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Remembering Jerry Fodor and his work[1]

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This is a reminiscence and short biographical sketch of the late philosopher and cognitive scientist Jerry Fodor. It includes a summary of his main proposals about the mind: his "Language of Thought" hypothesis; his rejection of analyticity and conceptual role semantics; his "mad dog nativism"; his proposal of mental modules and—by contrast—his skepticism about a computational theory of central cognition; his anti-reductionist, but still physicalist, views about psychology; and, lastly, his attacks on selectionism. I conclude with some discussion of his idiosyncratic style and of his aesthetic and other interests. An appendix provides some memorable quotes.

KEYWORDS
antiselectionism, confirmation holism, language of thought, nativism, referentialism

1 | SOME INTRODUCTORY PERSONAL NOTES

After a long illness, the philosopher Jerry Fodor died on November 29, 2017. This was a great loss not only to his family and many friends but also to philosophy and cognitive science. For reasons I hope will emerge in this remembrance, he was indisputably the most important philosopher of psychology of his generation.[2]

I first met Fodor on a wintry evening in February 1974. I had been a graduate student at Harvard for several years, still to some extent under the spell of Wittgenstein and Quine, whose views then dominated the philosophy of mind, there and elsewhere. My entering class had been expressly warned by Quine's close colleague, Burton Dreben, to avoid (in Wittgenstein's famous phrase) "the grip of the picture" of traditional mentalism—which, he claimed, underlay the work of Chomsky and

[1] I make no pretense of covering all of Fodor's views, which are far too rich for summary in a journal article. I will touch only on what I hope will be of general interest to a cognitive science community. Readers interested in greater detail might consult, besides the original work itself, Loewer and Rey, 1991; Rey, 1997, Chapters 8–10; Rives, 2010; and Aydede, 2010. Note that, depending on context, I sometimes refer to Fodor as "Jerry," partly because that is how many knew him, but also to distinguish him from his wife, Janet, who has also published extensively under "(J.) Fodor." Publication dates without a name are works of Jerry's, unless otherwise obvious.

[2] In a poll conducted by Brian Leiter (2016), Fodor was rated at the very top of the top 20 philosophers of mind since WWII.

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Fodor down the street at MIT. And, I am embarrassed to say, I acquiesced for a while—until I began to wonder what life there was for psychology after Wittgenstein and Quine, and so wandered down Mass Ave. that evening to the seminar Fodor was running on the manuscript of what would become his (1975) *Language of Thought.*

Well, he was in the middle of a sustained attack on those very figures and on how recent work in psycholinguistics refuted one after another of their claims. Of course, loyalty to myself and my graduate school demanded I make some token replies, which I dutifully set about doing. It went alright for about half an hour or so. But soon, in ways that many others who have argued with Fodor will recognize, I was overwhelmed by a torrent of objections, from both psychology and philosophy, which left me in the position of that familiar cartoon image of a man trying to withstand a hurricane by clinging horizontally to a door frame: I was blown out of the room. Fortunately, that was the time for a break, and so, I wandered the halls for the next 15 min and considered what had been said. "My god," it soon dawned on me, "there is life after Wittgenstein and Quine, after all! Indeed, a hope at last for a serious, empirically grounded, mentalistic psychology." I went back and joined the discussion, which, of course, I haven't left since.

In addition to the sheer intellectual benefit of meeting him, I was also immediately impressed by his philosophical style. He argued with astounding energy, intelligence, wit, imagination, integrity and good will. In my and many others' experience, one never felt in the least *personally* attacked (I acknowledge that others in the field may have felt differently). The philosopher Steve Ross expressed very nicely my enduring impression in his own short obituary on the *DailyNous* blog. Steve managed the colloquia series at the CUNY Graduate Center for many years, for which Jerry was often a speaker, and he recalls:

> [Jerry] was always in touch with what made a philosophical view both tempting and a bit of a burden. He was one of the very few who never pretended that, just because he thought a particular view *right*, that did not for a moment mean he could not see how it faced difficulties others could reasonably find fatal. When Jerry took questions, you felt—here is someone who feels both the power and the provisional nature of philosophy. (Ross, 2017)

At the memorial for Fodor held at Rutgers University in April 2018, it was striking how many of the speakers praised Jerry's synoptic, dialectical understanding of philosophy and psychology. His son, Anthony Fodor, spoke about how discussions for Jerry in these areas seemed to him to be moves in an essentially 2,400-year-old chess game, where the point was to make arguments that would advance the game and not be open to immediate refutation. Which is not to say that such discussions were, for Jerry, merely pointless games. On the contrary, as Sue Carey, Lila Gleitman and Barry Loewer each stressed in their remarks, and I hope to make clear below, Jerry was concerned—often obsessed—with getting to the truth about large and important questions in the domains and expected any experimental result or philosophical argument to be justified by its relation to that goal.[3]

The vigor and excitement of arguing with Jerry was well captured in a marvelous simile of Dan Dennett's:

[3] At the same memorial, Louise Antony recounted presenting a paper criticizing Donald Davidson along lines she thought genial to Jerry, after which, however, Jerry went to Davidson's defense. She exclaimed, "Jerry, what are you doing? I thought you agreed with many of these criticisms I'm making!" to which he replied, "What fun would there be in merely defending the defensible?" She went on to stress, however, how often she felt supported by his simply taking her arguments seriously.

> Most philosophers are like old beds: you jump on them and sink deep into qualifications, revisions, addenda. But Fodor is like a trampoline: you jump on him and he springs back, presenting claims twice as trenchant and outrageous. If some of us can see further, it's from jumping on Jerry. (Dennett, 1991)

Leaving aside just who winds up seeing further, there is no question that exchanges with Jerry were invariably exciting and fruitful, with one frequently coming away finding the world looking very different (which is not to say his views were always right). For good glimpses of Fodor in action, one can view several videos available online under his name on YouTube.

McGinn (2002) noted both these lively aspects but also what many of us also sometimes observed—his surprising shyness and sensitivity:

> Fodor…is a gentle man inside a burly body, and prone to an even burlier style of arguing. He is shy and voluble at the same time … a formidable polemicist burdened with a sensitive soul … (McGinn, 2002, quoted at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerry_Fodor)

Shy, indeed, he was. In one of his "diary" entries for the *London Review of Books*, he wrote, quite self-revealingly:

> I am pathologically easily embarrassed. I would rather be mugged than shout for help in a public place. (I suppose I'd be prepared to shout for help in the privacy of my own home, among consenting adults; but what good would that do?). Likewise, I almost never go to those trendy plays in small off-off-Broadway theaters where God knows what indignities may be visited on the audience in pursuit of its edification or entertainment. If I'm forced to go to one, I sit in the middle of a row in the middle of the house, where peripatetic actors can't get at me. "What have I got to lose?" My nerve, for starters. (Fodor, 2000b, p. 40)

His shyness was most evident to me once when he came to talk to my seminar at Maryland about some new work he was doing. Of course, once the word was out that Fodor would be in town, my seminar got packed. Jerry was visibly shaken by the size of the formidable gathering (and expressed annoyance to me for having allowed it). He said he was comfortable talking mostly to small audiences but—those who witnessed some of his virtuoso performances, especially in large Q&As, will be surprised to learn—rarely in front of large crowds.

