PHILOSOPHY 407/507: Philosophy and Cognitive Science

Fall 2012—Course Syllabus

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PLC 355    Meets: MW 10:00-11:50
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Course Description: The guiding theme for this seminar is the possibility of a constructive collaboration between philosophy and the cognitive sciences. The cognitive sciences claim to offer empirical studies of the nature of mind, thought, and language. Do they thereby replace traditional philosophy of mind? I propose that philosophy of mind and language can no longer proceed in ignorance of cognitive science; however, there remains an important role for philosophical reflection in relation to the empirical scientific research. Ideally, there should be what Patricia Churchland has called a “co-evolution” of philosophy and the sciences. We will focus on some selected key issues from the philosophy of mind and language that are illuminated by empirical research in the cognitive sciences, and we will then ask how philosophy can contribute to the work of cognitive scientists.

Schedule of Topics/Readings

Week 1
Sept. 24 Introduction—What is cognitive science and what are the philosophical issues?
   Read: Lakoff & Johnson, Chs. 1,2 (3-15)
Sept. 26 Cognition and the Brain
   Edelman & Tononi, Ch. 4 (37-50); Feldman, Ch. 4 (43-58), Ch. 5 (59-70).

Week 2
Oct. 1 Computational Models of Cognition
   Feldman, Ch. 6 (71-82), Ch. 7 (85-94), Ch. 9 (105-122)
Oct. 3 Consciousness and the Brain
   Edelman & Tononi, Ch. 5 (51-61), Ch. 7 (80-92), Ch. 9 (102-110).

Week 3
Oct. 8 Edelman & Tononi, Ch. 12 (139-154), Ch. 13 (157-175).
Oct. 10 Life Management, Homeostasis, and Maps/Images
   Damasio, Ch. 1 (3-23), Ch. 2 (31-52), Ch. 3(63-77)

Week 4
Oct. 15 Emotions, Feelings, and Memory
   Damasio, Ch. 5 (108-129), Ch. 6 (130-147)
Oct. 17 Consciousness and Proto-self, Core Self, Autobiographical Self
   Damasio, Ch. 7 (157-169), Ch. 8 (180-209), Ch. 9 (210-215)
Week 5
Oct. 22  Embodied Meaning and Thought
        Lakoff & Johnson, Ch. 3
[First short essay due]

Oct. 24 Image schemas
        Dodge & Lakoff, “Image Schemas”

Week 6
Oct. 29 Concepts
        Barsalou, “Perceptual Symbol Systems” (577-587)
Oct. 31 Barsalou, “Perceptual Symbol Systems” (587-609)

Week 7
Nov. 5 Concepts
        Gallese, “A Neuroscientific Grasp of Concepts”
        Gallese & Lakoff, “The Brain’s Concepts”

Nov. 7 Language and Abstract Thought
        Lakoff & Johnson, Ch. 4, Ch. 5
        Lakoff, “The Neural Theory of Metaphor”

Week 8
Nov. 12 Metaphors for Mind
        Lakoff & Johnson, Ch. 12 (235-266)
Nov. 14 Mind and Mechanism
        Bechtel, Ch. 1 (1-48)
[Second short essay due]

Week 9
Nov. 19 Bechtel, Ch. 4 (129-158)
Nov. 21 Bechtel, Ch. 5 (159-200)

Nov. 23 Bechtel, Ch. 6 (201-238)

Week 10
Nov. 26 Flanagan, “Free Will”
Nov. 28 Flanagan, “Normative Mind Science? Psychology, Neuroscience, and the Good Life”

Week 11
Term papers due no later than 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 4.
Assignments/Grading: Grades will be based on two short philosophical essays (3-5 pp.) and one term paper (12-20 pp.). Each short essay counts as 25% and the term paper constitutes 50% of your grade. Class participation will be taken into consideration for cases of borderline grades (e.g., B+/A-). The short essays are on topics assigned by me, while the term paper is on a topic of your choice, subject to approval by me. Due dates of essays are indicated in the schedule of readings above.