LIFELINE

Chris McManus

Chris McManus qualified as a doctor, then became an experimental psychologist, and is now professor of psychology at University College London and Imperial College School of Medicine. A foot in each camp makes him an outsider in each, but he nevertheless tries to be an ambassador between psychology and medicine, as by co-editing the forthcoming Cambridge Handbook of Psychology, Health and Medicine.

Who was your most influential teacher? Nick Humphrey, for showing me there is nothing psychology cannot explore, that the hardest of thought is necessary, and evidence comes from unlikely places.

Which aspect of your work gives you most pleasure? In front of a computer screen, enthusing with a student over freshly collected data, searching for the sense and meaning.

Which single medical advance would benefit most people? Sequencing the genes for humanity and compassion, presumably found on the X-chromosome.

Which event had most effect on your work? Peter Richards asking me to collaborate on a study of medical-student selection; 17 years later, many people assume I am genuinely a medical educationist.

What is your unrealised ambition? Finding the gene for left-handedness and cerebral language dominance.

Which alternative profession would you have liked to pursue? An artist. My evening class is the still centre of a turning world, where seeing something properly for the first time is as close as I’ll get to transcendence.

What would be your advice to a newly qualified doctor? I’ll steal a line of Marshall Marinker’s: “Remember every complex problem has a simple solution—and it’s wrong.”

Whom do you most admire? Tony Blair. For doing it.

What was your biggest mistake? None, as yet, professionally (except this?); but too many in my personal life.