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AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Psychology, Philosophy of Cognitive Science

AREAS OF COMPETENCE

Philosophy of Science, Metaphysics, Ethics, Data/Technology Ethics

EDUCATION

University of Wisconsin-Madison Ph.D. in Philosophy	Expected 2023
University of Wisconsin-Madison Master of Arts in Philosophy	2016
University of Texas El Paso Master of Arts in Philosophy	2013
Lehigh University Graduate Certificate in Cognitive Science	2011
Lehigh University Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering	2001

DISSERTATION

"Narcissistic Properties and Representation: A Fresh Attempt to Naturalize Mental Content"
Committee: Lawrence Shapiro (chair), Farid Masrour, Elliott Sober

PUBLICATIONS

- "Structural and Indicator representations: a difference in degree, not in kind (with Lawrence Shapiro)
Synthese 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02537-y>
- "Revisiting the empirical case against perceptual modularity" (with F. Masrour, M. Schon, J. Leardi,
& E. Barrett)
Frontiers in Psychology [6] 2015. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01676>

UNDER REVIEW

"Structural Representations and the Causal Role of Content"

Structural representationalists argue that other naturalistic approaches to content, in virtue of relying on

how representational vehicles are used to ground content, cannot explain how representational content can be causally relevant to the production of behavior. I argue that structural representations are susceptible to the very same critique; they, too, rely on use in relevantly similar ways.

"On the Possibility of Reading with Your Ears: A Defense"

I present a parity argument which aims to establish that reading is a process for which any sense modality can serve as a candidate input mechanism. I then move to establish that any properties purportedly possessed by visual and tactile (e.g., Braille) reading, but lacked by auditory reading, fail to mark a relevant difference between these forms of reading.

"Teleology and Consumer Systems: An alternate approach to function ascription"

There are two broad approaches to function ascription. Etiological approaches explicate function via appeal to the selection history of an item. In contrast, functional analysis approaches appeal to an item's current causal contribution to some capacity of the system in which it is embedded. I offer an account of function focusing on the dependency relations that obtain between components of a system, one which can accommodate the main insights of prominent approaches, while avoiding their pitfalls.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

"Radical Consumerism: Use is all you need (for mental content)"

Consumer system approaches to mental content put significant emphasis on how a state or structure is "used" to determine its content or its status as a representation. In this paper I aim to establish two things. First, that *all* naturalistic approaches to representation must incorporate a use condition. Second, this use condition, when properly explicated, is sufficient for representation, as it screens off any other purported necessary conditions for mental content.

"Beyond Belief: The Extended Mind and Why Propositional Attitudes are Still in the Head"

The extended mind hypothesis (henceforth EMH) says that cognition, and thus our mind, extends beyond the boundaries of our skin and skull. Thus far, with respect to the propositional attitudes, arguments from proponents of EMH have focused almost exclusively on beliefs. I argue that EMH fails to apply to other propositional attitudes, such as desires and fears. Furthermore, when we understand why EMH fails in these other instances, we see that it similarly fails to apply to beliefs.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

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| "Structural Representations and Causal Explanation"
American Philosophical Association, Central Division Meeting, Main Program, Chicago, IL. | February 2020 |
| "Structural and Indicator Representations: A Difference in Degree, Not Kind"
Australian Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Sydney, Australia | December 2018 |
| "Akrasia, Rationality and Reasons"
Great Plains Graduate Philosophy Conference, Lawrence, KS. | October 2014 |
| "The Extended Mind: How Does Otto Know to Believe the Information in His Notebook?"
Chicagoland Graduate Philosophy Conference, Chicago, IL. | March 2014 |
| "Does the Judgment Internalist's Claim Depend on a Particular View of Motivation?"
American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meeting, Main Program, San Francisco, CA. | March 2013 |

<p>"It's Not All About Beliefs: The Extended Mind and Why Propositional Attitudes are Still in the Head" Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Austin, TX.</p>	February 2013
<p>"Getting Clear on What it Means to be Motivated, and the Impact on Judgment Internalism" Great Plains Graduate Philosophy Conference, Lawrence, KS.</p>	November 2012
<p>"Can Embodied Cognition Deny Representation and Still Explain Intentionality?" Poster presentation, Society for Philosophy & Psychology, Boulder, CO.</p>	June 2012
<p>"Why Phenomenology is Still Important to Embodied Cognition" New Mexico West Texas Philosophical Society, Las Cruces, NM.</p>	March 2012

