

The land of the mentally unsound is poignant territory, which attracts all kinds of scientific and philosophical projects. To understand it involves, in part, identifying the underlying causal patterns that allow for correct classification, assessment, and treatment. From Professor Graham's book we learn that to understand the land of the mentally unsound also involves being able to draw a moral psychological model of human flourishing —one that preserves dignity and self-respect. *The Disordered Mind* will definitely be of interest to philosophy undergraduates and to anyone interested in a philosophical account of the fine balance between sanity and insanity. It is written in an engaging and accessible way for students, yet its contributions will also appeal to psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health practitioners.

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LOT 2: The Language of Thought Revisited, by Jerry Fodor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 228pp.

In the course of some characteristically wry autobiographical comments at the beginning of this book, Jerry Fodor remarks that when he published *The Language of Thought* in 1975, he thought of himself as reporting an emerging consensus in the study of cognition. His views have inspired much discussion but little outright agreement, and this proclaimed sequel is polemical in nature. Fodor sees himself as in an embattled minority, and here he returns the fire of his critics.

The book is a short one, but covers a great deal of ground. Beginning with some remarks on the history of the development of cognitive science and analytical philosophy, Fodor addresses propositional attitude ascriptions, concept possession, the nature of perceptual representation and the sense/reference distinction, among other things. The pace is brisk, and Fodor's famous wit is again on display. His humorous approach to philosophical writing

often alienates his supporters and amuses his critics, but those who find the tone objectionable risk missing some good jokes.

Fodor is here, as ever, concerned to defend a version of the computational theory of mind, which in his hands is a view both about mental states and about mental processes. He sees mental states as constituted by relations between agents and mental representations. These representations are expressed in a language of thought, sometimes referred to as 'Mentalese', which is semantically prior to natural languages such as English. In particular, it is both syntactically and lexically unambiguous. Ambiguities in natural language are to be explained by positing, for example, that the English word 'bank' corresponds to at least two Mentalese expressions. Further, mental processes are seen as computations on mental representations. For an agent to engage in inference, for example, is for one representation to give rise to another, where the causal powers of the antecedent representation are given by its Mentalese syntax.

Early on in this book, Fodor identifies his enemy as 'pragmatism', 'perhaps the worst idea that philosophy ever had' (p. 9). His characterisation of this enemy is somewhat vague, but what Fodor opposes is the explanation of mental content in terms of abilities or dispositions to act, rather than vice versa. 'Dewey, Wittgenstein, Quine, Ryle, Sellars, Putnam, Rorty, Dummett, Brandom, McDowell' are listed (p. 11) as exponents of pragmatism. Later (p. 194), Kant is added to the list.

This is an astonishingly broad definition of pragmatism, and it yields an astonishingly disparate list of pragmatists. But perhaps we can accept it as a stipulative definition devised for Fodor's particular purposes. It is meant to refer quite generally to views according to which we must explain or characterise in more primitive terms the possession of concepts and beliefs. This explanatory demand is seen as threatening Fodor's extreme realism about the mental, and by extension the necessity of appealing to a mental language underlying our capacities for thought and natural language use.

Unfortunately, the vagueness of Fodor's characterisation of his enemy undermines the effectiveness of his counter-attack. He accuses 'pragmatism' of vicious circularity. The only sort of action, the argument goes, which could possibly be adequate to ground an account of mental content is intentionally directed

action. But ascription of such activity to an agent presupposes a capacity to think on the part of that agent, since the agent must be capable of conceptualising the objective of his or her action.

Fodor's argument here is much too brief, and he makes no attempt to deal with the specific positions of the authors he lists as pragmatists. Quine, for example, is working with a conception of behaviour which is much less rich than the one that Fodor here assumes. In Wittgenstein's case, it is not even clear that he is attempting any sort of reductive explanation of thought, in terms of action or anything else. These authors' projects may well come aground, but Fodor's arguments are not sufficient to show that and where they do.

For the rest of the book, Fodor is concerned not so much with the refutation of 'pragmatism' as with the constructive enterprise of showing how his mentalist computationalism impacts on various problems in the study of cognition, what objections it itself may be open to, and how those objections might be overcome.

The first step is the sense-reference distinction. Here, Fodor is concerned to argue that Frege's puzzle does not arise for Mentalese expressions. If that is so, he thinks, the semantics of Mentalese can be purely referential. In a way, Fodor's account corresponds to traditional attempts to distinguish the logical from the surface form of natural language expressions, the difference being that Fodor takes logical form to be straightforwardly the correct syntax for an unlearned, unarticulated language, quite distinct from any natural language.

While interesting in its own right, Fodor's discussion is orthogonal to much of the literature about the distinction. That is because his concern is not to argue that the meaning of, say, a proper name in common use in English is given entirely by its reference. Rather, he is concerned to show that the psychology of cognitive processes can carry out causal explanations without appeal to any such entities as 'senses'. It is to expressions of Mentalese that such a psychology will appeal, so that the semantics of English becomes irrelevant.

He goes so far as to speculate (p. 219) that perhaps *only* Mentalese has a semantics, that natural languages do not have any semantics at all. If true, this would indeed be a solution (a very radical one) to Frege's puzzle as conventionally understood, but it is not Fodor's main purpose to argue the point.

