

## NIGEL MACKAY

### Background

After a varied pre-university career that included schools in Kenya, England, Scotland, and Swaziland, Nigel went to the University of Cape Town where he took a B.Sc and M.Sc in Psychology, studied for an honours in the Logic and Philosophy of Science, and lectured in psychology. Following this he went to Oxford (Magdalen College and the Department of Experimental Psychology) from where he got a D.Phil, under the supervision of Brian Farrell in Oxford and then, after coming to Australia in 1977, externally with David Armstrong. Since then he has tutored and lectured in psychology at Macquarie University, worked as a child psychologist for the New South Wales Department of Health, and since 1985 has been a lecturer, then senior lecturer, and now associate professor in psychology at Wollongong. In November 2010 he shifted to working for the university part time.

### Research and Academic Life

His research interests are primarily theoretical and metatheoretical, on the conceptual foundations of psychology and on psychological explanation. His intellectual direction has been formed by a perverse urge to swim against the stream of orthodoxy, an increasing conviction of the value of realism, a thoroughgoing Australian realism, to psychological theory, and the sense that much of psychology's claimed progress on the hardest of all problems, understanding the mind, is bogus: often mere careerism dressed up as science. His research aim is - against the anti-realist and constructivist trends of modern psychology - to slip realist conceptual analyses and theoretical critiques past journal editors and into print. He can claim a modest success in this, having published on psychoanalysis, methodology, motivation, clinical psychology, meaning, constructivism, and cognitive psychology. (He tries to remain, however, on good terms with the Department's constructivists.) Correspondingly, his teaching is aimed at helping students understand that true science is critical inquiry, rather than the acceptance and application of theoretical and methodological dogma; that *as for the things that they're liable to read in the (psychology) bible, it ain't necessarily so*.

Notwithstanding rumours to the contrary, he exercises great restraint in his reactions to the managerialism and the contempt for intellectual values that now permeate much of 'university' life; to the use of performance indicators (grant and award getting, A\* publication ratings) as virtually the only measures of academic worth; to the craven scrambling by academic toadies to adopt these standards. He would like to start a 'slow thought' movement in response to this footling academic activity. But, failing that, he at least hopes that the genuinely good things of academic life, some autonomy and a modicum of academic freedom will remain sufficiently long to allow him to continue independent and critical research, to make contact with intellectually kindred spirits, and occasionally to pursue the contemplative life. Among the good things of academic life he should mention the company of tolerant and able colleagues, who still think academic life should involve the pursuit of knowledge. He hopes too that being able to make academic visits to fellow researchers in UK, USA and Italy continues - especially if the university authorities ever read this page. Yet he fears that now he understands the environmental damage flying does, he may never be able to fly again and square it with his conscience.

## Projects

He is currently collaborating with Agnes Petocz of The University Of Western Sydney realism and a unified psychology. This follows the publication with Agnes and other theoretical psychologists of *Realism and psychology: Collected essays*, ([INSERT LINK TO http://www.brill.nl/realism-and-psychology](http://www.brill.nl/realism-and-psychology)). Increasingly, and perhaps in flight from the dispiriting actuality of the academy and the discipline, his interests are turning to the history of (psychological) ideas. Other projects include realist accounts of the extended mind thesis, the binding problem, and the psychological assumptions in philosophical positions.

## Honours & Awards

Nigel can truthfully claim to have given invited and keynote addresses internationally, to APA Division and to psychoanalytic conferences in the USA, and to have been awarded an honorary professorial position by a US college. For the past few years he has been contributing to the research programme at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis, where it was his privilege to spend some months in research related work annually. (However, he *still* worries that these awards were the result of misunderstanding and the failure to recognise the subversive intent of his writing.)

## Affiliations

Nigel convenes the inter-university Theory Group, which meets monthly at the University of Sydney (website link to come) to discuss research on the history and theory of psychology. When he remembers to pay his dues he is a member of the Philosophy Group of the Royal College of Psychiatry (UK) and the European Society for Philosophy and Psychology. He was registered with the New South Wales Psychologists' Registration Board before the demand that he reapply after a renewal notice failed to reach him, decided him against it.

## Responsibilities

Undergraduate and graduate teaching; supervision of Honours, Clinical Masters and PhD theses; In USA (BGSP): research advising for Faculty and doctoral students

## Current Teaching

Psychological Theory: History & Metatheory of Psychology, PhD, MA & Honours supervision. Supervision includes both empirical and theoretical postgraduate research in areas as diverse as clinical psychology, psychotherapeutic process and psychodynamic psychology.

## Some Representative Publications

- Mackay, N. (1989). *Motivation and explanation: An essay on Freud's philosophy of science. Psychological Issues Monograph 56*. N.Y.: International Universities Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1994). Cognitive therapy, constructivist metatheory and rational explanation. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 46 (1), 7-12.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1997). Constructivism and the logic of explanation. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 10, 339-361.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1999). Reason, cause and rationality in psychological explanation. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 19,1-21.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2003). Psychotherapy and the idea of meaning. *Theory & Psychology*, 13(3), 359-386.

\_\_\_\_\_ (2006). Missing: The key to the executive suite. Commentary on "Freudian Dream Theory, Dream Bizarreness, and the Disguise-Censor Controversy". *Neuro-psychoanalysis*. Vol 8(1) 2006, 40-42

Mackay, N., & Petocz, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Realism and psychology: Collected essays. (Philosophy of History and Culture, Vol. 30.)* Leiden/Boston: Brill.

#### Away From Work

Nigel considers he has given the best years of his life to improving and maintaining an old weatherboard cottage and its garden. Foolishly, he has now moved to an even older stone and brick house near Picton, with an even larger garden, which threaten to demand the remaining years of his life. He prefers such things as restoring old furniture, walking, listening to Bach, watching his wife painting (see <http://www.helenpaulucci.com>), reading Patrick O'Brian, Elmore Leonard, Anita Brookner, or even something highbrow, going to the opera, seeing his family flourish, spending time in places far from the sounds of internal combustion engines, barking dogs, and other people's music, or complaining with friends about the state of the university, the environment and the world. He would have liked to add a list of 'things that he hates' to this site. But the list was too long, and it would make him look even more curmudgeonly than he is.