HONORS

<p>W. Donald Oliver Graduate Student Prize Essay Awarded annually by the UW-Madison Philosophy Department for best graduate student essay in any area of philosophy.</p>	May 2022
<p>Graduate student travel stipend, American Philosophical Association</p>	February 2020
<p>Berent Eng Teaching Award Awarded annually by the UW-Madison philosophy department in recognition of exceptional graduate student teaching</p>	May 2019
<p>UW-Madison Graduate School Fellow Highly competitive university wide fellowship for dissertation research</p>	Spring 2018, Spring 2019, Summer 2019
<p>Travel grant, UW-Madison Student Research Grants Competition Award</p>	December 2018
<p>Outstanding Graduate Student in Philosophy Awarded annually by The College of Liberal Arts to one graduating student, University of Texas at El Paso</p>	May 2013
<p>Travel grant, UTEP Graduate School</p>	January 2013 June 2012
<p>Graduate student travel stipend, American Philosophical Association</p>	December 2012

TEACHING – FULL RESPONSIBILITY

CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES UW-Madison (3x)

Units on ethical theory, ethical relativism, moral status of animals, world hunger, abortion, capital punishment, income inequality and theories of justice, genetic modification, sports ethics, speech ethics, sexual ethics, family ethics, and affirmative action

ETHICS OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES UW-Madison

Units on video games, social media, information privacy, algorithms, automation, genetic modification, artificial intelligence, and existential risk

PHILOSOPHY OF MIND Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY) (2x)

Units on dualism, behaviorism, identity theory, functionalism, interpretationalism, extended cognition, and personal identity

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS Badger Precollege Accelerated Learning Program

Units on utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, social contract theory, care ethics, moral realism, moral relativism, moral motivation, moral status of non-human animals, genetic modification and family ethics

INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY UW-Madison (3x), UTEP (2x), CTY (3x)

Units on philosophical methodology, epistemology, philosophy of religion, metaethics, normative ethics, free will, moral responsibility, philosophy of mind and personal identity

REASON IN COMMUNICATION UW-Madison, Badger Precollege Accelerated Learning Program

Units on propositional logic, rhetoric, informal fallacies, media bias and credibility, analogical arguments, inductive arguments, and scientific reasoning

RESEARCH ASSISTANT**For Elliott Sober (2x)**

Edited Professor Sober's book *Ockham's Razors*. Helped organize the Philosophy of Biology at Madison workshop. Provided research help on topics including atheism, scientific methodology, and parsimony arguments for God's existence.

For Farid Masrour (2x)

Helped Professor Masrour on research topics having to do with the geometry of visual space, predictive processing approaches to consciousness, and the phenomenology of hallucinations.

For Caroline Arruda

Grant Project entitled "Are Non-Human Primates Agents?" Duties involved researching various capacities of non-human primates, including language, future planning, problem solving, theory of mind and error knowledge, and then constructing an annotated bibliography.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Member, American Philosophical Association

Member, Society for Philosophy and Psychology

Member, Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology

Member, Australian Society for Philosophy and Psychology

SERVICE

Referee, British Journal for the Philosophy of Science

Commentator, "Disjunctive Fregean Representationalism and Color Constancy," 2022 Central

Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association

Director of Research Development, UW-Madison Department of Philosophy, 2018-2019

Director of Teaching Development, UW-Madison Department of Philosophy, 2017-2018

Commentator, "Quantum, Consciousness, and the Will," Annual Meeting of the Wisconsin Philosophical Association, April 2017

Session Chair, Philosophy of Biology at Madison, May 2016

Session Chair, Central Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association, March 2016

Session Chair, Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, February 2013

Session Chair, Brackenridge Philosophy Symposium, February 2012

References

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Elliott Sober (Committee Member) 608-263-3700
Hans Reichenbach Professor & William
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GRADUATE COURSES TAKEN

Courses Taken in Philosophy of Mind & Philosophy of Psychology/Cognitive Science

Perception and Cognition (Farid Masrouf)
Naturalism, Consciousness, and Representation (Martha Gibson)
Greatest Phil Mind Hits of the 80s and 90s (Lawrence Shapiro)
Philosophy of Perception (John Symons)
Memory and the Extended Mind (Sarah Robins)
Philosophy and Psychology (Sarah Robins)
Husserl & Phenomenology (Jules Simon)
Philosophy of Mind (Mark Bickhard)
Foundations of Cognitive Science (Mark Bickhard)
Memory (Padraig O'Seaghdha)
Externalism (Farid Masrouf)*
Embodied Cognition (Lawrence Shapiro)*
Belief (Jesse Steinberg)*

