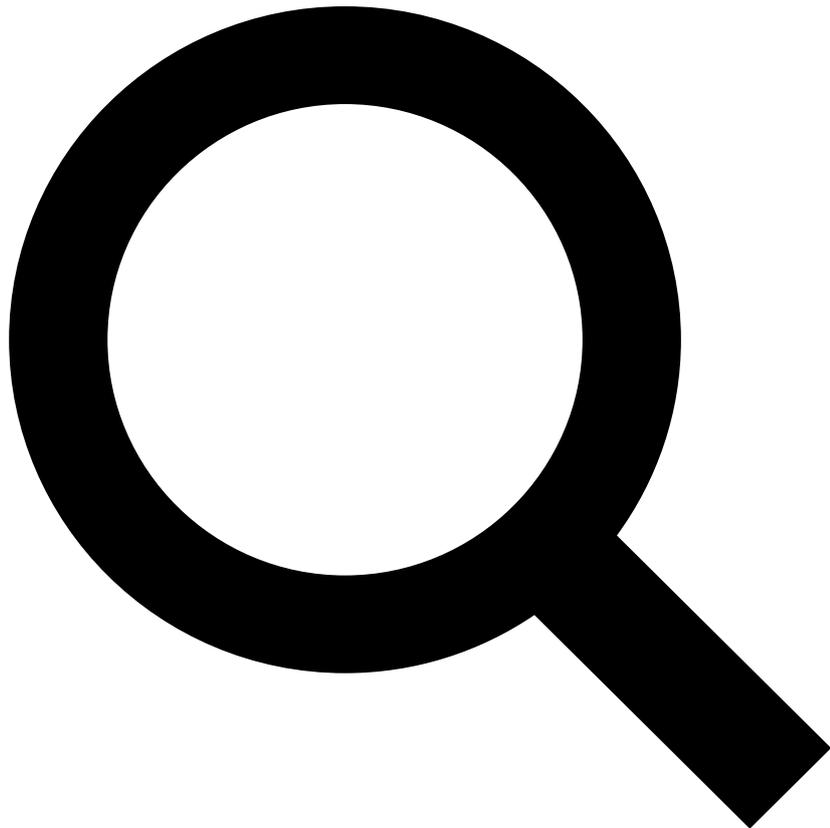


[The New York Times](#) is hosting a piece by [Tyler Burge](#), philosopher of mind, that may be of interest to ICCI readers.



Popular science writing on psychology, Burge argues, is often just "neurobabble" which does three things he strongly dislikes: (1) it provides no additional insight into essentially psychological phenomena, (2) fools people into thinking psychological explanations can be replaced with neural explanations, and (3) tricks people into giving massive amounts of \$\$\$ to neuroimaging studies in order to understand psychological phenomena that should rightly go to psychologists.

Burge thinks this misplaced glory is based on misguided notions of the relative maturity of different fields. Neuroscience, he says, is not more mature than psychology, particularly not subfields such as vision science.

This puts an aspiring visual cognitive neuroscientist (like me) in a funny position. On the one hand, I think it's wonderful when philosophers pay attention to vision science when discussing the mind and mental representation. To this end, Burge includes an interesting discussion about how to distinguish between environment-contingent responsivity in plants and perceptual representation in animals. I also highly approve of sentiments such as those:

"...science of mind begins with perception, the first distinctively psychological representation", and: "We have a rigorous perceptual psychology. It may provide a model for further psychological explanation that will do more than display an MRI and say, "behold, love."

On the other hand there are also some sentiments that take me by surprise, and make me wonder if the thing I think he's thinking is the thing he's actually thinking — and that seem at odds with some of the basic assumptions that motivate an aspiring visual neuroscientist like me to get up every morning and study the relationship between brain and behavior. Here are some:

"Individuals see, know, and want to make love. Brains don't. Those things are psychological — not, in any evident way, neural." And:

"States capable of accuracy are what vision science is fundamentally about."

So, should I be happy that Burge is a fan of vision science as an important gateway to a science of the mind, or sad that he doesn't think neuroscience is a worthwhile endeavor if one's goal is to explain psychological phenomena? Suggestions welcome...