

Cattell Sabbatical Awardees Announced

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Douglas L. Medin and Alison Gopnik have been awarded this year's James McKeen Cattell Fund Fellowships. These awards provide an extended sabbatical period that allows the recipient to pursue new research. They are available to North American university faculty members committed to the scientific study of human behavior and its applications for improving human welfare.

A past member of the APS Board of Directors, Douglas Medin will primarily use his sabbatical to integrate the findings he and several colleagues have accrued over the past few decades exploring the relationships between culture and one's understanding of nature. "We have found that there are striking cognitive consequences of different orientations towards the biological world," said Medin. These consequences have been reflected in such areas as moral decision making, knowledge organization, reasoning, and environmental practices. Although he believes these diverse findings can be understood within a common theoretical framework, his research team is currently stepping back and trying to incorporate different perspectives. "I owe a debt of gratitude to the Cattell Fund and hope I can live up to the vote of confidence they have expressed for this project," said Medin. While he appreciates this individual recognition, Medin acknowledges the crucial contributions of his current and past team members and would like to specifically thank Scott Atran, Megan Bang, Norbert Ross, John Coley, Sandra Waxman, Will Bennis, Karen Washinawatok, and numerous students for their support.

Over the past ten years, APS Fellow Alison Gopnik has been exploring how children learn about causal structure, and how they develop everyday theories of the world, using the computational framework of probabilistic models. Her most recent work relates that kind of probabilistic causal learning to the sort of social "theory of mind" learning she first explored in the 1980s. The Cattell grant will allow her to be part of a group of 8 visiting fellows including biologists and anthropologists at the University of Oxford exploring the evolution of cognition, from both a social and cognitive perspective. The grant will also allow her to write a new book exploring the relations between children and caregivers and the role of caregivers in enabling children to develop social knowledge. "The biggest problem for many academics is that we become so immersed in the specific details of research at our own university that it's harder to pull back and get the big picture," said Gopnik, "The Cattell fellowship will allow me to take the computational work we've been doing in the last ten years and relate it both to the broader biological and evolutionary context and the social context."

Cattell, a renowned pioneer of American psychology, dedicated his career to establishing the field as a legitimate, academic science. In 1942, Cattell advanced this goal by donating the majority of his holdings in the Psychological Corporation to create a fund in his name. The Fund's core objective was to support scientific research and disseminate knowledge that would advance the development of psychological science and its functional applications. In 1974, a set of supplementary sabbatical awards were created from this fund. More information on the Cattell Fund Fellowships can be found at <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/awards/cattellfund>. ?