

Deflating mental Representation

FRANCES EGAN

Mardi 16 novembre - 14h30

REPRESENTATION IN COMPUTATIONAL COGNITIVE SCIENCE

École normale supérieure, Salle Dussane
45 rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris
Remise du Prix Jean-Nicod et cocktail après la conférence

Vendredi 19 novembre - 14h

NATURALIZING INTENTIONALITY: THEORIES AND GLOSSES
IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE

École normale supérieure, Salle des Actes
45 rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

Mardi 23 novembre - 14h

BELIEF AND ITS LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION

École normale supérieure, Salle Dussane
45 rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

Vendredi 26 novembre - 14h

PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

École normale supérieure, Salle des Actes
45 rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris

Organisation
Frédérique de Vignemont

Communication
Marie Lods

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philosophie cognitive

Conférences Jean-Nicod de

L'esprit humain, son organisation, sa nature, ses relations avec le corps et avec le monde sont depuis toujours parmi les thèmes centraux de la philosophie. La psychologie contemporaine elle-même a pris naissance au sein de la philosophie. Elle s'est émancipée, mais l'émergence des sciences cognitives consacre d'une certaine façon le retour de la philosophie dans ce champ de recherche. Les développements de l'informatique et des neurosciences, en jetant une nouvelle lumière sur les phénomènes mentaux, ont eu pour effet de relancer le débat philosophique. La « philosophie de l'esprit » est ainsi plus florissante que jamais. Ce retour n'a rien d'une régression, car la philosophie dont il est question est en phase avec la recherche scientifique, informée par elle et en constante interaction avec elle.

Les Conférences Jean-Nicod visent à promouvoir les recherches philosophiques se rapportant à la cognition et à faire connaître en France les travaux réalisés à l'étranger dans ce domaine. Le conférencier présente ses recherches au cours d'un cycle de conférences qu'il rassemble ensuite en un livre.

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COLLECTION JEAN-NICOD

The MIT Press - F. Récanati (dir.)

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FRANCES EGAN

Deflating mental Representation

2021



FRANCES
EGAN

Frances Egan was born in Belfast, N. Ireland and grew up in Canada. She received her BA and MA in philosophy from the University of Manitoba and a Ph.D. in philosophy of science from the University of Western Ontario in 1988. She has taught her whole career at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She has held research fellowships at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) at the University of Bielefeld in Germany, the Institute for Advanced Studies at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and the Center for Mind, Brain, and Cognitive Evolution at Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany. She has published extensively on issues in the philosophy of mind and psychology and the foundations of cognitive science.

SÉLECTION BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE

- 2020 "A Deflationary Account of Mental Representation" in *What are Mental Representations?*, J. Smortchkova, K. Dolega, and T. Schlicht, (eds.), Oxford University Press (2020), 26-53.
- 2017 "Function-Theoretic Explanation and the Search for Neural Mechanisms," in *Explanation and Integration in Mind and Brain Science*, David M. Kaplan (ed.), Oxford University Press (2017), 145-163.
- 2014 "How to Think about Mental Content," *Philosophical Studies* 170 (2014), 115-135.
- 2012 "Metaphysics and Computational Cognitive Science: Let's Not Let the Tail Wag the Dog," *The Journal of Cognitive Science* 13 (2012), 39-49.
- 2012 "Representationalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Cognitive Science*, E. Margolis, R. Samuels, and S. Stich, eds., Oxford University Press, 2012, 250-72.
- 2003 "Naturalistic Inquiry: Where Does Mental Representation Fit In?," in *Chomsky and His Critics*, L. Antony and N. Hornstein, eds., Blackwells, 2003, 89-104.
- 1995 «Computation and Content,» *The Philosophical Review*, 104, 1995, 181-203.
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Conférences Jean-Nicod 2020

Deflating Mental Representation

Mardi 16 novembre

REPRESENTATION IN COMPUTATIONAL COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Much of cognitive neuroscience traffics in representation talk. Computational theories of vision, for example, posit structures that are described as representing edges in the world. Neurons are said to represent elements of their receptive fields. Despite the widespread use of representation talk in computational theorizing there is surprisingly little consensus about how such claims are to be understood. Is representation talk to be taken literally? Is it just a useful fiction? I sketch an account of the nature and function of representation in computational cognitive models that rejects both of these views while acknowledging that there is an element of truth in each. According to the deflationary view I defend, representational content serves several important pragmatic purposes, most notably connecting formal computational accounts to cognitive explananda with which we are pretheoretically familiar.

Vendredi 19 novembre

NATURALIZING INTENTIONALITY: THEORIES AND GLOSSES IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Computational cognitive science aims to provide a naturalistic foundation for theorizing about mental states. It can provide such a foundation only if it makes no essential reference to meaning or content or to intentional processes such as understanding. Philosophers typically assume that computational theories characterize mental states in intentional terms, and they have undertaken to demonstrate how to discharge the commitment to intentionality, by specifying non-intentional and non-semantic sufficient conditions for a mental state to have a determinate content. So far, this so-called naturalization project has not met with success. I argue that computational theories do not need naturalization since they make no essential appeal to meaning or content. Nonetheless, an adequate theory of cognition must maintain contact with the way that we see ourselves as intentional agents. I explain how glossing computational states in representational terms provides the crucial link between the mechanical processes posited in the computational theory and the manifest personal-level, rational capacities that the theory attempts to explain. I argue that in thus reconceiving the project of naturalizing the mind I sketch a more realistic alternative to the traditional naturalization project, one that computational theories are well-placed to satisfy.

Mardi 23 novembre

BELIEF AND ITS LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION

In the last two lectures I argue that beliefs (lecture 3) and perceptual experiences (lecture 4) are not relations between subjects and mental representations of some sort. I argue that they are rather to be understood as monadic properties of subjects that are modelled by aspects of external reality. Beliefs, in particular, are modelled as linguistic objects that have syntax as well as content and truth conditions. That is to say, we gloss beliefs as being linguistic objects with such properties, though they do not actually have them. Rather, they have properties which have linguistic properties as images. This scheme for modelling beliefs in linguistic terms has important pragmatic virtues, especially enabling the prediction, regulation, and explanation/rationalization of behavior.

Vendredi 26 novembre

PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

In the philosophy of perception, representationalism is the view that all phenomenological differences among mental states are representational differences, in other words, differences in content. In the final lecture I defend an alternative view which I call external sortalism, inspired by traditional adverbialism, and according to which experiences are not essentially representational. The central idea is that the external world serves as a model for sorting, conceptualizing, and reasoning surrogatively about perceptual experience. On external sortalism, contents once again are construed as a kind of gloss. We can retain what is attractive about representationalism, namely, that perceptual experiences can be evaluated for accuracy, without problematic commitment to the idea that they bear a substantive, representational relation to external objects and properties and that this relation determines the phenomenal character of experience.