This shyness was, I suspect, connected to what seems to be true of many people of great wit, that it was somehow linked to a depressive strain, which always seemed in fact not far in the background with Jerry. He was peculiarly loathe to express these or other purely personal feelings directly, but they and his empathy for others' suffering were often revealed in his remarks on opera and literature (to which I will return). When the children's entertainer "Mr. Rogers" died, Jerry expressed real sadness for the loss of someone who he greatly admired for his ability to connect so genuinely with children's anxieties. It is worth noting that many people also witnessed Jerry being sometimes extraordinarily patient, empathic and helpful with colleagues and students, many of whom posted warm remembrances of him also at the *DailyNous* blog.

Understandably, however, this shyness and vulnerability were lost on many who were put off by just how aggressive, rhetorical and relentless he could be in argument. These traits are, of course, associated with a competitiveness that can get in the way of fruitful exchange. But it is worth stressing that, for many of us, these traits in Fodor really did not seem so much an issue of competition or *self*-indulgence—Jerry never seemed particularly self-aggrandizing—than as simply *his obsession*

sometimes to the point of rudeness with what he regarded as *getting the issues right.* As others I have already quoted have stressed, what usually (not always) seemed uppermost in his mind was understanding the dialectic in an ancient and continuing chess game of enormous significance for our understanding of the mind and nature. Many of us who withstood his many onslaughts do think he was right enough that it was usually (not *always*) personally worth it. Few gifts come for free.

2 | BACKGROUND AND CAREER

Jerry once said to me that, if he were to write an autobiography, it would begin, "The best moments of my life were counterfactual". I don't think I have quite the space to go into all the counter-facts here, so I'll just stick as best I can to some actual ones.

Jerry Alan Fodor was born in New York City on April 22, 1935, the son of Andrew Fodor, a research bacteriologist, and apparently rather cultured Hungarian Jewish immigrant, and the former Kay Rubens, a third-generation American from Pittsburgh. For various reasons, Jerry was raised primarily by his mother and a grandmother.[4] Absent Jerry's father, the family was not wealthy, and his mother eventually had to go to work in a hardware store.

Jerry attended Forest Hills High School in Queens and then Columbia University, where he studied with Sydney Morgenbesser and Arthur Danto. He received his A.B. degree (*summa cum laude*) in 1956 and went on to graduate school in philosophy at Princeton University, receiving his Ph.D. in 1960 under the direction of Hilary Putnam; he then spent a year (1960–1961) at Oxford. I suspect Morgenbesser and Putnam were his most significant mentors, especially the latter—who, in the late 1950s, had begun to develop, against the then prevailing Logical Positivism, his realist approaches to science, and his so-called functionalist approaches to the mind, which emphasized the analogy between minds and computers.

From 1959 until 1986, Fodor was on the faculty of MIT. From 1986 until 1988, he was a full professor at the City University of New York (CUNY), continuing as an adjunct professor until 1994; and from 1988 until his retirement in 2016, he was the State of New Jersey Professor of philosophy and cognitive science at Rutgers University in New Jersey, where, at his death, he was emeritus. Over the years, he had visiting appointments at the University of Illinois, Yale, SUNY Binghamton, the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Toronto. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and served as vice president and president of the American Philosophical Society. At various points, he was a New York State Regents' Fellow, a Woodrow Wilson Fellow (Princeton University), a Chancellor Greene Fellow (Princeton University), a Fulbright Fellow (Oxford University), a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in The Behavioral Sciences and a Guggenheim Fellow. He received the first Jean Nicod Prize (France) for philosophy of mind and cognitive philosophy (1993) and presented the 1997 John Locke lectures at the University of Oxford. He wrote some 20 highly influential and charmingly readable (if intellectually demanding) books and countless articles.

In 1957, Fodor married Iris Fodor (*née* Goldstein), presently *professor emerita* in the Department of Applied Psychology at New York University. They divorced in 1968, and a few years later, he married the psycholinguist Janet Fodor (*née* Dean), who had come to MIT to study with Chomsky, and with whom Jerry was soon collaborating in experiments on speech perception. In 1986, they

[4] Readers familiar with his work will know that "granny" is one of the most important of a number of characters with who he was in frequent internal dialogue. Some idea of how formidable she must have been can be guessed from the photograph Barry Loewer and I were able to reproduce as the frontispiece of our book (Loewer and Rey, 1991). That is a somewhat depressed-looking Jerry in her arms and his grandfather peering timidly over her shoulder.

moved to New York, where they lived in a comfortable apartment across from Lincoln Center, where they could enjoy endless productions of opera, ballet and lieder (I remember Jerry wistfully wondering how he could have failed to have lived in New York for so many years).

3 | CONTRIBUTIONS TO COGNITIVE SCIENCE

In an obituary for Jerry, Chomsky recently wrote:

> Jerry Fodor was one of the founders of contemporary cognitive science and a leader in its development over the years, and a major figure in contemporary philosophy of language and mind. His highly innovative contributions have had a broad influence as well in linguistics and psychology of language. His computational-representational theory of mind has for years been the gold standard in the field. His analyses of concepts and of the role of "language of thought" are unsurpassed in their depth and import. Always with sparkling wit and style. A wonderful person and valued friend for 60 years. (Chomsky, quoted in Branson, 2017)

I'll return to Fodor's wit and style in §4. In this, I hope not too long or difficult section, I will try to sketch his main views and contributions to the "cognitive" revolution that he joined Chomsky in initiating. I hope I'll not be guilty of what Fodor (1983, p. i) once described as the "scholarship that turn[s] a butterfly into a caterpillar."

3.1 | Mental realism and the language of thought

Fodor's original interests had been largely literary, leading him to complete his senior thesis at Columbia on Kierkegaard.[5] But at a summer institute in 1958 run by Zellig Harris at the University of Pennsylvania, he met and was immediately awed by Chomsky. The next year, he accepted a position at MIT to teach "humanities," bringing culture to the engineers.[6] Inspired by Chomsky's work as well as by Putnam's,[7] he began a relentless attack on the various forms of antirealism about psychology that had dominated mainstream philosophy and psychology since the 1920s.[8] Contrary to the insistence of various kinds of behaviorists, from Skinner and Quine to Wittgenstein, Ryle and most recently Dan Dennett, Jerry argued that psychology *should* study real, internal mental competencies and processes, which might be only quite indirectly manifested in the complexity of ordinary behavior. Like the claims of any science, claims about the mind should be grounded in lawful, empirically

[5] Alas, Columbia College has destroyed its records from that period, but Jerry mentioned his work on Kierkegaard in his application to Princeton, which apparently led him initially to work there with the 19th century philosophy scholar, Walter Kaufman (my thanks to Sarah-Jane Leslie and Paul Benacerraff for digging up these facts). Although he was decidedly not "a believer," in a number of conversations, I was surprised by both his knowledge and his empathic understanding of both Kierkegaard and much of Christianity generally.

[6] In a related oddity of history, Chomsky was hired at MIT in 1957 to teach French and German! It was not until 1960 that MIT had a department of linguistics.

[7] Iris Fodor (Jerry's first wife) recalls Jerry during his year at Oxford being "also very interested in ethology (especially concepts of built-in innate releasing mechanisms). Tinbergen had not yet received the Nobel, but Jerry attended his lectures and became quite interested in his experiments and his descriptions of Konrad Lorenz's work. I think this perspective fitted his developing beliefs in innateness" (personal communication).

