Information and Association

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1 Here is what happened. I started out to write something about the use of associative networks as models of mental processes, but it kept turning into a paper about what notion of information is the right one to use in cognitive psychology. So I thought: Very well then, I shall write something about what notion of information is the right one to use in cognitive psychology. When I set to work on that, however, it kept turning into a paper about the use of associative networks as models of mental processes.

It began to dawn upon me that perhaps there is some connection between questions about the use of associative networks as models of mental processes and questions about what notion of information is the right one to use in cognitive psychology. This idea rather surprised me since I do not remember ever having heard these two sorts of questions discussed together. (Indeed, the people who have recently had interesting things to say about the first are mostly psychologists and the people who have recently had interesting things to say about the second are mostly philosophers-cum-semanticists. For all I know, cognitive science being what it is, these two groups of researchers have never heard of one another.) So it occurred to me that perhaps I should write a paper about information and association and how views about the one are related to views about the other.

What follows is thus cartography. I want to see how some ideas that are current in cognitive science fit together to comprise a landscape. The main thesis is that two markedly distinguishable prototheories at present occupy the field, and that these express very different — perhaps irreconcilable — construals of the doctrine that minds are information processors. I have, as will become abundantly evident, my preference as between these views, but my present purposes are only partly polemical. I am also interested in getting clear what the options are and how they are assembled from their parts.

By way of prospectus, then, the views I have in mind are typified by the following galaxies of claims: