



## The Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University


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### Your Stories

- A LA UNA DE LA TARDE

*John R. Walsh, Class of 1979-80*

(At a farewell dinner for fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences) After optional work and... Read more...

- All in the Family

*Hester Goodenough Gelber, Daughter of Ward Goodenough, Class of 1957-58*

My father, the Anthropologist Ward Goodenough, was at the Center in 1957-58. My parents, younger sister Debbie (12), and younger... Read

## My Year at CASBS *Daniel C. Dennett, Class of 1979-80*

My year at CASBS was 1979-80, as a member of the group assembled by Stanford Professor John McCarthy, founding father of Artificial Intelligence (and coiner of the term), to spend the year working on Artificial Intelligence and philosophy. That year has proven to be one of the major turning points in my academic life. McCarthy assembled an interdisciplinary gang of six that would be hard to strengthen. John Haugeland and I were the philosophers, and the two of us had spent more time with AI than any other philosophers aside from Hubert Dreyfus at Berkeley, the notorious critic of AI (*What Computers Can't Do*, and other works). Zenon Pylyshyn, the philosophically astute cognitive psychologist and AI modeler, along with McCarthy, Patrick Hayes, and Robert Moore were the philosophically sophisticated AI researchers. McCarthy and Hayes were the coauthors of the seminal paper on the Frame Problem, and Moore was a student and colleague of McCarthy's, well read in logic and philosophy, and a very quick study.

We got on very well all year, after a rocky start. The first week at the Center was devoted to introducing ourselves to the other members by spending a day each on what we thought the most interesting and pressing issues were and why. It got off to a blazing start, with many interruptions and objections, and while we youngsters were having a fine old time of philosophical phisticuffs, John was looking glummer and glummer. Then he blew up. As I recall, his words were roughly as follows: "Look. You're all plenty smart. I wouldn't have invited you if you weren't. Stop trying to impress each other and me. Stop the cute counterexamples and

more...

- America the Unusual  
*John Kingdon, Class of 1987-88*

I was a Fellow at the Center in 1987-88. I had been Chair of my department at Michigan for the...

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- CASBS Memories  
*Peter Eisinger, Class of 1985-86*

The class of 1986 worked hard and played hard. I wrote the first half of a book during my year....

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- CASBS Recollection  
*Robert H. Bates, Class of 1993-94 & 1985-86*

I have been fortunate to have spent two years at the Center. For reasons of space, I write only about...

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- CASBS Reflections  
*Bob Scott, Associate Director 1983-2001*

Being part of the Center for more than two decades was a genuine privilege. I made friendships and

gotchas, and let's get down to some serious work, or I'll leave you all up here on the hill to chatter away for the rest of the year while I go back to my office at SAIL (Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory)." He had our attention, and he proceeded to tell us about his war experience, working on very difficult technical problems (with radar and other novelties) among people who didn't snipe, didn't rush in for the kill when somebody was confused; they pitched in constructively to help! This was the teamwork he had hoped for from us; the problems were very hard, and if we couldn't work together on them, the year would be a waste of everybody's time.

Duly chastised, we reformed our ways on the spot, and while we never achieved the sort of Unified Philosophical Understanding of Artificial Intelligence that John dreamed of creating, we did make some real progress. John Haugeland wrote two excellent books, *MIND DESIGN*, 1981, and *ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: THE VERY IDEA*, 1985, and I wrote the paper "Cognitive Wheels: the Frame Problem of AI," 1984, which introduced the frame problem to philosophy and to cognitive science more generally. And more important, John McCarthy's plea for truly constructive discussion in place of smartypants sniping has flavored my research and teaching ever since. I have come to despise the oh-so-clever competitive repartee that many graduate students in philosophy are taught to engage in, not explicitly, but by the examples set by their professors.

McCarthy had arranged for us all to have computer monitors hard-wired to the Arpanet via SAIL in our studies, and it was an intense year of immersion in computers and computing for me and John Haugeland. Haugeland took it farther than I, and was soon writing macros to ease his enthusiastic use of the preposterously clunky email system we had. WYSIWYG—what you see is what you get—wasn't on the horizon yet, and our messages had to be festooned with control codes and nested brackets, using a line editor that was intolerant of novelty, so John basically designed his own personal word processor to make the system user-friendly just for him. We interleaved our own research and writing with joint meetings on an irregular basis, conferring and querying and tutoring and explaining. Every day was intense, in my memory, but there was still plenty of time to get to know the other fellows at lunch, and volleyball after lunch, or sometimes tennis down the hill somewhere.

acquaintanceships with... [Read more...](#)

- CASBS: Effects on Me and Observations for the Future *Kenneth J. Arrow, Class of 1956-57*

(Talk given at the 60th Anniversary Event on Nov 9, 2014) Basic inspiration: a unity of the social sciences with... [Read more...](#)

- CASBS: Spring, 1970 *Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, Class of 1969-70*

It was the spring of 1970. We Fellows were beginning to feel the anxiety of hoping to finish our work;... [Read more...](#)

- Elysium *Gerald Holton, Class of 1975-76*

Our stay (1975-76) at the Center was magical, felt to be so both at the time and in retrospect-- a... [Read more...](#)