[8] His insistence on realism was not only influenced by his mentor Putnam's (1975) forcible insistence on a generally realistic conception of science, but also by an intense aversion to relativism, which he expressed pretty unequivocally: "I hate relativism. I hate relativism more than I hate anything else, excepting, maybe, fiberglass powerboats... surely, surely, no one but a relativist would drive a fiberglass powerboat." (Fodor, 1985)

informed explanation about the systematic realities that underlie what we observe on the surface. More traditional a priori epistemology, metaphysics and folk thought and talk about ordinary behavior he regarded as secondary, if relevant at all.

In his seminal *The Language of Thought* (1975), Jerry went on to articulate and defend a computational theory of mental processes that he argued provided the only serious framework—the "only President you've got," as he quoted Lyndon Johnson as saying in the epigraph for the book—for actual psychological research. Propositional attitudes, such as belief, preference and expectation, were to be treated as computational relations to sentences in a "language of thought" (an "LOT") that was encoded in the brain. In that book and in much subsequent work (e.g., Fodor, 1981b, 1987), he argued that only such an approach could capture and begin to explain what seems to be the lawful *compositional structure, productivity* and "*systematicity*" of thought: possible thoughts have recursive logical structure that permits people to be able to think a potential infinitude of ever more complex thoughts (at least, it is doubtful that there is some finite upper bound: for any proposed longest one, one could negate it) and which allows someone who can think *that p* to be able to think logical permutations of *p* (e.g., someone can think *I'll leave if he speaks* iff she can think *I'll speak if he leaves*). The LOT hypothesis ("LOTH") also seemed to him to be the only way of capturing proposed mechanisms of language acquisition, hypothesis confirmation and decision-making, both in perception and in ordinary and scientific reasoning. After all, standard rules of inference in logic are defined over semantically valuable *sentential strings*, and these are also the natural objects of, for example, Bayesian probability inferences and patterns of formal decision theory. At any rate, it is extremely difficult to see how deductive arguments or hypotheses and representations of preferred or risky circumstances could be systematically expressed other than in syntactically structured sentences of some language or the other (what mere *picture* could represent nested quantifiers, counterfactual conditionals, disjunctions or even negations?).

Some common issues about the LOTH:

1. The LOT is an innate, formal language over which classical (Turing computable) operations can be mechanically specified and which, therefore, does not need an "homunculus" to understand it. It might be closely related to a "natural" language of the sort understood and spoken by people, but it need not be. Birds, bees, spiders and even ants very likely have some sort of LOT.[9]
2. To the extent that the LOT is not a natural, socially shared "public" language, it might be thought to be a "private" one, falling foul of the *later* Wittgenstein's (1953) supposed arguments against the possibility of one. Fodor is not only decidedly unconvinced by Wittgenstein's supposed arguments (see Chihara & Fodor, 1965), but he is not presuming the LOT is any kind of internal, necessarily "private" language of introspection of the sort that worried Wittgenstein.[10]
3. Indeed, the LOTH is not committed to any particular claims about the character of introspection or phenomenology, which may well not be the least bit sentential. Even the most intense

[9] See Gallistel (2017). Note that, *pace* Searle's (1984) "Chinese Room argument," the LOTH is also not committed to a behavioristic "Turing Test" of intelligence. LOTH is a species of a "functionalist" theory of mind, which permits psychological theories to appeal to an indefinite variety of internal states that may or may not have any overt behavioral manifestation. Precursors of the LOTH may be found in the work of William of Ockham (1323, I, c.1.), Kant (1781, A100ff) and in an amusingly impatient letter of the *early* Wittgenstein (1919, p. 130) to Russell.

[10] Fodor (1975, Chapter 2) does refer to the LOT as a "private" language, but, I submit, this is entirely ironic and mischievous—as is his unpublished, hilarious (and, stylistically, amazingly close) parody of Wittgenstein's later style (available at http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/miscellaneous/Fodor_Wittgenstein.tiff).

eidetic imagery and visual hallucination is compatible with LOTH: all that need be true of such cases is that there are events with certain content, for example, *as if seeing a bright green bird hovering before me.*

4. On the other hand, Fodor (2010, Chapter 6) also argues for some nondiscursive imagistic representations in perception, or representations in which there is no canonical decomposition, and parts of the representation represent parts of what is represented (2010, p. 173). It is just that, because of logical combination, this cannot be the only kind of representation.
5. The LOTH is not committed to presuming that most current work in "artificial intelligence" is illuminating of the mind. The aim of that field is largely to build machines that manage to solve problems whose solution usually requires intelligence, whether or not they do so in remotely the way that intelligent people or animals do. Indeed, we will see shortly (section 3.2.5) that Fodor was skeptical that a computational theory of mind was *sufficient* as a general account of thought.

3.2 | Fodor's reliance on confirmation holism

A background view that played a surprisingly central role in much of Fodor's thought is a doctrine called "confirmation holism" (hereinafter, "ConfirmHolism"), according to which, in Quine's (1953, p. 41) canonical formulation, "Our beliefs confront the tribunal of experience only as a corporate body." Quine was expanding on an observation of Duhem (1914), who drew attention to how a scientist testing a hypothesis and confronted with a failed prediction does not automatically reject the hypothesis but will usually check out any number of auxiliary hypotheses regarding the conditions of the experiment, the reliability of the experimental apparatus and the plausibility of any number of background beliefs. Indeed, it would certainly appear that virtually any background belief *could be* the source of an error, including even one's understanding of logic, arithmetic and the meanings of words.[11]

Now, no one has nearly an adequate theory of how a scientist proceeds to choose where exactly among these options an error might lie. Fodor also follows Quine in thinking that the choice is subject to evaluation in terms of holistic considerations, of, for example, the conservativism, generality, simplicity and modesty of one's system of beliefs *on the whole.* Another moral Fodor took from Quine's view is that confirmation—or, more generally, a claim's "epistemic liaisons" (Fodor, 1987, p. 56)—was an a posteriori (or empirical) matter of what was, in fact, causally connected to what in the world, not a matter to be settled by a priori reason, least of all by reflection on the meanings of one's words or concepts (Fodor & LePore, 1992, p. 52).

ConfirmHolism enters into a number of Fodor's distinctive views, which I will discuss in turn (Fodor at one point perversely remarked, "I often have the feeling that I'm just saying what Quine would have said but for his empiricism," (Fodor, 1998a, p. 145)). As I just suggested, Fodor joined Quine in thinking ConfirmHolism undermines the traditional presumption of an analytic/synthetic distinction and an internal conceptual role semantics (section 3.2.1). Unlike Quine, however, Fodor still thought a determinate semantics is possible, and that is because one can turn to a *mentalistic*, externalist referentialism to ground intentional content (section 3.2.2).

ConfirmHolism also figured in at least one of his main arguments for his (in)famous "Mad Dog Nativism," or his thesis that virtually all concepts are innate (section 3.2.3); it played an interesting contrastive role in his celebrated hypothesis about the modularity of perceptual systems

[11] Although Quine (1953), unlike Duhem, famously includes logic and mathematics in the scope of his ConfirmHolism, Fodor nowhere concerns himself with this extension.