Next comes an interesting discussion of what Fodor calls the problem of 'locality'. Here he is pointing to a limitation of the computational theory of mind as currently understood. The problem is that the computational theory does not seem apt to account for certain sorts of cognitive process, specifically those involving inductive inference. A viable account of how creatures like us succeed in reasoning inductively would appear to demand that a nontrivial criterion for the relevance of empirical data to a particular inference be specified, and it is just this that the computational theory has trouble providing. The chapter indicates the sort of work which Fodor thinks philosophers of mind ought to be engaged in.

The remaining three chapters of the book, grouped together under the general heading of 'Minds', might be seen as contributions to the programme, which motivates the computational theory, of naturalising the mind. Generally speaking, Fodor downplays concerns about the importance of normative notions to a proper understanding of mental processes, particularly the processes of concept acquisition and perceptual belief formation.

Fodor's approach is to prioritise causal-explanatory psychological explanation over normative epistemology, a procedure described here (p. 170) as letting 'the epistemological chips fall where they may'. For example, Sellars, Davidson and McDowell have argued that perceptual content cannot be nonconceptual, because if it were then perceptual beliefs could not count as justified. Fodor dismisses the argument. It is, he thinks, an empirical question whether perceptual representations are conceptual. If it turns out that they are not, and perceptual beliefs thereby prove unjustified, then so much the worse for perceptual beliefs.

Fodor draws on some evidence from the cognitive-scientific literature on perceptual illusions to argue that perceptual content is indeed nonconceptual. He does not engage with the arguments of John McDowell (in, for example, 'The content of perceptual experience', *Philosophical Quarterly*, XLIV, 1992, pp. 190-205) to the conclusion that such empirical evidence is consistent with different philosophical views as to the nature of perception. Perhaps more valuably, he provides a clear explanation of how, in his view, perceptual representation works. It is 'iconic', rather than 'discursive', as for example linguistic representation is. In particular, iconic representations, unlike sentences, have no canonical

decomposition. Some parts of a sentence, for example the name 'John' in 'John loves Mary', themselves count as representations, but others (such as the phrase 'John loves') do not. By contrast, each part of a picture represents some part of what the whole picture represents. Perceptual representations, like pictures, lack subject-predicate structure; correlatively, they have no conceptual content. Perceptual beliefs are produced from perceptual representations by way of sub-personal computations on such iconic representations. Whether or how such computations can be seen as preserving epistemic warrant is seen as a secondary consideration.

The discussion of concept acquisition is more frankly speculative. Such accounts are typically threatened by vicious circularity. It is unclear how one can acquire the concept *dog* from experience of dogs without already being able to apply the concept. Fodor again advocates an approach emphasising processes at the subpersonal level, with questions of normativity sidelined. The difference is that the posited process is not only subpersonal but also sub-computational. To simplify greatly, agents are innately disposed, as a matter of their neurology, to form certain concepts provided they have had certain experiences. The concept *dog* could not be inferred merely from experiences of dogs, no matter how many experiences occur and no matter how typical the dogs. It is rather a moot point whether such accounts make all concepts innate: either way, what is innate is the human tendency to produce certain representations given exposure to certain extensionally-defined features of the world.

Fodor makes his proposal in some detail, but without much appeal to evidence. The important point for him is that proposals of that sort, if true, would be adequate to the problem of concept acquisition. The discussion thus serves to illuminate how he sees the problem. The issue for him is how creatures like us acquire our capacity to represent the world, and this is seen as a causal-explanatory question in answering which we are free to appeal to any feature of human nature or experience.

A word, in closing, on Fodor's methodology. His approach to the philosophy of mind is very much constructive rather than critical, and this determines a great deal of the course of his book. The consideration that a particular line of thought presents the best or clearest available explanation of some cognitive phenome-

non tends to trump fundamental objections. Fodor's remarks on the epistemology of perceptual belief, mentioned above, may serve as an example. The approach tends to result in unsatisfyingly glib and superficial responses to other philosophers.

This book works better as a clear exposition of Fodor's current views than as polemic. It contains little detailed engagement with alternative views, and few attempts to provide compelling arguments against them. It clarifies the author's position, but will not convince sceptics.

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Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories, by Gregory Currie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 237 xx + 237 pp.

Gregory Currie's new book, *Narratives & Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories*, discusses a concept which has not received sufficient attention from the community of analytic philosophers, namely, the concept of 'narrative'. How is it possible to characterise such a concept, avoiding the use of unhelpful technicalities or, worse, the dominant ideologies underlying much current literary analysis? Which instruments can the philosopher introduce or exploit in order to clarify the intricate network of concepts around this notion, many of which mesh with the study of fiction? More ambitiously, what is the significance human beings give to their being imaginatively engaged with narratives? What is, finally, the role and function of narrators in the societies to which they belong and about which they narrate? If in this bunch of questions I have tried to summarise some of the most pressing issues dealt with in the book, what remains to be seen is how Currie intends to answer them and whether he succeeds in this demanding task.

The book is articulated into four main directions of investigation: (i) an account of the intentional and representational properties determining what a narrative is; (ii) a pragmatic framework where the nature and presence of an implied author in narratives are discussed and where the differences between narrative texts and forms con-