

...with Richard Gregory

Emeritus Professor of Neuropsychology and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bristol

One person who inspired you

Sir Fredrick Bartlett. I was one of his last students at Cambridge.

One moment that changed the course of your career

Studying SB, who was born blind but recovered sight by operation at the age of 52. I have been thinking about this ever since.

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

William James's *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). He shares his thinking and questioning with his reader so that one can enter his mind, and live with him as a friend. He combines being a superb communicator with insights of philosophy and science really worth communicating. I was struck by his breadth of mind, respecting the arts from the past as well as technologies for creating future science.

One thing that you would

change about psychology

I would push for the Oxford and Cambridge system of writing essays and discussing them with tutors. By writing essays students learn to speak to themselves, while comments from others can make their minds debating societies, open to old ideas and adventures into the future.

I think one learns to think by writing and discussing ideas as rigorously as possible. I think basic knowledge of the physical sciences is important.

But I also think that there are philosophical questions, and we need philosophical analysis to interpret experiments and clarify ideas.

One challenge you think psychology faces

Making social psychology effective in politics. It is incredible to me that psychology is ineffective in world crises. For epidemics, medical doctors are called in: we are not called in even to advise on social and political crises.

One regret

I invented a hearing aid years ago, but it was never manufactured.

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Be prepared to live with questions – to see answers as

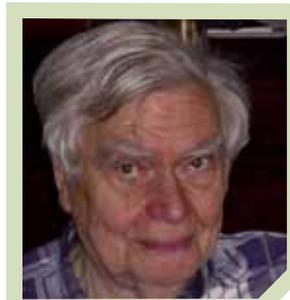
tentative, though they may inspire action.

One cultural recommendation

Recognise that music has immense power, though we do not understand how it works.

One thing that 'organised psychology' could do better

Push research into humour. (Why are some things funny?)



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Can jokes take over from wars? Can jokes knock sense into Fundamentalists?)

One alternative career path you might have chosen

Inventing instruments.

One hero/heroine from psychology past or present

Hermann von Helmholtz not only saw the importance of neural channels, being the first to measure conduction rate, but appreciated that vision is as much 'top down' as 'bottom up'; so he introduced active mind to the eyes. He was a deep and original thinker, not only in the psychology of perception but also in physics, including the geometry of space. He was a pioneer in thermodynamics, as well as the physiology of reaction time delay, and cognitive processes of vision and hearing. He is the modern founder of the science of perception, and where he led set paths for future inquiry.

One great thing that psychology has achieved

Brought empirical evidence into philosophy.

One problem that psychology should deal with

Learn from and contribute to artificial intelligence.

One hope for the future

That we learn more from art, and learn how to contribute more to the arts.

One more question

Can mathematical theories, such as Bayesian accounts of perception, really tell us how the brain works? For we are hopeless at mathematics without written symbols, or handing over to a computer.

resource

Gregory, R. (1966). *Eye and brain*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 'It makes transparent some difficult ideas and places the activity of mind central in the physiological play of the brain. Sad that one's first book is the best!

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