

PHLC95-Topics in the philosophy of mind: Perceptual experience

Instructor: Dr. Dustin Stokes
Section: PHLC95H3 LEC01; Winter Term
Lectures: Tues 11:00-1:00 BV264
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Course description

This is a course on the contemporary philosophy of perceptual experience: what is the nature of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching (perhaps among others)? We will divide the course roughly into two general areas.

What is the *structure* of perceptual experience? This question will divide into several. When you have a conscious visual experience, do you directly see the physical objects of the world, or do you instead only have direct causal access to some intermediary entity: a representation of some kind? Do perceptual experiences have *intentionality*? Are they always and only representational, and can this feature fully explain *what they are like*, that is, their subjective, phenomenal features? Finally, sometimes we have illusory and hallucinatory experiences (or we at least could). Are such experiences of the same kind as accurate perceptual experiences (where what you are seeing is really there)? Or are these distinct kinds of things?

What is the relation between *perceptual experience and cognition*? What kinds of things get represented in perceptual experience? For example, do we only see colours, shapes, and edges and interpret or infer the rest, or does vision represent things like causal relations and categories? Do we need concepts to see? For example, can I see a cat as a cat, if I don't have the concept 'CAT'? Do higher-level cognitive states like belief and desire influence, in a direct way, how we hear, see, or otherwise experience the world? And finally, to return to a classic epistemological question, can we acquire knowledge of the world through our perceptual experiences? How?

Text

All readings will be online, on the blackboard course webpage. Note also that, essay assignments, announcements, and other information will also be made available on this site. Please check the site regularly.

The portal may be accessed via: <https://portal.utoronto.ca/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp> (You must login using your UTORid and password. Then find our course: PHLB81 Theories of Mind. Then click 'Content', then 'Course readings').

Assignments/Requirements:

30%	Short paper 1	DUE 15 FEB. (Assigned 8 Feb.)
30%	Short paper 2	DUE 22 MAR. (Assigned 15 Mar.)
40%	Final exam	TBA

The short papers might also be thought of as take-home exams. You will be given a short list of questions, from which you will choose and respond to one. The questions will be distributed in class, and the papers are to be submitted the following week at the start of class. Your responses should be concise and to the point, and should be approximately 750-1250 words.

The final exam will be comprehensive and essay-style, but like the short papers, you will have choices between questions.

General:

This is a writing intensive course. All of the work/examinations will be written. Your papers will be graded not only on content, but also on grammar, writing mechanics, style, etc.

All paper/exam dates are listed on this syllabus. Therefore, late work/exams are allowed only if arranged at least one week prior to the scheduled due date/exam date. Unexcused late work will be penalized accordingly.

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. You should familiarize yourself with the university guidelines and policies on academic integrity:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/resourcesforstudents.html>

If you require special test-taking or note-taking accommodations, please see me.

(Tentative) Reading/discussion schedule:

11 Jan. *Introduction/history/basic concepts and questions*

THE STRUCTURE OF PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

18 Jan. *Sense datum theory*
 Ayer-‘The argument from illusion’
 Price-from *Perception*
 Barnes-‘The myth of sense data’

25 Jan. *Intentionalism*
 Tye, ‘The intentionality of feelings and experiences’
 Harman, ‘The Intrinsic Quality of Experience’

1 Feb. *Intentionalism, representation, and qualia*
 Dretske, ‘Experience as representation’
 Crane, ‘The intentional structure of consciousness’

8 Feb. *Disjunctivism*
 Martin, ‘The Limits of Self-Awareness’
 Sturgeon, ‘Visual experience’

15 Feb. *Active theories of perception*
 Noe, ‘The enactive approach to perception: An introduction’
 Short essay 1 due

22 Feb. NO CLASS-READING WEEK

CONTENT, COGNITION, AND PERCEPTUAL EXPERIENCE

- 1 Mar.** *Varieties of content*
Siegel, 'Varieties of Content' (Section 3 only) from 'The contents of perception'
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-contents/#3>
Peacocke, 'Scenarios, Concepts, and Perception'
- 8 Mar.** *High-level contents*
Siegel, 'Which properties are represented in experience?'
- 15 Mar.** *Conceptual vs. nonconceptual content*
Crane, 'The nonconceptual content of experience'
Heck, 'Nonconceptual content and the space of reasons'
- 22 Mar.** *Sensation, cognition, and experience*
Dretske, 'Conscious experience'
Noe, 'Thought and experience'
Short essay 2 due
- 29 Mar.** *Cognitive penetrability*
Stokes, 'Perceiving and Desiring: A new look at the cognitive penetrability of experience'
Additional reading TBA
- 5 Apr.** *Knowledge and perception*
BonJour, excerpts from 'Epistemological problems of perception',
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-episprob/>
BonJour, 'In search of direct realism'

Resources:

All of the readings will be primary sources. Needless to say, much of this material will be challenging. You might find some of the following resources helpful.

-For introductory texts on philosophy of mind, try Kim, J., *Philosophy of Mind*, Second Edition (Westview Press: 2005) or Heil, J., *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge: 2004).

-For general philosophy resources, I suggest both *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1999) ed. Audi, R. and *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1994) ed. Blackburn, S. Online, try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/> (For this course, two very useful entries in the latter are 'The problem of perception' and 'The contents of perception')