

Developmental Proseminar
Concepts
September 10

READING

Laurence, S. & Margolis, E. (1999). *Concepts and Cognitive Science*. In E. Margolis & S. Laurence (Eds.), *Concepts: Core Readings*. (pp. 3-82). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

This is the best tutorial I know on the philosophy and cognitive science literatures on concepts. The whole paper is worth reading, but it's very dense. For Thursday's class read *carefully* about half of the chapter (as total of about 35 pages of reading for this class). Put the time into understanding this material. Formulate questions and objections. Consider which points apply to mental representations in general, and which to concepts in particular. That is, do you think concepts are different from perceptual representations, sensory representations, motor representations...? If so, how?

pages 1 - 5, up to *Concepts as Abstracta vs. Concepts as Mental Representations*.

pages 8-18, starting with "Given this way..." and up to the section *The problem of analyticity*

pages 21- 34, up to "one way to avoid these conclusions...."

pages 36-43, starting with *The missing prototypes problem* up to *The Theory theory*. **Skip that section and the section on the *The neoclassical theory*.** We may consider the Theory theory (the treatment of in this chapter I do not like) later in the class.

pages 59-65. Read the section on atomism and information semantics up to page 65. *The problem of analytic data*.

pages, 67-68. Read *The problem of compositionality*.

pages 72-75. Read *Concluding remarks*

PREPARING FOR THE CLASS

As you do the reading, keep the following questions in mind. Come prepared to lead the discussion on I, II, or III.

- I. What was the British empiricists' theory (the classical view) of concepts? How did that theory address all of the phenomena a theory of concepts is responsible for explaining?

Why have most cognitive scientists abandoned the classical view?

- II. What is the prototype theory. How does it address all the phenomena a theory of concepts is responsible for explaining?

Why have most cognitive scientists abandoned the prototype theory?

- III. What is the atomism theory? How does it address all the phenomena a theory of concepts is responsible for explaining?

Why did most cognitive scientists not adopt this theory in the first place?