

...with Shira Elqayam

Reader in Cognitive Science and Research Lead for Psychology at De Montfort University

One inspiration

Jonathan Evans, my mentor and collaborator. Mentorship is a lifelong nomination, and I never stop learning from Jonathan. He is the genuine article, an all-round scholar of the old school, in a way that you rarely see any more, equally at home with the broadest meta-theoretical integration and the finest detail of experimental design. His classic book with David Over (*Rationality and Reasoning*, 1996) inspired my own interest in rationality, and I still consider it a model of proper cognitive science, bringing psychology and philosophy together in a feast of ideas.

One book that you think all psychologists should read
Thinking, Fast and Slow, a dual processing account of decision making from Nobel Prize laureate Daniel Kahneman. Accessible, a treasure trove

of knowledge, and a real fun read.

One challenge

To end the isolation which made reasoning research a niche topic for too long. Psychologists of reasoning are now connecting more and more with other areas of psychology and cognitive science, and getting better at contextualising reasoning in everyday life.

One alternative career path you may have chosen

I almost became a translator. I translated several sci-fi books into Hebrew (Samuel Delany's *Babel 17* is the one I am most proud of, lots of wordplay,

quite tricky to translate). I even took a module in linguistics of translation, and at some point seriously considered a master's.



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One nugget of advice for new psychologists

Always look at the descriptives before the inferential stats.

One cultural recommendation

Jorge Luis Borges, easily. Metaphysical literature with a bite. Anything of his, but start with the *Ficciones* collection.

One thing you like about research

I love exchanging ideas with colleagues and collaborators. Doing science for me is very much a social activity.

One great thing that psychology has achieved

Psychological knowledge filtered out so extensively that it changed the face of folk psychology, at least in the industrialised world. You do not need to be a psychologist nowadays to draw easily and naturally on concepts such as

thinking outside the box, the unconscious, emotional intelligence, and so on. Purists might bemoan the hopeless muddle of popular usage, but it does take folk psychology one step closer to established science.

One thing you love about psychology

The way ideas travel between disciplines and take you by surprise. Take embodied cognition, the idea that cognition is situated in the human body. The idea starts with Lakoff and Johnson – a linguist and a philosopher – in *Metaphors We Live By*. By the time it has made its way to psychology, it touches almost everything, from perception and memory to concepts and moral cognition. And then you get these startling findings: That speakers of Aymara in the Andes perceive the future as behind them and the past as in front of them, and gesture accordingly; that people exposed to bad smell tend to pass harsher moral judgements. Isn't it brilliant?

One source of irritation

Classic psychology and philosophy texts written with sexist language. Why is the scientist always a 'he'?

One hope for the future of psychology

That there will be one. That in a hundred year's time, psychology is still here as a discipline in its own right, that it has not been reduced into and taken over by neuroscience.

One psychological superpower

Unlimited working memory capacity, what else?

resource

Elqayam, S. & Evans, J. St B. T. (2011). Subtracting 'ought' from 'is': Descriptivism versus normativism in the study of human thinking. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 34, 233–248.

'Psychology of reasoning and decision making is obsessed with norms. Instead of asking how people *actually* reason, we all too often focus on how they *should* reason. The paper criticises this normativist paradigm.'

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