(section 3.2.4), and it was at the heart of his claims about the (for many) surprising claims about the limits of a computational psychology (section 3.2.5).

3.2.1 | The abandonment of analyticity

In highly influential early work in the 1960s with Jerrold Katz (who had been a fellow graduate student at Princeton), Fodor also defended a "Semantic Markerese" conception of an internalist semantics that they thought brought to Chomsky's linguistics program Fregean demands for compositionality and underwrote traditional philosophical claims about the "analytic." Unlike Katz, however, Fodor soon became persuaded that there was no way to save such a semantics from the attacks on the analytic raised by Quine, particularly from the challenge to distinguish intuitions about meaning from simply tenacious beliefs (he also raised serious doubts that even so syntactic seeming an analyticity as "to kill is to cause to die" could be defended syntactically (Fodor, 1970), an issue that inflamed the "linguistic wars" of the time about "generative semantics" and is still discussed today—see Pietroski, 2003, §1.2). In view of ConfirmHolism, what today may be taken to be "analytic" may tomorrow, with enough pressure from other beliefs, be found to be false. As Putnam (1962) pointed out, *contra* Katz, even so humdrum an apparent (for Katz) analyticity as "Cats are animals" could be abandoned if the things turned out to be robots from Mars.[12]

Fodor argued that this latter sort of revisability especially had deep implications for psychology, dooming any internal, "conceptual role" semantics to a "semantic holism" that would render psychological generalization and explanation impossible. Indeed, in *Concepts* (Fodor, 1998a), he argued that the idea that a theory of meaning should be grounded in the role or use of a word or concept is where "cognitive science has gone wrong." The only content a concept need have is what it contributes to a publicly shared compositional structure, and this he ultimately came to think can only be provided by an "atomistic," referential semantics (Fodor, 1994).[13]

3.2.2 | Referentialism and asymmetric dependency

Specifically, Fodor developed a version of the "informational semantics" originally proposed by Fred Dretske (1981), whereby the content of a mental state or symbol was provided by some kind of covariant relation it bore to a real, or perhaps only possible, external phenomenon. (As Fodor (1990, pp. 53–57) noted, the idea actually goes back to Skinner; Fodor just applied it *mentalistically* in a way that Skinner did not.) Initially, Fodor (1980/90) toyed with covariation under ideal epistemic circumstances, but he soon came to worry that this could not be stated in a way that avoided the intentionality to be explained, and so (even before this first proposal was published), he hit upon the idea that all that really mattered was that there was a lawful covariation under *some or other* circumstances that provided the basis upon which all other tokenings of the symbol asymmetrically depended: the causal asymmetry would suffice all by itself! He defended this theory with extraordinary ingenuity (if not to universal acclaim) in *Psychosemantics* (Fodor, 1987) and, in more qualified ways, in *A Theory of Content* (Fodor, 1990) and in his "Replies" to critics in Loewer & Rey, 1991.[14]

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[12] Moreover, concept possession does not seem constrained by supposed conceptual connections:

> People can have radically false theories and really crazy views, consonant with our understanding perfectly well, thank you, which false views they have and what radically crazy things it is they actually believe. Berkeley thought that chairs are mental, for heaven's sake! Which are we to say he lacked, the concept MENTAL or the concept CHAIR? (Fodor, 1987, p. 125)

[13] "Atomistic" (as opposed to "anatomistic") theories of meaning are ones whereby the meaning of a symbol is independent of the meaning of any other symbol (see Fodor & LePore, 1992).

Despite all this referentialism, Fodor did acknowledge that more needed to be said to quell the intuitions that there was an aspect of content that was not referential, even in his extended, counterfactual sense, and in a number of books, from the mid-1990s—*The Elm and the Expert* (Fodor, 1994), *Concepts* Fodor, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, right up until his last book *Minds Without Meanings* (Fodor & Pylyshyn, 2016)—he struggled with various ways to explain away what he appreciated were the appearances of internal, "narrow" content. The ways are so variegated and complex that I must leave it as an exercise to the reader to sort them all out. But one main strategy was to exploit a distinction between the purely internal, often logically complex LOT *syntactic* "concepts" or "modes of presentation" ("MOPs") in the brain, from the externally grounded "contents" of those concepts.

3.2.3 | Mad dog nativism

ConfirmHolism played a role in another of Fodor's controversial claims, what came to be called his "mad dog nativism" (here, I present what I take to be the most important of the various versions he presented of this view). Given that there are no analyticities, as he thought ConfirmHolism leads us to expect, concepts cannot be decomposed and so cannot be acquired by "constructing" them from experience. Rather, they must be merely *activated* by experiences that "trigger" prototypes of them.[15] But then, at least *the disposition* for the concepts to be so activated must be *innate.* In which case, *the expressive power* of the child's mind is not increased by experience, even if she now *uses* concepts she might not have used previously (see Fodor, 1981c, 1998a). As he and Chomsky often put it, contrary to a fundamental impulse of empiricism, the basic structure of people's minds is not a reflection of the *exogenous* environment but of *endogenous* features of their physiology.

Fodor concluded that children must be born with the power to express all the concepts they will ever acquire, that is, with virtually all the concepts expressed by monomorphemes in natural languages.[16] This view, "mad dog nativism," is, of course, widely regarded as preposterous, a reaction of which Fodor was not entirely unaware. Michael Devitt (pc) has recounted a conversation he had with Jerry when he first met him:

> "Before we get going, Jerry, I think I should tell you that I've recently described, in print, one of your views as 'wildly implausible'." Jerry looked interested and I went on: "But since writing that I've come to think that I misunderstood your view—the one about innate concepts. I overlooked the full significance of your talk of 'triggering'." I spelt out what I now took the view to be in light of that talk of triggering and asked: "Is that your view? It's a better view." Jerry responded: "Yes, that's it." A pause. Then, with more than a touch of anxiety: "It's still pretty implausible, isn't it?"

[14] One qualification missed by many of his critics is that the condition was *not* supposed to provide a sufficient condition for *intentionality tout court*: he stresses that it is intended only to be sufficient for meeting "disjunction problems" or determining what a symbol might mean, for example, *horse* and not *horse or cow on a dark night,* even though the latter might also cause a tokening of it (Fodor, 1990, pp. 127–31). But see Loewer, 1995 and Adams & Aizawa, 2017 for discussion.

[15] Here, he was, of course, influenced by the Rationalists Descartes and Leibniz but also by the contemporary ethologists Tinbergen and Lorenz (see fn 6 above). Note that the "triggering" could take the form of, say, Bayesian hypothesis confirmation, in which case something being innate need not exclude its being learned (see Leibniz, 1705/1981, bk I, i, 23; and Rey, 2014). Noting this fact perhaps ought to quell Fodor's (1998a) "doorknob/DOORKNOB" anxieties about how an innate concept might, nevertheless, be rationally related to experience.

[16] Because Fodor presented this view initially in the same (Fodor, 1975) volume in which he argued for the LOTH, readers sometimes think they are linked. They are completely independent. Of course, the LOT itself is presumably part of an innate computational system. But it could turn out that all concepts are innate but *not* expressed in an LOTH, and all nonperceptual concepts might be reducible to perceptual ones and so "learned," but in fact, all of them *are* expressed in an LOT.

