Talk by Dr. Douglas Hofstadter: Sep 14, 2015
North Ballroom in PMU, 12:30PM

Dr. Hofstadter is a professor of cognitive science at Indiana University. His research focuses on the sense of "I", consciousness, analogy-making, artistic creation, literary translation, and discovery in mathematics and physics. He is best known for his book Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid, first published in 1979. It won both the Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction and a National Book Award (at that time called The American Book Award) for Science. His 2007 book I Am a Strange Loop won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Science and Technology.

“Analogy as the Core of Cognition”

We have been taught by our culture that analogies are Grand Intellectual Achievements, and analogies can indeed be very grand. But we all make non-grand analogies all the time, day in, day out, minute in, minute out, second in, second out. The ubiquity of analogies in thought is nonetheless extremely hard for most people to appreciate, and some people strongly resist the idea, because the smaller or humbler an analogy is, the less it feels like a Grand Intellectual Achievement, and therefore not meritorious of the label “analogy” as it has been imposed on us over the course of our lives. So the common conception of “analogy” keeps on reinforcing itself, but unfortunately that conception excludes 99 percent of the analogies that are made (if not even more than that!).

The purpose of this talk is to show how analogies are everywhere around us, almost invisible, yet blatant once one starts to become aware of them. Once one realizes that analogy-making pervades every nook and cranny of our thinking and every moment of our cognitive lives, then one can develop a radically different perspective on what thinking’s essence really is.

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