- Fire on the Hill: The Making of a Modern Classic *Kamala Visweswaran (Class of 2014-15) on M.N. Srinivas, Class of*

Our group attracted a few others, and for a while John Searle and Bert Dreyfus would drive down from Berkeley to have sessions with us—though after one session, as I recall, John McCarthy left us alone, and for good reason. No matter what the agreed upon topic of the day was, Searle would soon manage to turn the discussion to his Chinese Room thought experiment, which he later went on to publish in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*—and the rest is history, as one says. When I think that I have by now spent hundreds of hours over 35 years explaining the flaws in this famous but misbegotten intuition pump, I am consoled by the reflection that Searle has no doubt devoted at least ten times more precious time to presenting and discussing it. I remember that Bert Dreyfus did not have much to say during these discussions, probably because his more focused (if sometimes exaggerated) criticisms of AI could not be expressed without undercutting his Berkeley colleague.

Other frequent visitors were my old friends Marvin Minsky and Jerry Fodor, and late in the spring we hosted a conference on AI and philosophy drawing researchers from both philosophy and AI from all over. The brilliant, combative Oxford philosopher Gareth Evans had just been appointed the Wilde Reader of Mental Philosophy in Oxford, and I made a point of inviting him to come early, since our conversations in Oxford the previous year had persuaded me that he was ideally positioned to be both a critic and introducer of AI to philosophers in the UK. He spent a week before the conference meeting with our group, and his famous intensity was much in evidence. He played a big role in the conference, in spite of health problems about which he was stubbornly uninformative. He returned to Oxford after the conference, and a couple of months later died of lung cancer, aged 34.

In addition to working with McCarthy's group, I labored over the single hardest piece of philosophical analysis I have ever engaged in, my long and arduous critique of "propositional attitudes" and the conceptual machinery philosophers had erected in their defense, "Beyond Belief" (1982), once unforgettably retitled by Patricia Churchland "Beyond Belief and Past Caring." I could not have hammered out the ideas in that piece anywhere else in academia, I think. It benefited immeasurably from the criticism and advice of Gareth Evans (who gently advised me to work on easier topics!), John Haugeland, Paul Benacerraf, and other fellows at the Center that year, and the Stanford philosophers and logicians John Perry and Jon Barwise. Having unburdened myself of that project, I found it intellectually comfortable to devote more and more of my time

1964-65 & 1969-70

I came to know of MN Srinivas as a UC Berkeley student in a course on "Social Stratification in India"... Read more...

and energy to topics and questions that were not strictly speaking philosophical, but should, in my opinion, be valuable food for philosophical thought. The year at CASBS gave me a time and place to pivot, and this was enhanced by the arrival one day of Douglas Hofstadter, who had just reviewed my book *Brainstorms* (1978) for the *New York Review of Books*, and wanted to meet me during a visit to his parents' home in Palo Alto. (His father was the Nobel laureate Stanford physicist, Robert Hofstadter.) Doug proposed that we compose an anthology together, and I at first resisted vigorously; I had plenty of projects lined up, and a trade book anthology was low on my list. But I had been dazzled by his *Gödel Escher Bach*, (1979), just published, and eventually he persuaded me—I'm happy to say. The success of our joint effort, *The Mind's I* (1982), has reverberated wonderfully for more than thirty years, and he's been a friend and colleague ever since.

As if all that were not enough, my year at CASBS also provided a setting for me to become both a licensed scuba diver, and a windsurfer. One day in the winter I looked out my study window and saw, down on the Stanford campus, that the ugly brown patch of ground had filled with winter rain and become Lagunita, and a dozen or so students were zipping around on windsurfers. "I have to do that!" I proclaimed, and John McCarthy joined me for a trip down the hill that very afternoon to see if I could rent or borrow one of these fabulous craft. It turned out I could rent one by the hour, and John watched from a safe seat on the shore while I fell and fell and fell and fell, never managing to get going for more than a few yards, in spite of my many years of experience as a sailor. When I dragged myself ashore and turned the board in, he said "Ok, I guess you've had enough of that!" "Oh no," I replied, and went back the next day and the next, when I finally got it, and began my career as a windsurfer. I bought my own, which I still have, an original teak-boomed squishy-bow Windsurfer, but over the years I've had other sailboards, now all sold off, since my recent shoulder arthritis forced me into retirement. I do plan to teach my grandchildren the fine points and get them going, using my antique original.

As for scuba diving, I did dives all over the world for many years, until one sad day a close friend of ours died diving, and I promised my wife I'd stick to snorkeling henceforth.

CASBS found the Dennett family a delightful house to rent in Atherton, complete with citrus and olive trees, a beautiful

dark-bottomed pool, a grand piano, a dog and two cats to care for, and two cars. Our children, aged nine and seven, had the time of their young lives, with visits to Marine Land and Disneyland thrown in, and my wife, Susan, and I had a fine time exploring the peninsula and beyond, and watching our children leap into new worlds. It was a fine adventure of mind and body, for which we are all grateful.

◀ My Year at CASBS

*Martin H. Krieger, Class of 1973-74*

Serendipity at CASBS in 1971-72 That Stimulated a Career

Change

*Frederick L. Newman, Class of 1971-72* ▶

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