Anyone skeptical of the view, however, must be prepared to deal with Fodor's arguments and the embarrassing fact that he (1981c, 1998a) stressed that successful analyses of most words simply do not seem to be available.[17]

3.2.4 | Psycholinguistics and modularity

Beginning in the mid-1960s at MIT (where he came to hold positions equally in the Psychology department and what became the department of Linguistics and Philosophy), Jerry began undertaking some experimental work in psycholinguistics, mostly with Tom Bever and Merrill Garrett. He and Bever (1965) published some famous "click" experiments, in which perceptual sensitivity to linguistic structure seemed manifested in the ways listeners displaced the locations of bursts of white noise ("clicks") played at various points in a heard sentence. Then, following up on his Quinean skepticism about the analytic, he, Janet and Garrett (1975) also ran some interesting experiments challenging lexical decomposition by showing that such decomposition seemed not to show up in any response times of listeners to presumably decomposed items. This result was related to similar problems found with the "Derivational Theory of Complexity," according to which, processing times of sentences should correspond to their derivational complexity in a Chomskyan syntax. Although widely discussed at the time, neither result has remained influential: the gulf between competence and performance seems to be much wider than they believed (although a descendant of the derivational theory is actually being reconsidered by some Chomskyans; see Phillips & Wagers, 2007).

Continuing to work with Garrett and then joining Zenon Pylyshyn in developing an idea that Zenon had been sketching (Pylyshyn, 1974; 1980), Jerry produced what may well be his most influential work for psychologists, his (1983) monograph *The Modularity of Mind.* Here, Fodor urged a computational approach to perceptual systems, among which he significantly included linguistic parsing. Unlike "central systems," these systems, he argued, are exceptionally fast, automatic and "informationally encapsulated," insensitive to the indefinite kinds of information that our central cognitive system routinely processes. Linguistic perception occurs about as fast as any brain process can; one can't hear one's own language as noise, and perceptual illusions, like the Müller-Lyer, for example, are resistant to our explicitly learning about them.[18]

3.2.5 | The limits of computationalism

An issue that Jerry mentioned in his (1983) but did not really fully address there was his (for many) unexpected pessimism about the very computational theory of mind he had earlier seemed to have proposed. In reply to Steven Pinker's endorsement of a computational view in *How the mind works* (Pinker, 1997), Fodor (2000a) argued that, in fact, *the mind doesn't work that way.* While computational processes' over representation in an LOT might explain those parts of mental processing, such as perception, about which current theorizing seems promising and might be *necessary* for an account of "central" cognition, he thought it is doubtful it will be *sufficient* for it. For it is in the "central" system of reasoning that Quine's ConfirmHolism seemed to him fully evident.

Jerry pointed out that ConfirmHolism involves actually two claims, that central reasoning is "*quinian*," or subject to valuation in terms of holistic properties such as conservativism and simplicity, and "*isotropic*": any belief is, in principle, relevant to the truth value of any other belief (see Fodor, 1983, §IV; 2000a, Chapters 3–4). However, if cognition involves these two properties, then it

[17] For a useful discussion of the issues surrounding both Fodor's and Chomsky's nativist views, see the record of the October 1975 debate between Piaget and Fodor, Chomsky and many others, reproduced with commentary in Piatelli-Palmarini (1980).

[18] He usefully brings this discussion to bear on the then rampant skepticism about the observation/theory distinction in philosophy of science (Fodor, 1984, 1988).

is doubtful that classical computation could account for them. After all, in Turing's famous characterization, computation is a fundamentally *local* affair, in terms of which nonlocal quinian and isotropic confirmation would seem to be computationally intractable. In pressing this worry, Fodor can be regarded as echoing Descartes' (1637, p. 116) prescient observation that, although machines might be designed to deal with many specific cognitive problems, they are incapable of what seems to be the "universal" reason displayed by people, a fact that Fodor and many others think has been borne out by the limitations of efforts in artificial intelligence.

3.3 | Physicalism

3.3.1 | (Relatively) autonomous sciences

Unlike Descartes, however, Fodor was a committed physicalist. But his version of physicalism was considerably weaker than many traditional ones. In particular, it was *nonreductive*: there was no requirement that there be biconditional bridge laws linking the phenomena of some special science to the underlying phenomena of physics. In the first chapter of his 1975 book, he famously argued that "special sciences" should be pursued relatively autonomously from deeper physical theories, whose regularities they may cross-classify. Thus, psychology may classify events as belonging to the same psychological type even though they differ in their neurophysiological properties, and neurophysiology might classify events as belonging to the same neurological type even though they differ in their psychological properties.

3.3.2 | "Solipsism" and mental causation

A more complex issue is the exact relation Fodor saw between mentalistic explanations in psychology and the underlying physics. In a (at the time) much discussed paper, "Methodological solipsism as a research strategy in cognitive psychology" (Fodor, 1980), he argued that a computational psychology depends on mere formal, syntactically specified operations that could be satisfied by a machine, regardless of what environment it was in; indeed, it could be a solipsistic "brain in a vat." On the other hand, in contrast to Stich (1983), he insisted that *psychological laws and explanations* quantify over and are therefore committed to the *intentional content* of the formal states: "no computation without representation!" he had proclaimed (Fodor, 1975). As in standard logic, the formal apparatus is merely a means of mechanically implementing essentially semantic phenomena.

The above nonreductionist suggestion raises, however, a difficult question: if physics provides the metaphysical *basis* for any true explanations of phenomena at higher "macro" levels, no matter how much they might be cross-classified, how can there be any explanatory, nonphysical macro-*properties.* If intentional content is not a *physical* property, how could it be explanatory? For discussion, see Kim (1998), LePore and Loewer (1987) and Antony (1999)—and Fodor's famous last words on the topic:

> I'm not really convinced that it matters very much whether the mental is physical; still less that it matters whether we can prove that it is. Whereas, if it isn't literally true that my wanting is causally responsible for my reaching, and my itching is causally responsible for my scratching, and my believing is causally responsible for my saying…, if none of that is literally true, then practically everything I believe about anything is false and it's the end of the world. (Fodor, 1990, p 156)

To some aspects of folk psychology, he was more attached than one might have expected, given his seriousness about science and his general ConfirmHolism.

3.4 | Iconoclasm

3.4.1 | Against lingering empiricism

A few years ago, I was asked to introduce Jerry for one of his many talks on Darwin. I was suddenly struck by how that talk was really only the last in a long string of attacks Jerry had made on one prevailing wisdom after another and could not help remarking that it seemed to me that what Jerry most wanted to be when he grew up was an *enfant terrible.* I mention this because, afterward, Jerry came up to me and, beaming, said that was exactly right!

