Week 4b Seminar questions, Bloom Chapters 6-11

Focus on the questions Q1-Q5 in small groups. We will discuss questions Q6 and Q7 and any questions generated by the small groups in the full seminar

Q1 What is an essence (p. 152), and what contrast does Bloom draw between Locke's essentialism and a stronger version (which is rejected by biologists) on p. 152? How does the dinosaur/rhinoceros experiment (p. 153) provide evidence that young children are essentialists? Discuss Bloom's claim that "In such cases, children aren't like scientists who have theories; they are like scientists *before* they have theories." (p.168)Why do you think he entitles the final section "Essentialism Lite" (p. 157f).

Q2 What is meant by *childhood/iconic realism* (p. 174)? What arguments does Bloom give against claims that this phase continues past age 2 (p. 179 ff)? How are these arguments (in particular, the role of artist's intent) important to his claim that visual representations are understood as artifacts (p. 188)? How does this claim relate to his account of naming and categorization in the previous chapter? (p. 189)

Q3 What three possibilities does Bloom consider (p. 211 ff) for the connection between syntax and word learning? Discuss at least one experimental result from Chapter 8 which supports the theory Bloom advocates. On p. 207, Bloom points out that "the ability to use syntax as a cue to word meaning presupposes the ability to syntactically categorize new words." Discuss the "semantic bootstrapping" proposal outlined on p. 208, and Bloom's claim that the apparent circularity of this argument "isn't a serious concern."

Q4 What feature of number learning does Bloom find most surprising and in need of explanation? (p. 218)? What evolutionary theories about the relationship between "numerical language and numerical thought" are described on pp 233-234? What developmental alternative is advocated by Bloom (pp 235 ff)?

Q5 What is *linguistic determinism* (p. 243)? What are some of the strongest arguments that you read (or can think of) in favor of and against this theory? Discuss Levinson's experiments which seem to support this view (p. 246 ff) and Bloom's alternative analysis of these same experiments. Do you agree with Bloom's final claim in this section (p. 248): language doesn't "create new ways of thinking of space" but rather "determines which of the available methods of spatial thought gets used the most."?

Q6 On p. 258, Bloom draws an analogy between language and vision: "Language may be useful in the same sense that vision is useful. It is not a mechanism that gives rise to the capacity to generate and appreciate these ideas in the first place." Do you find this analogy apt? Bloom goes on to say that his book "can be seen as a long argument for just this conclusion." Discuss whether you think the book is successful in this endeavor, by pointing to evidence that seemed particularly compelling (or particularly weak) to you.

Q7 What are the fox and hedgehog strategies, as described on p. 263? What aspects of human mental function strike you as most hedgehog-like, and which are most fox-like? On p. 264, Bloom makes the strong claim that "Word learning is never done through a hedgehog process." Do you agree, or are there some types of word that still strike you as best explained by hedgehog processes? How does this issue bear on the nature of mind, and on the modularity of linguistic function in the brain?

Last small group task: formulate a question for the full session.