

WHY SHOULD WE READ THE CLASSICS?

Cortex now invites historical submissions. These might be proposals for translating and reprinting historical papers or quotations from and/or comments on them. Particular emphasis will be given to neglected papers or neglected aspects of famous papers.

There are substantial arguments *against* publishing historical papers.

They further increase the flood of information which can submerge the student seeking a firm position in cognitive neuroscience. We should be glad about every paper that has been forgotten, as it is one paper less which we need to read and possibly cite. Scientific progress resembles natural evolution: authors produce a surplus of ideas and papers, and only the strong survive. If papers do not fit the scientific landscape any more they die out. Some papers die out without leaving traces, but some remain as fossils: Their titles are still present in reference lists, but their authors' original ideas and intentions are neglected or forgotten. This fate is particularly likely to happen to German and French writers of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century who still have a great reputation but are both inaccessible and incomprehensible to most students living outside German or French speaking European countries. However, deploring their fate makes as little sense as deploring the cruelty of natural evolution. Apparently, their disappearance provided space for the flourishing of further scientific progress. Are there any good reasons therefore, why Cortex should try to construct a Jurassic Park of long forgotten papers and fossilised ideas?

I think one good reason for digging out and revitalizing neglected papers and forgotten theories is that they can reveal something about the mechanism of scientific progress. If they foreshadowed ideas or observations which became fashionable only much later we may ask the reason for such a delay. If an historical paper sounds bizarre and incredible today we may ask why the authors' contemporaries found it credible. If an historical paper is widely misquoted or misinterpreted we may ask what the author's original intentions were and why only a fragment of them has survived. Answers to these questions can help us to a better understanding of the rules of scientific communication and the motives for accepting or refusing novel ideas. Presumably, rules and motives of scientific progress have changed much less than the nature and scope of the empirical data. The historical distance alleviates the importance of the empirical data and makes it easier to see rules and motives of scientific progress behind them.

You do not need to be an historian to submit a paper to the historical section of Cortex. Indeed, you do not even need to write an elaborate paper. If you come across or know of an historical paper or a paragraph of a paper which you consider to be little known but interesting, send it to us together with a comment of any length (from a few sentences to a full paper) explaining why you think this piece of literature is interesting. You need not even translate suggested quotations into English. Cortex can provide professional translation from German, French, and Italian.

The historical section of *Cortex* should provide a forum for reflection and for looking back which may be helpful in finding a secure position in the increasingly rapid flood of progress in neuropsychology and cognitive neuroscience. You are sincerely invited to contribute! Any proposals or submissions are welcome to <Georg.Goldenberg@extern.lrz-muenchen.de> or, by regular mail to me at:

Neuropsychological Department
Krankenhaus München-Bogenhausen
Engschalkingerstrasse 77
D 81 925 Munich / Germany

Georg Goldenberg