In any case, here is the string of iconoclasms. Beginning in his (1965) and (1968) *Psychological Explanation*, he went after Wittgenstein's, Ryle's, Skinner's and Osgood's various versions of Behaviorism. In his (1972) and (1975), he challenged Vygotsky's and Piaget's experiential accounts of concept acquisition (cf., above). In his (1978), he criticized Johnson-Laird's "procedural semantics." He and Pylyshyn critiqued John Gibson's "ecological" psychology (Fodor & Pylyshyn, 1981), and they roundly criticized the then nascent connectionist approaches to cognition (Fodor & Pylyshyn, 1988), claiming that they could not account *nomologically* for the manifestly compositionally productive and systematic structure of thought. A few years later, he and the philosopher Ernie LePore mounted an argument against the "meaning holism" that had become popular in many quarters (Fodor & LePore, 1992), and then, Fodor deployed, again, Quinean considerations against various versions of "conceptual role semantics," where he thought not only cognitive science but "the whole of the 20th century" had gone wrong (Fodor, 1998a, 2004). Virtually all the arguments press either on essentially the same points about ConfirmHolism and the challenge it raises to a conceptual role semantics, or on the argument that Chomsky (1959) originally raised in reply to Skinner, against an excessively empiricist presumption about ways in which the psychology of an organism is supposed to be a reflection of its environmental history.

3.4.2 | The Darwin book

This last issue is at the heart of one of his last main works, the attack on Darwinian selectionism that he undertook with his fellow cognitive scientist, Massimo Piatelli-Palmarini (see their 2010a and 2010b). The book has generated considerable controversy, many biologists bristling at being criticized by nonbiologists (although Piatelli-Palmarini does adduce considerable biological evidence, as well as independent research by biologists, in support of their claims). Not being a biologist, I will not try to enter that fray here. But at least Fodor's part of the argument turned largely on complex claims that were not so much about biology but about the nature of explanation. These claims may be controversial and inconclusive, but in the few remarks here, I hope to indicate why they are not as frivolous as many of the critics of the volume have claimed.[19]

Note, first off, that Fodor is not for a moment disputing Darwin's phylogenetic hypothesis about the origin of species. He is not remotely a Creationist, nor does he think that somehow the explanation of human faculties must, in principle, be different from the explanation of the traits of other animals. He is simply concerned with what he regards as the spurious explanatory force that selectionist explanations routinely display.

There are two tiers to Fodor's quarrel with selectionism. The first is a generalization of the argument against Skinner about where the deeper explanations of cognitive traits lie, and both for Chomsky's reasons and for the reasons we discussed earlier (section 3.2.3), Fodor believed they lie instead

[19] In assessing the arguments in the Darwin book, I recommend looking at a more succinct and (if I may say) readable version of it in Fodor, 2007. There is also the Fodor and Piamentelli-Palmarini (2010b) précis of the book and an interesting video exchange on the topic between Fodor and the philosopher of biology Eliot Sober (Fodor & Sober, 2010).

in a creature's innate structure. And then, just as Skinner saw himself as applying Darwin's natural selection to individual ontogeny, Fodor generalized his critique of Skinner back to Darwin: he doubted that a selectionist story had a significant role to play in an explanation of *any* traits. Again, like Chomsky, he insisted that an animal's traits are better explained by endogenous biological structure, not by exogenous features of the environment. Even if, for example, grammatical, logical or digestive abilities provided our ancestors with some selective advantage, the *structure* of those abilities is more likely to be explained by structural facts rooted in the organism's chemistry and biology than by environmental exigencies.

Unlike Chomsky, however, Fodor was not satisfied with merely a relatively low-level empirical objection to Darwin. He thought there was a deeper philosophical issue about the *logic* of selection. In order for selection to provide an explanation of a trait, the trait must not only be selected but "selected *for*" (see Sober, 1984; Neander, 2017). But "selection *for"* is an *intensional* concept, requiring a difference between coextensive properties. A standard example: the heart pumps iff it thumps, but presumably, it was its *pumping* that was selected for, not the coextensive thumping. Fodor then argues that coextensive properties can be distinguished only if there are either *laws* involving them or there are intentional processes, such as breeding or sexual selection, that distinguish them. He argues that there are, in general, no *laws* of selected properties and that, apart from sexual selection, selected properties are not *intentionally* selected.[20] Indeed, contrary to Dan Dennett (1995):

> Darwin's idea is not that " … we are artifacts designed by natural selection …" (1995, p. 300). Darwin's idea is much deeper, much more beautiful, and appreciably scarier: We are artifacts designed by selection in exactly the sense in which the Rockies are artifacts designed by erosion; which is to say that we aren't artifacts and nothing designed us. We are, and always have been, entirely on our own. (Fodor, 1990, p. 79)[21]

As he put essentially the same point in relation to selectionist ("teleosemantic") accounts of the cognitive content of a frog's mind:

> Darwin cares how many flies you eat, but not what description you eat them under. (Fodor, 1990, p. 73)

Without intentionality, Fodor goes on to argue, selection cannot specify *which* of a creature's traits are the crucial ones. At best, it can explain only the persistence of *whole organisms*: it is *entire polar bears*, not specifically their girth, coloration, furry feet and stocky claws *in isolation*, that beat out their rivals. As my student, Andrew Knoll, nicely put it: as with, yet again, ConfirmHolism, "an animal's traits meet the tribunal of mortality only as a corporate body."

Whether Fodor is right or wrong about any of this has been forcefully disputed (see Hornstein, 2010, for further support, and Block & Kitcher, 2010, and Godfrey-Smith, 2010, for critiques and a further exchange). But note that, unlike the first *empirical* issue, the second involves largely *conceptual* ones about the nature of casual explanation, not specifically about *biology*, and so is unlikely to be refuted by considerations of biology alone. The conceptual issues are complex, and Jerry's claims

[20] See Fodor & Piatelli-Palmarini, 2010a, pp. 155–157.

[21] Fodor made essentially the same point in reply to a question after he presented his Darwin talk at Maryland. Someone said something about what "Mother Nature wouldn't have done," and, exasperated, Jerry retorted: "Mother Nature is just God in drag."

are—characteristically—hyperbolic, but, I submit, his discussion should not be dismissed as casually as many have been inclined to do.

4 | STYLISTIC IDIOSYNCRACIES

4.1 | Serious wit

Fodor's writings display some striking idiosyncrasies. In addition to his being sometimes maybe a bit hyperbolic, he was almost compulsively jocular, and this led some readers to dismiss his writings as unserious. This would be a bad mistake. Fodor's jokes were invariably philosophically insightful, a way of capturing an important idea in a memorable quip. Several come to mind: preceding the above observation about how Darwin cares only about how many flies the frog eats, he wittily quotes a famous line from Berthold Brecht's *Three-penny Opera:*"*Erst kommt das Fressen; dann kommt die Moral*" (roughly: *First comes the grub, then comes the morals*). Another, commenting on Hilary Putnams's (1975) observations about how speakers defer to experts to ground the reference of their terms:

> What philosophers call "linguistic deference" is actually *the use of experts as instruments*; not Marxist division of labor in semantics, but capitalist exploitation in epistemology. (Fodor, 1994, p. 36)

And in a succinct rebuttal of scientific instrumentalism (from the aptly named "The Dogma that Didn't Bite"):

> If all you want is to be able to predict your experiences, the rational strategy is clear: Don't revise your theories, *just arrange to have fewer experiences*; close your eyes, put your fingers in your ears, and don't move. Now, why didn't Newton think of that? (Fodor, 1991, p. 202)[22]

Indeed, it cannot be stressed enough that Jerry's sharp jokes were usually backed up by rich argumentation. A number of people have complained about an amusing parody he made of Pinker's (1997, p. 543) explanation of why we read fiction:

> Pinker: "Fictional narratives supply us with a mental catalogue of the fatal conundrums we might face someday and the outcomes of strategies we could deploy in them. What are the options if I were to suspect that my uncle killed my father, took his position, and married my mother?"
>
> Fodor: "Good question. Or [and here Fodor summarizes Wagner's *Ring*], what if it turns out that, having just used the ring that I got by kidnapping a dwarf to pay off the giants who built me my new castle, I should discover that it is the very ring that I need in order to continue to be immortal and rule the world? It's important to think out the options

[22] He went on to say, more substantively:

> Surely this stuff about the business of science being to save the appearances gets the priorities backward, and the tail has commenced to wag the dog. What goes on in science is not that we try to have theories that accommodate our experiences; it's closer that we try to have experiences that adjudicate among our theories (Fodor, 1991, pp. 202–203).

