

# ...with Bruce Hood

Professor in the School of Experimental Psychology at the University of Bristol and Director of the Bristol Cognitive Development Centre

### One inspiration

I had the privilege to know Richard Gregory well. I used to drop by his office every Thursday afternoon for a cup of coffee, discussion and his incorrigible punning. Richard was very supportive of my activities and helped me to take immense joy at being a scientist. He knew all the greats and always had wonderful anecdotes. He was my direct link to a bygone era of romantic science.

### One book that you think all psychologists should read

I think *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins was probably the most influential book I read as a student that really shaped my thinking as a psychologist and a human.

### One thing that you would change about psychology

Many people consider psychology to be a soft science partly because the media often portrays it as common sense. This really annoys me. Understanding the complexity

of humans makes scientific inquiries into how we tick some of the most difficult problems to solve. Just because our psychological processes seem effortless, we should not underestimate the complexity of what's going on. We need to get some really good communicators out there doing our field justice.

### One thing I get out of Twitter

I am utterly fascinated by Twitter and believe that it is a very powerful mechanism. It's mostly concerned with gossip and trivia, but then the human brain is a gossiping brain. Twitter gives the impression of intimacy with celebrities that one would not normally have the chance to meet, and also creates an inflated sense of self-importance when other strangers respond to your tweets. This can create two types of distortion: increasing polarisation of opinions when groups coalesce around a topic, and contagious emotions.

### One hope for the future

More psychologists in positions of power in the boardroom to temper the irrationality of decision



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makers who can sometimes lead the rest of us into ruin.

### One challenge you think psychology faces

Psychological research used to straddle topics of interest covered by the different research councils but as budgets have been cut, the

shift is towards more applied work. Psychology and especially theoretical work seems to be falling in between the cracks.

### One regret

Never acquiring a second language. I always feel incredibly inadequate when I hear colleagues conversing in another language. I have tried but, regrettably, I think my window of plasticity has shut down firmly in that domain.

### One reason we believe the unbelievable

Because it is an inevitable by-product of a brain that tries to make sense of the world around it.

### One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists

Write every day. Keep writing and you will get better at it. It is just like any other skill and writing is the key to communication. It forces you to be more coherent and relevant.

### One cultural recommendation

A much under-rated 2006 film, *The Prestige* with Hugh Jackman and Christian Bale who play two rival Victorian magicians. The reason I love it is because it addresses the philosophical problem of identity and duplication.

### One psychological superpower

Mindreading of course! But there again, maybe it is better not to know.

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

### resource

The 2011 Royal Institution Christmas Lectures, on BBC Four on 27, 28, 29 December (and iPlayer). 'The three lectures cover "What's inside your head?", "Who is in control?" and "Are you thinking what I am thinking?" My book, *The Self Illusion*, follows in the spring.'

### coming soon

Articles on willpower, language, face recognition, the psychology of birth, and much more...

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