

...with Ruth Byrne

Vice Provost of Trinity College Dublin, University of Dublin, Ireland, and Professor of Cognitive Science at Trinity College's Institute of Neuroscience and School of Psychology

One person who inspired you

My father – for his willingness to engage in reasoned and informed debate on everything and anything under the sun. His calm, measured and often very witty conclusions were a real inspiration.

One alternative career path you might have chosen

At one point I was on track to work with horses – and I still sometimes like to think this is a temporary detour from that!

One journal article or book that you think all psychologists should read

Phil Johnson-Laird's *Mental Models* (1983, Cambridge University Press) was a catalyst that changed a whole field's way of thinking about the mind and how we make inferences.

One moment that changed the course of your career

I suppose one was when I decided to go to university

in the first place, following my mother's encouragement – she sent applications in my name to the bank, the civil service and the university while I was drifting around Europe (and only the university said yes). Another was when I decided to study reasoning for my undergraduate project – at the suggestion of Mark Keane, who had listened to me hemming and hawing for too many weeks about possible topics on everything from emotions to child development.

One great thing that psychology has achieved

Computational models of cognitive processes – they have marked a real advance in coherent theorising about the mind. Experimental methods have brought us a long way towards a reliable understanding of the mind, but computational modelling methods are also essential for reliable explanations.

One challenge you think psychology faces

A coherent theory of consciousness supported by computational models of the cognitive processes that give rise to it, and corroborated by rigorous experimental tests, still seems some way off.

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Arrange for part of your education in psychology – undergraduate, postgraduate or postdoctoral – to be carried out in a lab in a different country. It's invaluable to gain expertise in different ways to do psychology.

One cultural recommendation

The newly opened Science Gallery at Trinity College Dublin, a world first in combining science, art and creative thinking. I brought my 15-year-old daughter and her friends to its recent 'Lightwear' exhibition,

a designer fashion show using the latest light technology in textiles. They loved it.

One thing that 'organised psychology' could do better

Debunking pseudoscience and psychobabble. Organisations need to ensure that people are provided with sufficient reliable information about what psychology is, what it can do, and what it cannot do.

One hope for the future

I hope psychology and psychologists continue to build on interdisciplinary approaches. In cognitive science, the interlinked efforts of cognitive psychologists, artificial intelligence workers,

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resource

Byrne, R.M.J. (2005). *The rational imagination: How people create alternatives to reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

'I argue that imaginative thoughts are guided by the same principles that underlie rational thoughts. Rationality and imagination have often been viewed as complete opposites. But just as rational thought has turned out to be more imaginative than we supposed, so too imaginative thought is far more rational than we imagined.'

coming soon

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