

CITATION FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF SCIENCE  
AWARDED TO PROFESSOR DOROTHY BISHOP



Mr Chancellor,

“Academic, blogger, and all-round good egg” was the summary description given recently to Dorothy Bishop by Dr Jon Sutton, Editor of *The Psychologist*. Later I’ll consider what kind of an egg she may be.

Dorothy Bishop is one of the most distinguished psychologists of her generation. She has pioneered the investigation of impairments in the development of language. Humans are born with some kind of capacity to develop language, but it’s very unclear what it is, and there certainly isn’t anything like a language ‘gene’. Communication problems feature in a range of developmental disorders including autism, dyslexia and learning disabilities of other kinds. More specific language impairments also occur but these are rare. Dorothy has posed and answered questions about auditory and grammatical processing in specific and less specific language impairments, the interactions between genes and environment, and the boundaries between different kinds of impairments. She has created important tests that help speech and language therapists and psychologists diagnose disorders and design interventions appropriate to them. And it is of fundamental theoretical importance, because understanding how brains deliver and decipher language helps us to understand one of the key ingredients in the complex recipe that makes us human.

Dorothy obtained a First class degree in psychology in Oxford and went on to clinical psychology training at the Institute of Psychiatry in London. She then returned to Oxford to do research with neuropsychologist Freda Newcombe with whom she began her work on developmental language disorders – her field ever since. She is a career researcher, supported for many years by the Medical Research Council, here in Newcastle for four years till 1986, then in Psychology at Manchester till 1991, and then at the Applied Psychology Unit in

Cambridge till 1998. She is now based in Oxford where she has been a Wellcome Principal Research Fellow since 1998.

Dorothy is prolific – The Web of Science lists over 70 titles published **in the last five years** – and that's without her web publishing, of which more later. Her work is extremely well cited, averaging over 40 citations per article and with an H factor – a measure of personal impact – of well above 50. These are high numbers in our fields.

Dorothy is a Fellow of the British Academy, and of the Academy of Medical Sciences, and has Honorary Fellowships from the College of Speech and Language Therapists and from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. Her book 'Uncommon Understanding' won the book of the year prize from the British Psychological Society in 1999.

The methodologies she uses in her work are fiendishly challenging – longitudinal cohort investigations, twin studies, genetic linkage, brain imaging, and require skills of research design and statistical analysis across a range of disciplinary interfaces. Her mastery of all these techniques alongside her penetrating critiques of bad science in her area should make her one of the scariest psychologists around, if she weren't so thoroughly decent with it all.

I said mastery... am I being sexist here? Dorothy has a long-standing interest in the question of why women are under-represented in most areas of academia though over-represented amongst the student body in some. What is it that conspires to keep numbers of senior women low even in a discipline like psychology where there is a large majority of undergraduates who are women? She has addressed our own NU-Women network here on these matters. Characteristically Dorothy has researched in detail the statistics and the possible causes and likely remedies.

For example, she notes research which shows the subtle prejudices that can operate against women – prejudices that women as well as men hold. Understanding such prejudices, she has herself always published her articles using a gender-neutral name - D.V.M Bishop.

But then there is her alter-ego, DeevyBee. DeevyBee posts a blog on serious academic and scientific issues, but also reflects on the lighter sides of academic

life. Here she critiques a wider range of discourse, for example through nominations for her Orwellian prize for misrepresentation of science by journalists, and her sublime system for scoring the winner each year. Her extraordinary blog has burgeoned to the point that she has now helpfully organised it into discreet sections covering such areas as, Statistics, Science and Religion, Women and Humour. This last section includes some delightful ramblings sometimes featuring an anonymous 'husband'.

Those of us in the know, know that husband is Pat Rabbitt, who memorably described his own work on ageing as examining whether you lost your marbles all at once or independently. Husband, now retired with marbles intact, features frequently, and helpfully, on Dorothy's blog. We hear about him rustling up a risotto while Deevy works tirelessly on her, well....blog. Or suggesting that a fridge magnet can be used to retrieve a fiddly battery inserted the wrong way round by the impetuous Deevy who was trying to get a lash-up video camera to work.

Dorothy's blog serves the purpose of reminding us of her wicked humour, formidable intellect, and perseverance. And of her capacity to deploy new communication media to enhance rather than dumb down her scientific messages. Everything that she does – light-hearted or not – is truly excellent. Characteristically her blog was Runner Up of the Good Thinking Society's Science Blog of 2012. And her popular writing took off still further a couple of years ago when she began writing crime fiction. Dorothy and Pat used to make regular academic visits to the University of Western Australia and enjoyed the interesting cultural mix in the town of Freemantle. Plunged into the depths of winter on return from Freemantle one December, she began to write crime novels for Kindle. She has just published her third, all starring the intrepid Rose Absalom, Australia's answer to Miss Marple. Deevy writes "Recently widowed at the age of 64, Rose is lacking in libido, energy or education, and decides to volunteer as a victim support worker" .....and she's off. Proceeds from these e-novels go to the fund for preservation of the Black Cockatoo, appropriately enough as the proceeds thus far, according to Dorothy and Pat, are peanuts.

From whence comes this strand of her own intellectual DNA? Intriguingly, her great grandfather Rudolf Eucken won the Nobel Prize for Literature – though for rather austere philosophical works – not for the kind of creative writing

engaged in by Deevy Bishop. But with the quality of her science and the breadth, diversity and excellence of her wider communication, she certainly lives up to this heritage.

So, what kind of an egg? Obviously not a scrambled egg, or a dippy egg, though not completely hardboiled either. But there's a kind of egg around now which is much coveted because it conceals an unexpected surprise within. A treasure egg – that's the one.

Chancellor, in recognition of her contribution to speech and language sciences, psychology, and wider science communication, I invite you to confer upon Dorothy Vera Margaret Bishop the honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

Vicki Bruce, 10 July 2013