



## Two Questions

- 1) What is the relationship (if any) between the structure of concepts and the structure of their referents?
  - (Does the structure of concepts mirror, in some way, the structure of their referents?)
  - (Are concepts structured at all?)
- 2) What is the relationship (if any) between the structuredness of concepts and levels of consciousness?
  - (To Prinz, concepts are prototypes; but do we really think of our concepts that way?)
  - (In Fodor's language of thought [LOT], most concepts are lexical concepts and all lexical concepts are atomic. But how well does LOT apply to unconscious cognition?)

Concept (n.): a sub-propositional component of thoughts.

Atom (n.): a unit which, with respect to some dimension of inquiry, has no internal structure: i.e., is indivisible.

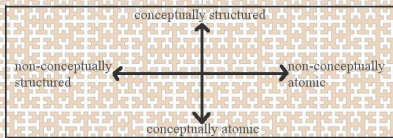
## Two Dimensions of Structure

When Fodor says that most (lexical) concepts are atomic, he means that they are *conceptually* atomic: i.e., they do not decompose into other concepts. They must have some structure -- some *content* -- or they would not be distinguishable from one another.

◀ conceptually structured vs. conceptually atomic ▶

Just as concepts might be conceptually structured or conceptually atomic, so, too, they might be structured or atomic in terms of their *non-conceptual* structure.

◀ non-conceptually structured vs. non-conceptually atomic ▶



## Two Directions to Compositionality

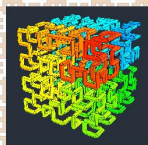
Whenever you have these building blocks, you can assemble them according to these rules to make a new (larger) building block.

◀ composing upward ▶

Whenever you have a building block that looks like this, you can replace it with a set of (smaller) building blocks, assembled according to these rules.

◀ composing downward (decomposing) ▶

Again, to Fodor, most concepts are conceptually atomic. So, they only compose upward. Per Prinz: elegance at a price!



## Levels of Consciousness

Could talk in terms of discrete levels:

unconscious - conscious - self-conscious

(cf. Damasio's unconscious - core consciousness - extended consciousness or proto-self - core self - autobiographical self)

...Or in terms of a continuum:

◀ unconscious ————— fully self-conscious ▶

Maybe the story one tells about concepts, be in e.g. Fodorian or Prinzian, depends in part on what level you're looking at.

Maybe both accounts (or something like them) are necessary to a complete account of concepts!

Maybe there's not a single correct answer as to what a concept is!



Whatever account of concepts one takes, concepts provide the continuity to cognition and to experience that a strictly non-conceptual account of either cannot.

## Reconciling Fodor & Prinz

**Fodor: rationalist - from symbolic AI/GOFAI tradition**

Approach amenable to understanding high-level cognition and taking a top-down approach.

Fodor: concepts can't be prototypes because prototypes don't compose. (pet fish)

**Prinz: concept empiricist - very different background**

Approach more amenable to understanding lower-level cognition and taking a bottom-up approach.

Prinz: concepts can't be just prototypes, but with sensible caveats, prototypes can compose.

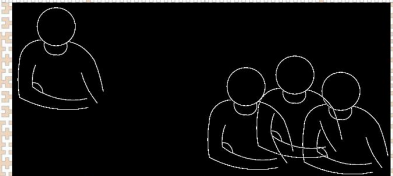


## The Self-Reflective Self Full Self-Consciousness

When people think of concepts as concepts -- as, I believe, even lay persons clearly do -- then it's natural to understand them as complexly structured composites of concepts.

sense: conceptually structured, non-conceptually-atomic label (could be Fodor's atom) ↔ definition.

reference: conceptually atomic, non-conceptually structured pointer ↔ referent "in world".



levels of consciousness / levels of self

## The Unreflective Self Unreflective Consciousness and the Unconscious

When people use concepts without thinking of them as concepts, then I think that we, as philosophers of concepts, need means to specify the contents of those very same concepts non-conceptually, using e.g. methods suggested by synthetic phenomenology (per Chrisley).

sense: conceptually atomic, non-conceptually structured shape (could be Prinz's scale models) ↔ location within a conceptual space

## Two Directions Forward

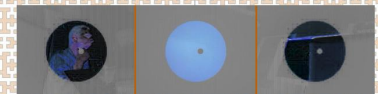
Refining the theory toward something that can be implemented in e.g. a toy-world model.

(For example: a tool for helping people build an external model of a portion of their conceptual domain and examine it for accuracy, completeness and consistency.)

Go ahead and implement a toy-world model as a way of driving the theory forward!

(The goal: a tight loop between implementation - theory - implicit model - explicit model, and back to implementation.)

In any case, both the theory and the concepts it seeks to understand are dynamically engaged with their environment!



Concepts help us piece our moment-by-moment-by-moment experience of the world together.

## References

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- Prinz, J. (2007). "Picture this: concepts are constituted by percepts," conference presentation, *Concepts: Content and Constitution*, 11-12 May 2007, Copenhagen.

Concept (n.): a sub-propositional component of thoughts.

