integration into psychological science. And we think that the prospects for fruitful collaboration between empirically minded philosophers of mind and theoretically minded cognitive psychologists are excellent. These are exciting times for scientific psychology; and exciting times, too, for the philosopher of psychology. We hope that readers of this book will come to share some of that excitement.

Number of chapters

Not only did we face questions about *audience* and *content*, but we also faced a question about the *number* of chapters the book should contain; which is rather more significant than it might at first seem. Since lengths of teaching-terms can range from eight weeks up to fifteen in universities around the world, the challenge was to devise a structure which could be variably carved up to meet a number of different needs. We opted for a basic structure of eight main chapters, together with an introduction which could if necessary be set as preliminary reading before the start of the course proper (or skipped altogether for classes with appropriate prior knowledge). Then the two long final chapters were designed to be taken in two halves each, if desired. (Chapter 8, on forms of representation, divides into one half on the connectionism versus language-of-thought debate and one half on the place of natural language in cognition; and chapter 9, on consciousness, divides into one half on the 'new mysterianism' concerning phenomenal consciousness and one half on recent naturalistic theories of consciousness.) Moreover, chapters 6 and 7 both cover a great deal of much-debated ground concerning the nature of mental content (wide versus narrow in chapter 6, and the question of naturalisation in chapter 7); so each could easily be taken in two or more stages if required.

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Finally, we are grateful to our families for their patience.