

## PHIL\*4360-01

### THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE II [0.50]

**Instructor:** D. Dedrick

**Brief course synopsis:**

The interdisciplinary study of concepts

Jerry Fodor's famous argument for concept nativism has a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part claims that all computational or psychological accounts of the learning of a new representation must start with some representations as input, and that the most such accounts can deliver as output are representations constructed out of those initial resources. The empirical part observes that most lexical concepts are not structured or constructed out of any other representations. They are atomic. So they must be innate - accounting for their acquisition is beyond the range of cognitive science.

This view has proved controversial for many reasons: it makes empiricism about concepts out to be false; it has attributed to us huge innate conceptual resources (that seem absurd to some: did our ancient ancestors really have a concept of "telephone" built in?); it makes psychology pretty boring, since there is no learning to study and explain, but rather an "unfolding." In this course we look at Susan Carey's important book *The Origin of Concepts* [Oxford 2009], which makes a strong case for a developmentalist account of concepts. Carey is a psychologist familiar with the philosophy of cognitive science and mind, and her work ranges widely across cognitive psychology, philosophy, linguistics, infant studies, cross-species animal research, cross-cultural human research. This highly accessible work serves as an excellent introduction to the styles of research in these different but related fields, as well as a response to Fodor's problematic argument.

**Reading:**

Susan Carey, *The Origin of Concepts*, Oxford 2009. [Some other readings will be supplied.]

**Evaluation:**

- 1 presentation, 20%
- participation, 20%
- Essay, 60%.