John Trueswell:

Welcome to the Eleventh Annual Benjamin and Anne Pinkel Endowed Lecture. The Pinkel Endowed Lecture Series was established through a generous gift from Sheila Pinkel on behalf of the estate of her parents, Benjamin and Anne Pinkel. The Series serves as a memorial tribute to their lives.

Benjamin Pinkel received a Bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering, here, from the University of Pennsylvania in 1930. Throughout his life he was actively interested in the philosophy of the mind and published a monograph in 1992 entitled “Consciousness, Matter, and Energy: The Emergence of Mind in Nature.” The objective of the book was, and I quote, “a re-examination of the mind-body problem in light of new scientific information.” The lecture series is intended to advance the discussion and rigorous study of the deep questions which engaged Dr. Pinkel’s investigations. Over the last ten years, the series has brought in some of the most interesting minds in the field of cognitive science as it pertains to thought, learning, and consciousness. These include Daniel Dennett, Liz Spelke, Martin Nowak, Stan Dehaene, Geoff Hinton, Ray Jackendoff, Colin Camerer, Elissa Newport, and Christof Koch. It’s a great pleasure to add to this list Dr. Alvaro Pascual-Leone who will be speaking about modifying decision-making.

Dr. Pascual-Leone is the Director of the Center for Noninvasive Brain Stimulation and Professor of Neurology at Harvard, the Harvard Medical School, and the Beth Israel Medical Center. He also holds appointments as an Adjunct Professor in Psychiatry and Neurobiology at Boston University and in Cognitive Neuroscience at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard. He is also the Associate Director of the Harvard-Thorndike General Clinical Research Center. Dr. Pascual-Leone was born in Valencia, Spain and attended medical school and completed his PhD in Neurophysiology at the University of
Valencia and at the Albert Ludwig’s University in Freiburg, Germany. He received his neurobiology training at the University of Minnesota where he also completed a fellowship in clinical neurophysiology. He spent four years at the National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke in Bethesda, Maryland, and joined the Harvard Medical School after working in Spain for four years as an Associate Professor in Physiology at the University of Valencia. As stated on his website, Dr. Pascual-Leone’s overall aim in his research is to understand neural plasticity at a systems level by seeking rules of plasticity that are invariant across neural systems and domains. He has made great strides in doing this via careful and very creative experiments on this topic, such as examining the response of the visual cortex in the blind and even modifications in the response of visual areas in visually unimpaired people who have been temporarily blindfolded. It should be noted that Dr. Pascual-Leone uses a dizzying array of techniques in his research, including PET, MRI, trans-cranial magnetic stimulation, EEG, and MEG, but I hope it will be clear from the talk today, his work, rarely, if ever, loses sight of the forest from all the data trees that these devices generate. In fact, I find many of his papers quite accessible for people who are novices in these technical devices. So, because of this, he has received numerous awards for his work on these topics, but without any further delay let’s welcome Dr. Alvaro Pascual-Leone.