> betimes, because a thing like that could happen to anyone and you can never have too much insurance." (Fodor, 1998c)

One critic found this a "deliberately obtuse and highly superficial reading of Pinker's claim." Of course, as the critic goes on to say, Pinker has an obvious rejoinder: fiction provides us with strategies for conundrums we might encounter *at a suitable level of abstraction.* Thus—*perhaps*—*Hamlet* instructs us about avenging grievous wrongs and Wagner's *Ring* about sacrificing love for power (although one does hesitate to wonder what *Lohengrin* and *Oedipus Rex* were instructing us to do).

Fodor was, of course, well aware of such a rejoinder. He resorted to caricature to dramatize his real point, that it seemed to him preposterous to think of literature—some of which he loved intensely—in such a utilitarian way, especially in ways that struck him to be the result of a tyrannical selectionism that insisted somehow on finding some purpose or function to every significant human trait (which is not to say that a trait, like reading fiction, might not sometimes have happy effects). This was a serious theme of both the whole of the review in which the caricature appeared (Fodor, 1998c) and as well as, of course, of his general skepticism about Darwin's selectionism that we discussed above. It should be required reading for anyone interested in evolutionary psychology. Whatever one may think of these pieces' controversial conclusions, the arguments for them are hardly obtuse or superficial.

4.2 | Literary, colloquial—But also scientific

Another idiosyncrasy: I mentioned earlier his concern with science as opposed to ordinary talk. This concern can, however, sometimes seem belied by the colloquial, informal character of much of his philosophical writing. I once asked him, "Jerry, you probably know more scientific psychology than any other philosopher: why, when you give an example of a psychological law, do you take a trivial folk example, such as *Eating potato chips can make you want to eat more,* instead of any serious ones from actual psychology?" Without hesitation, he replied, "Citing the science would be vulgar." This struck me as a sincere and deeply revealing remark about his peculiar sensibility. But it should not lead readers to think that he did not take the science entirely seriously.

In fact, Jerry regularly dealt quite straightforwardly with the science when he took himself to be addressing a scientific audience, as in his then influential text *The Psychology of Language* (Fodor, Bever & Garrett, 1974) and *Modularity of Mind* (Fodor, 1983). Absent is much of the usual wit and rhetoric, and the (1983) book has particularly come to figure in empirical psychology as a standard work whose suggestions have been developed in a number of rich and different ways. But in addressing philosophical audiences, Jerry seems to have felt (not unlike some important philosophers before him; Hume and Quine come to mind) the need to be more literary and sophisticated. And he was quite capable of being so, as his frequent reviews and "diary" entries for the *Times Literary Supplement* and *The London Review of Books* richly attest (many of these, such as the one involving the above comment about Pinker, are collected in the ominously titled *In Critical Condition* (Fodor, 1998b)). These sundry pieces make for entertaining and often enlightening reading on a variety of topics of more general interest, from evolutionary psychology to neuroscience, consciousness (an issue he usually scrupulously avoided) and synoptic books on philosophy; to Fred Astaire, Puccini, Verdi, Wagner and opera in general.

5 | AESTHETIC AND OTHER INTERESTS

Indeed, these latter writings reveal Fodor's passion equally for the arts as for science. He had an intense life-long love of ballet, opera, film, art and literature, from Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*, to Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji*, to virtually all the works of Shakespeare and Henry James (which he vastly preferred to that of William, the psychologist brother). From adolescence onward, he thought of ballet as one of the most perfect of the arts, particularly the work of George Balanchine (whose portrait hung on his office wall next to one of Morgenbesser)—but he also loved Fred Astaire. Indeed, he prized his collection of Astaire and Ginger Rogers films, and speaking of films, he also admired the work of Dreyer, Bergman (the bleak "Seventh Seal," but especially the charming "Smiles of a Summer Night"), Fellini, Antonioni and Ozu.

His taste in painting was quite conservative, not extending beyond Matisse, and he sometimes had what seemed to me puzzling views. A number of us had gone with him to see the Barnes Collection in Philadelphia, and at a certain point, we noticed we seemed to have lost Jerry. We eventually found him seated before a (to our eyes) rather schmaltzy Renoir portrait of a woman in a florid hat. We wondered what so entranced him. "So like St. Paul," he murmured, "the difficulty of dealing with sensual temptation."

His love of music was intense, but aside from the occasional Beethoven piano sonata or Mahler symphony, it was largely limited to opera, particularly (mezzo-)sopranos (I think he thought Frederica von Stade's Cherubino in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* was the ultimate in artistry).[23] He had a somewhat dimmer view of modern musicals. As he was such an opera lover, the *London Review of Books* asked him to write a review of Elton John's pop version of *Aida.* So he wrote:

> I haven't been to a musical play in maybe forty years. I know nonetheless (*a priori*, as philosophers say) that I do not like them. They are noisy, and banal, and manipulative, and vulgar, and the singing is amplified. I know this, as I say, prior to experience, and independent of it. Moreover, I am painfully easily embarrassed; and I believe that musicals are the kind of plays in which the actors encourage the audience to come up on the stage and join in the fun. I did not see *Hair* of course, but I'm certain that everybody in the stalls eventually had to take his (/her/my) clothes off. (Fodor, 2000b, p. 40)

Jerry goes on to provide a terrifically amusing (and insightful) summary and commentary on the original—Verdi's—*Aida*, and a withering comparison of Elton John's pop version to it, which apparently his daughter finally got him to see.

I was surprised to find he did not enjoy Bach all that much. He did not find the writing for sopranos especially interesting, and when I expressed admiration for the fugues, and how extraordinary it must have been for Bach to be able to hear them apparently fully in his head, he exclaimed, "Yes, enough to drive one *insane*!"

Jerry also loved the theater, and he studied and had rich theories about the entire corpus of Shakespeare's plays. But although he and Janet regularly attended plays in New York, his tastes there were not quite universal:

> We once went together to a Tennessee Williams revival (*Orpheus Descending*, I think) in which poor Vanessa Redgrave had to deliver, in a lush but uncertain approximation to a Southern accent, some such line as: "Evera time ah walk past the graveyahd, ah

[23] In keeping with his claim that the best moments of his life were counterfactual, Jerry once said to Joe Levine, "You know, all my life I've wanted to be the kind of person who liked jazz."