Courses Taken in Ethics

Moral Realism (Russ Shafer-Landau & Mike Titelbaum)
Agency and Practical Rationality (Sarah Paul)
Moral Motivation and Normative Reasons (Caroline Arruda)
Contemporary Metaethics (Caroline Arruda)
Normative Ethics (Caroline Arruda)
Ethics and Science (Jules Simon)
Pleasure in Ancient Greek Philosophy (Emily Fletcher)

Courses taken in Philosophy of Science

Ockham's Razors (Elliot Sober)
Explanation (Elliott Sober & Lawrence Shapiro)
Philosophy of Science (Luciana Garbayo)
Causation (Malcolm Forster)*

Metaphysics

Spinoza (Steven Nadler)
David Lewis (Luciana Garbayo)
Proseminar (Martha Gibson)
Free Will (Martha Gibson)*
Time Travel (Peter Vranas)*

Other Courses

Feminist Philosophy (Caroline Arruda)
Philosophical Research & Writing (Jules Simon)

*denotes audited course

NARCISSISTIC PROPERTIES AND REPRESENTATION: A FRESH ATTEMPT TO NATURALIZE MENTAL CONTENT

Gregory Nirshberg

Philosophers of Mind and Cognitive Scientists regularly invoke the terminology of mental representations, and yet mental representations pose a unique explanatory challenge. Our thoughts represent objects and properties. They are *about* objects and properties. For example, my thought that there is a soy latte on the table in front of me is somehow about the soy latte in front of me, and involves a representation of a soy latte. And yet is it unclear how exactly to incorporate this “aboutness” into a naturalistic framework. How do thoughts acquire such directedness? By what means can neural states and processes be about objects in the world, such as tables, cups, chairs and lattes? In addition, how do we account for the fact that representations can misrepresent? If it turns out that what’s on the table in front of me is a dairy milk latte, not only does the barista have something to answer for, but it looks as if my thought is misrepresenting a milk latte *as* a soy latte. Naturalistic accounts of representation therefore attempt to answer at least the following two questions:

STATUS: In virtue of what does X, some physical state, count as a representation?

CONTENT: What makes it the case that X has the content Y (as opposed to Z)?

The first chapter of my dissertation articulates the basic strategies employed to answer the above two questions during the “representation wars” of the 1980s and 1990s. In doing so, it addresses the associated concerns raised about these strategies, specifically with respect to CONTENT. However, in recent decades a new set of challenges has arisen. These challenges seek to promote a wholesale skepticism of the entire representational enterprise. Those who raise these challenges, often referred to as proponents of 4E (embodied, embedded, extended, enactive cognition), suggest that we should reject appeals to representation in the cognitive sciences, either because there exist alternative models of cognition that provide better explanations of the target phenomena, or because there are no naturalistically respectable answers to the above two questions. The second chapter of my dissertation focuses on clarifying the precise target of the various challenges. I show that there are two distinct readings of STATUS, one metaphysical and the other epistemic, and that we can understand most 4E arguments against representation as targeted at one of these two versions. I then argue that, when examined more carefully with these precise targets in mind, these challenges do not leave mental representation in quite the dire situation it is often taken to be by 4E skeptics.

The next chapter presents my own positive proposal about the nature of representation. The account is based on two central claims. The first is that both representational status and representational content are determined by the way a structure is used by other parts of the system in which it is embedded. The second is that basic representational content is not about objects or intrinsic properties of objects, but about extrinsic, or *narcissistic*, properties that hold between the external object and the system interacting with it. Though initially counter-intuitive, I argue that this account offers satisfactory answers to CONTENT and STATUS. Indeed, I show that positing narcissistic content provides a more explanatorily fruitful account of content than competing theories. Further, I argue that my account can address the challenges from representational skepticism, while at the same time incorporating many of the considerations that motivate the 4E rejection of representation in the first place.

My last chapter addresses concerns that grounding a theory of content in use is naturalistically illicit. I first argue that all naturalistic accounts of representation must, and do, incorporate use to answer our original questions. I then suggest that when we become sufficiently clear on the role that use plays, we see that it *screens off* any other purported necessary conditions for representational status or content, such that all naturalistic theories of mental content ought to be interpreted as use theories. However, I also argue that, contra extant critiques in the literature, this is perfectly compatible with naturalism about mental content.