Affect, Decision Making, and Metacognition
PHIL 878A – Seminar in Cognitive Studies
Mondays, 4.30 pm to 7.00 pm in the Seminar Room (Sk 1116)

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Course Outline
This seminar will discuss a cluster of issues in philosophy of mind / cognitive science centering on the nature of affective states and their role in both human decision making and metacognitive reasoning. While the approach is broadly philosophical / theoretical, many of the papers we read are likely to be empirical. We will look at work examining the nature of emotions, as well as the nature of affective states more generally (including pain). We will discuss the role of affect in prospection (future-oriented imagining), which is increasingly believed to play a central role in decision making. And we will discuss whether metacognitive feelings (feelings of knowing, feelings of uncertainty, and so on) are affective in nature, and whether their content is or is not metarepresentational. We will also discuss the extent to which management of one’s own emotions is metarepresentational or first-order-executive in nature.

Note that this seminar will be an opinionated introduction to the debates about the nature of affect, rather than a dispassionate survey. It represents the instructor’s attempt to figure out what the interesting issues are, especially in light of recent data and new theoretical claims. But this does not mean that students are required (or indeed pressured) to share his vision. In particular, you should not be afraid to defend conflicting views in discussion and in your term-papers.

Course arrangements
During the first twelve weeks or so of the course (depending on the number of students registered for credit), classes will have the following format (starting in week #2): the first two-thirds of each session will be devoted to student-led discussion of the reading material for that week. One or more members of the class will be designated to lead and chair the discussion. But everyone will need to read the material carefully, and everyone will need to cooperate to make it work. In the concluding part of each session the instructor will introduce the material to be read for the week following. The instructor’s powerpoint slides will (where possible) be published in advance in ELMS, so that you can take notes directly onto your own copy as the lecture proceeds.

The remainder of the course will be reserved for presentation and discussion of draft
student term-papers. Depending on the number of students registered for credit, a schedule will get finalized early in the Spring and posted on the ELMS site.

 Copies of all the basic readings for the course will be posted on the ELMS site. (More may need to be researched for purposes of writing the term-paper, of course.) Many are experimental in nature, or reviews of experimental studies. Don’t get too bogged down in the technical details, and don’t be afraid to skim where necessary. Our task is to try to figure out what the results mean for different theories of the nature of human affect, human cognitive architecture, and human decision making.

**Assessment**

Assessment for the course will be driven almost entirely by the final term paper. This will need to be drafted in outline in time for oral presentation to the class during the final few sessions of term. If there are three presenters per class, plan on 25 minutes for presentation and a little under 25 minutes for discussion. If there are four per class, it will be 20 minutes for the presentation and 15 for discussion.

All for-credit students should make an appointment to meet with me to discuss an abstract of the intended term paper, as well as plans for your oral presentation, sometime during the two weeks prior to your scheduled presentation.

Following your oral presentation, initial drafts of your paper will then need to be submitted to me (by email attachment please) for critical comment by **Friday May 20**. I will return these with comments before the end of May, and final versions should then be submitted for grading (again by email attachment) by **August 29** (the first day of Fall Semester).

The final version of the paper should be of normal article length (between 7,000 and 9,000 words inclusive of all notes and references). Your first draft should be a bit shorter, to allow for expansion in response to feedback.

You can set your own question for the term paper, provided that it is drawn from among the topics covered by the seminar. You could either choose a question that is covered in one or two sessions, or a question that links together different elements of the course, or runs as a theme throughout it.

Grading for the course will be 20% for the oral presentation and subsequent handling of class discussion (judged both for content and for presentational skills), 80% for the final term paper.