> can heah all those dead people saying: 'Live, honey, live!'" All right; I got, audibly, the giggles. It could happen to anyone. (Fodor, 2000b)

Being of a depressive turn of mind, he had unusually bleak views about some works: he once argued to me that the defective characters of *King Lear* are not foolish Lear and his scheming elder daughters but, for him, sanctimonious Cordelia, who naively insists on being sincere in a purely formal ceremony, failing to realize how such sincerity can bring disaster upon a state. On another occasion, in response to my complaint that even a fellow melancholic like myself found the three "hammer-blows of fate" in the last movement of Mahler's Sixth Symphony a bit much, he replied: "they're not *nearly* enough!"

He had nonintellectual interests. As his readers will recall, he had a deep rapport with his beloved "Greycat," as well as its two successors.[24] He also had considerable talent as an amateur photographer, capturing unsuspecting subjects at revealing moments in the subway or the street. As a young man, he prized fast cars, owning a TR3 for many years. Later, he came to love to sail (hence the disdain for fiberglass boats) and, over the course of several decades, owned several sailboats, some 30′ versions of which, even into his 70s, he would sometimes single-hand several times a week. A particularly charming memory I have is from an overnight sail from Boston to Maine. I and others were sleeping below while he was at the helm, and we were awakened by his shouting "Shoo! Shoo!" at what turned out to have been a whale that had become interested in the boat.

There are heaps of other amusing memories and striking quotes that I am sure his many friends could provide. I have asked around and collected some of them, a few of which I include as an appendix below. I would be grateful for any more that others might send along, perhaps for a larger collection that I can imagine being eminently publishable, along with many of his less well-known essays.

A last memory of my own: a few months before he died, when he had become quite ill and very passive, I went to New York to keep him company for a few days. One thing I thought to do during the visit was to put on a video of what he had once said was his favorite opera, Debussy's "Peléas et Mélisande." Now, this is an opera that I, myself, really do not much enjoy, and so, after watching it with him for about half an hour or so, I turned to him and, remembering earlier conversations he and I had had about Proust, I remarked, "Isn't it ironic that you love this French, claustrophobically personal, *fin de siècle* opera and I don't, whereas I love Proust and you don't?" After a few minutes, in what were some of the very few words he spoke to me during that visit, he murmured, "The music's better." He was Jerry to the end.

Jerry is survived by his wife, Janet Dean Fodor, a professor of psycholinguists at the CUNY Graduate Center; a daughter, Kate Fodor, a playwright and television writer; a son, Anthony Fodor, a professor of Bioinformatics at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; and three grandchildren.

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[24] In defense of feline experience against "Higher Order Thought" theories of consciousness (whereby a state is conscious iff one has a thought about it), Fodor (1999) remarked, "Surely what matters to whether it's all right for me to step on the cat's tail, is primarily whether it hurts him, not what he thinks about it; still less whether he thinks about what he thinks about it."

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APPENDIX A: SOME FURTHER QUOTES

Miscellaneous comments on professional philosophy and psychology:

"Idealism is the effort to buy knowledge by selling off metaphysics" (to the author, ca. 1977).

On Dennett's (1971) view of the "optimal rationality" assumed in the "intentional stance":

> In a chess game "I may...predict Black's lapse precisely *because* of what I know or believe about Black's intentional states… I have, let's suppose, a mini-theory about Black's noticings. Put vulgarly, the theory might be that Black is a sucker for a knight fork" (Fodor, 1981b, p. 108).

Vis-a-vis Wittgenstein's (1953) "Family resemblances":

> "'And, anyhow,' you may add, in one of your Wittgensteinian moods, 'doesn't it seem *plausible* that the internal representation of a word is typically more or less of a mess? Isn't what games and tigers and typewriters have in common, each with each, more like a family resemblance than like the mutual satisfaction of defining properties? Isn't language really like a sort of city? Or a rope? Or a fountain? Or something?'" (Fodor, 1981c, p. 295)

Naming a nonpsychological view of linguistics:

> "We need a name for this view. In what follows, I propose to refer to it as the Wrong View." (Fodor, 1981d, p. 197).

To the author, ca. 1992: "The first line of my detective novel: *She was to him what material objects were to Mill: a constant possibility of sensation.*"

"I, for one, would not expect a good account of what concepts are to refute scepticism about other minds any more than I'd expect a good account of what cats are to refute scepticism about other bodies." (Fodor, 1998a, p. 6).

"Inferences that are *a priori* are prized by philosophers because they're useful in bopping skeptics over the head with." (Fodor, 1998a, p. 70).

"If there are no philosophical analyses, what are analytic philosophers *for*?"(1998a, p. 70).

"Cows go 'moo!', philosophers go 'norm!'" (Fodor, 2010, p. 203).

Devon Kearney (at the *DailyNous* blog) quotes Fodor in a seminar on an influential philosophical article, "This paper has all the hallmarks of a classic in philosophy, by which I mean it gets worse every time you read it."

At the Rutgers memorial, Tom Bever recalled Jerry saying that trying to stop psychologists from being behaviorists was like throwing life jackets to lemmings.

"History always repeats itself: the first time as tragedy, the second time, as cognitive science" (to the author, 1990s).

From Jerry's son, Anthony Fodor:

> Einstein was said to have loved humanity but hated people. I think in many ways dad was the opposite.
>
> Dad often made jokes about his health. He told me once that he went to get a check up and afterwards reported, "My cholesterol was so high that my doctor had a heart attack." And he had an interesting sort of solipsistic view of the placebo effect and anti-depressants; he told me often that when he took them, he felt the same but it made everybody else around him feel better.

Regarding his health, Stephen Schiffer recalls:

> Once, he and I were in a cafeteria line together. He selected a huge piece of pound cake, the kind that when digested rushes to clog the nearest artery. I said, "Jerry, you don't care what you eat, do you?" He replied: "No, I don't. If I cared about what I ate, then I'd have to care about the air I breathed, and if I cared about the air I breathed, then I'd have to move back to Connecticut, and I hated Connecticut."

It would be a mistake to say that Jerry was self-effacing. But he could be pretty ironical about himself. In the "Prologue" to his (2003) *Hume Variations*, he wrote:

> "I happened one day to mention to a colleague who is a historian of philosophy my intention to teach a course on Hume's theory of mind. I'm sorry to say that he took it very hard; though whether it was laughter, tears or merely scholarly rectitude that convulsed him was unclear to me. 'But how can you?' he inquired when the spasms had abated, '*You don't know anything about Hume.*'
>
> I wasn't offended, exactly, though his italics struck me as perhaps not called for. But I was perplexed. And troubled. It's quite true that I don't know anything about Hume; my ignorance of the history of philosophy is nearly perfect. Much like my spelling, it's a legend to my friends and students. But the thought that one ought to know a lot about what one teaches hadn't occurred to me, nor did my previous practice much accord with it." (Fodor, 2003, p. 1)

And from Joe Levine:

> One day over lunch Jerry was explaining why he had decided to abandon the idea of narrow content. He began, "If you just think about it for five minutes…". I stopped him right there and said: "Jerry, you've been arguing for narrow content for over a decade, what do you mean think about it for five minutes?" He replied, without missing a beat: "Oh, I meant five minutes MORE".

The psycholinguist, Lila Gleitman (personal communication), also reports an exchange at a colloquium at the University of Pennsylvania. After she had pointed out that what he was saying contradicted a position she had heard him take years before, Jerry replied: "Yes, there isn't a position so absurd that I haven't maintained it in public sometime."