

CRITICAL REVIEWS AND DIALOGUES

Introduction to Parkin/Baddeley dialogue

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Fortunately, it is the rare neuropsychologist who still uses the term “frontal lobe functions” to refer to the collection of supervisory and regulatory mental processes we now typically call the “executive functions.” Most of us have come to realize that simply using a neuroanatomic moniker for a set of cognitive processes does not a neuropsychology make.

But how far have we really come? Have we simply substituted one poorly-defined concept for another? Alan J. Parkin (University of Sussex) argues that we have, if we speak of the “central executive” as a unitary mechanism for the

organization of behavior and the allocation of processing resources. Alan Baddeley (University of Bristol) comes to the defense of the concept he introduced a quarter century ago and maintains that conceptual misunderstandings underlie Parkin’s critique. The scintillating dialogue that follows illustrates the interactive roles of experimental psychological data and clinical neurological phenomena in contemporary neuropsychology. Moreover, it teaches us that, without clear concepts and cogent mind/brain theories, neither of these will advance our science.