

## ...with Richard Hallam

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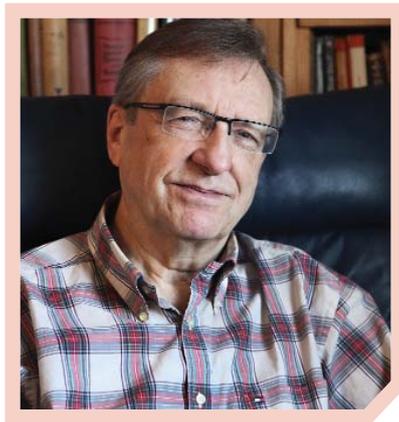
### One inspiration

Ted Sarbin. His first article appeared in 1939, and his last was accepted for *Theory and Psychology* a month before his death in 2005, an incredibly long dedication to psychology. He was generous with his time and readily agreed to write a foreword to my book *Panic* in 1985. We met and corresponded many times subsequently. He had a breadth of vision that is rare nowadays.

### One theoretical issue that psychology should face

Although this will be regarded as heresy, one hope I have for the future is that psychology will stop thinking that it should necessarily *have* a future. The way the sciences, and especially the social sciences, were originally carved up into separate disciplines was in many respects arbitrary. These disciplines have developed tribal characteristics, intent on their own self-preservation.

We need transdisciplinary thinking that attempts to understand human society in an ecological framework, dissolving ancient divisions such as the one between sociology and psychology.



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### One alternative career path

I was accepted for architecture

school and would certainly like to have been a good architect.

### One way CBT has changed

Originally, CBT adopted an anti-diagnostic, individual case formulation approach. It has now turned into a kind of quasi-medical administration of techniques guided by prescriptive models and cost-effectiveness considerations. The latter is not terribly appealing.

### One thing that you would change about psychology

Mainstream psychology has become too narrowly focused on the brain and biology. These are absolutely important aspects of psychology, but they are not sufficient to define it. The proper focus of psychology is the person – let's leave neuroscience to neuroscientists. Fortunately, some of them, and a number of philosophers too, can imagine an extended mind and see that our behaviour is also a function of the cultural niches we have created for ourselves.

### One thing I took from social anthropology

Breadth of vision. My year in social anthropology was partly a response to the aridity of behaviourism and my distaste for the cognitive science that replaced it. Social anthropology encompasses a variety of competing conceptual paradigms and retains a respectful awareness of its historical roots.

### One thing that organised psychology could do better

I think that any professional organisation must cater for the diverse interests of its members and encourage an open dialogue between them. Although accepting letters from 'outraged of Tunbridge Wells' is one way of doing this, I prefer the kind of commentary published in response to articles in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. So perhaps a free-for-all discussion is to be preferred over the approach of reviewer anonymity used by journal editors – a system which is never truly anonymous and never hides prejudices.

### One final thought

There is little doubt that people have become more 'psychological' in their thinking since I first graduated in the 1960s. I believe this is part of an historical trend, not necessarily the result of psychological scientists convincing everyone of the profound truth of their empirical findings. So perhaps a little more humility is called for in this two-way exchange with wider society.

More answers online at [www.thepsychologist.org.uk](http://www.thepsychologist.org.uk)

#### resource

Hallam, R.S. (2009). *Virtual selves, real persons: A dialogue across disciplines*. Cambridge University Press. 'It combines my interests in philosophy, psychology, and social sciences: a culmination of various trends in my thinking over my career.'

#### coming soon

Articles on the Olympics and the psychology of competition, neuroethology, an interview with Elizabeth Loftus, and much more...

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