Department of Philosophy Invited Lecture
as part of the COREmind Project

IDIOSYNCRATIC GROUNDING: SYNESTHESIA, LANGUAGE, AND ABSTRACT THOUGHT

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Time: Friday, October 30, 2026, 10:30—12:00
Venue: Room SP214, Sedláčkova 15
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How does perception ground abstract thought? Embodied accounts of cognition hold that abstract concepts are grounded in matching concrete representations - either by simulating a specific instance or by mapping them onto structurally similar domains (for example, affection as temperature in “a warm person”, importance as weight in “a heavy matter” and so on). But what if grounding can also be idiosyncratic – what if importance could be grounded in temperature, or affection in the color blue? Drawing on synesthesia’s conceptual asymmetry, its sensitivity to meaning, and its modulation by attention, I propose to reframe it as a conceptual rather than a perceptual phenomenon - and in fact, as an idiosyncratic instantiation of the very mechanism by which abstract thought is grounded. I will present several lines of evidence for this account, focusing on the novel phenomenon of Abstract Lexical Synesthesia, and discuss some of its implications for theories of conceptual representation and philosophy of mind, particularly regarding the relation between language and thought.

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