

Fodor's style, Helen Beebee's essay writing guide, minus causal overdetermination

Author: Terence Rajivan Edward

Abstract. I consider the opening to a paper by Jerry Fodor referring to graffiti in the subway stations and what Helen Beebee once said about it in her essay writing guide.

I used to just pass over that stuff, but now I find it may be more important.

Draft version: 9th December 2022

I have written on Jerry Fodor's paper "Observation Reconsidered," but there are parts of it which I don't really pay attention to or at least I didn't. Here is the opening sentence:

Granny and I think that things have gone too far, what with relativism, idealism and pragmatism at Harvard, graffiti in the subway stations, and Lord knows what all next. (Fodor, cited in Beebee n.d.)

But now I am thinking this ignored material is more important than it seems. There is a question of whether this flashy opening affects your evaluation of the content. And that fits with the theme of the paper, modularity (see Edward 2011). Apparently some systems within your mind do not pay attention to some information in your mind, such as the system which works out what your eyes are seeing to generate visual experiences.

I actually first encountered the opening in an undergraduate essay writing guide which I believe was by (my friend?) Helen Beebee, in the 1990s. In my apartment I have a copy with the cover fallen off. (I thought it was in my mother's house, in the cabinet.) Beebee writes:

A well known philosopher may be able to get away with starting a paper with the words... You, on the other hand, cannot. Remember that you are studying philosophy, not creative writing. (n.d. 10)

My apartment block, if that is the right word, is actually covered with graffiti and has the word "RTM" somewhere on it, or it did, so I am wondering if my situation is different now.

Appendix

A spider came into the room where I mostly type and it didn't back down. It was larger than usual, given my experiences, and it just stayed there. The causal overdetermination material has been cut, because I don't want to explain it wrong.

References

Beebee, H. n.d. How to write a Philosophy essay & exam preparation. *Centre for Philosophy. University of Manchester Department of Government.*

Edward, T.R. 2011. Theory-laden experience and illusions. *Ethos* 4 (2): 58-67.