



the mcdonnell project in philosophy and the neurosciences

neurophilosophy: the state of the art

Introduction

Neurophilosophy is an exciting new field that has emerged from the shared concerns of contemporary philosophers and neuroscientists. It encompasses traditional philosophical questions, which are today finding new expression in the work of neuroscientists, and issues in the theoretical foundations of neuroscience, towards which philosophers are increasingly making a contribution.

[The McDonnell Project in Philosophy and the Neurosciences](#) (see sidebar) will be holding its final meeting in 2005. The aims of this meeting are those of the project: to facilitate collaboration between philosophers and neuroscientists, to communicate new findings in neurophilosophy, and to encourage a new generation of researchers to become involved in this burgeoning field.

Neurophilosophy: The State of the Art, will be held at Caltech in June 2005. It will incorporate both a workshop for early career researchers, and a public meeting where distinguished philosophers and neuroscientists, and the members of the project, will speculate about the present state and future prospects of neurophilosophy.

In 1999, the [James S. McDonnell Foundation](#) awarded ten James S. McDonnell Centennial Fellowships to commemorate the centennial of James S. McDonnell's birth. **The McDonnell Project in Philosophy and the Neurosciences** is funded by the fellowship awarded to Kathleen Akins (a Philosopher at [Simon Fraser University](#)). The goal of the Project is to provide an international group of researchers with the means, opportunity, and community to do research at the intersection of philosophy and the neurosciences.

Workshop

The meeting will begin with a three day workshop (18th – 20th June 2005) aimed at early career researchers from both the neurosciences and philosophy. We will invite about 20 participants, selected via a competitive process which will be announced shortly. Sessions will consist of seminars/tutorials of 2–4 hours duration. About half the sessions will take a theme from neurophilosophy, introducing the relevant philosophy and exploring work that exemplifies fruitful interaction between philosophy and neuroscience. Proposed themes are:

- Neural Representation & Neural Computation
- Explaining Subjectivity/Consciousness
- Social Neuroscience
- Theory Building in Neuroscience & Psychology
- Colour Perception
- Philosophy of Cognitive Neuropsychiatry

The remaining sessions will be tailor-made for those with little or no experience in the methods of neuroscience. They will provide a brief overview of neuroscience: its history and techniques, the current state of the art, and future directions. A principal focus will be to consider which research questions can be fruitfully addressed using the current methods of neuroscience, and which await future developments. A project involving use of MRI facilities is being considered as part of the workshop.

Public conference

Following the workshop will be a public conference which we hope will attract in excess of 200 participants. The themes of the conference will complement those of the workshop, but presentations will be aimed at a wider audience, which may include scientists, philosophers, and members of the general public.

Three distinct strands will run through the conference:

1. McDonnell project members will present brief summaries of their work, indicating how they have contributed to integrating philosophy and neuroscience.
2. Neuroscience — invited talks by leading neuroscientists, with emphases on: methods (where we're at now, where things are going); and exciting new findings, especially those findings with philosophical interest, import or relevance.
3. Philosophy — invited talks by leading philosophers, with emphases on: conceptual issues and problems in neuroscience; and philosophical questions that might lend themselves to neuroscientific investigation.

In addition, the conference will provide an opportunity for paper/poster presentations from philosophers and neuroscientists with relevant expertise (an invitation will go out shortly). It will conclude with a panel discussion, led by our team of distinguished advisors, exploring the future prospects for neurophilosophy.

Timing/Location

The conference will be held at:

California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California
June 18 -23, 2005

Immediately following the conference, the Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness will hold its annual conference (ASSC9). Discount rates will be made available to those who register for both conferences.

The conference dates are:

18th – 20th June 2005: McDonnell Project workshop
21st – 23rd June 2005: McDonnell Project conference
24th – 27th June 2005: [ASSC9](#)

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