

**Topics in Language & Mind:
Philosophy of Perception**

Spring 2012
Department of Philosophy, NYU
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Mondays and Wednesdays, 12.30-1.45 pm
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This is an advanced undergraduate course in the philosophy of perception. We will discuss some classic and contemporary questions about sensory perception.

First we will ask in what sense, if any, perception is immediate awareness of the world. The traditional Argument from Illusion purports to show that the immediate objects of perception are not physical objects in the environment around us. We will assess the Argument and various responses to it. From this point of entry, we will investigate the contemporary dispute over whether perception is a form of representation. That will take us up until just before Spring Break.

We will then discuss some questions about the different sensory modalities – vision, hearing, touch and so on. What individuates these different sensory modalities or distinguishes them from one another? How does the experience of space differ in the different sensory modalities? We will explore some structural differences between experiences of space in vision, touch and hearing. We will also assess a question which William Molyneux famously asked Locke: Would a man born blind, who has learned to discriminate a cube from a sphere by touch, and then becomes able to see, be able to discriminate them by sight?

During the last five weeks or so of the course, we will focus on the role of perception as a source of knowledge. What, if anything, makes sensory perception a distinctive way of coming to know about the world around you? To come to know about the world through sensory perception, do you have to know that your senses are working properly? Here we will assess the impact of evidence that perception is cognitively penetrated – that what you perceive depends on what you believe.

The reading will be made available on Blackboard. Most of the reading consists of fairly recent books and research papers in philosophy, but we will also read some classic texts and a little scientific work. See overleaf for a preliminary schedule. Students will be expected to read this material carefully and repeatedly, and to contribute to in-class discussion. There will be four written assignments: one two-page paper and three five-page papers.

Preliminary schedule
(subject to adjustments as we go)

Monday, 1/23	Introduction	
Wednesday, 1/25	Selections from Hume; Russell, <i>Problems of Philosophy</i> , Ch.1	
Monday, 1/30	Smith, <i>The Problem of Perception</i> , Ch.1	
Wednesday, 2/1	Snowdon, 'How to Interpret "Direct Perception"'	
Monday, 2/6	Strawson, 'Perception & its Objects'	2-page paper due
Wednesday, 2/8	Harman, 'The Intrinsic Quality of Experience'	
Monday, 2/13	Tye, 'Representationalism & the Transparency of Experience'	
Wednesday, 2/15	Snowdon, 'Perception, Vision & Causation'	
Monday, 2/20	-- President's Day --	
Wednesday, 2/22	Selections from Berkeley, <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i>	
Monday, 2/27	Campbell, 'Berkeley's Puzzle'	
Wednesday, 2/29	Burge, <i>Origins of Objectivity</i> , Ch.9	
Monday, 3/5	Hurley & Noë, 'Neural Plasticity & Consciousness'	
Wednesday, 3/7	Macpherson, 'Individuating the Senses'	5-page paper due
Monday, 3/12 - Wednesday, 3/14	-- Spring Break --	
Monday, 3/19	Martin, 'Sight and Touch'	
Wednesday, 3/21	Nudds, 'Experiencing the Production of Sound'	
Monday, 3/26	Evans, 'Molyneux's Question'	
Wednesday, 3/29	Evans, 'Molyneux's Question'	
Monday, 4/2	Held et al, 'The Newly Sighted Fail to Match Seen with Felt'	
Wednesday, 4/4	Pryor, 'The Skeptic & the Dogmatist'	
Monday, 4/9	Dretske, 'What Good is Consciousness?'	5-page paper due
Wednesday, 4/11	Roessler, 'Perceptual Experience & Perceptual Knowledge'	
Monday, 4/16	Roessler, 'Perceptual Experience & Perceptual Knowledge'	
Wednesday, 4/18	Fodor, <i>Modularity of Mind</i> , Pt.3	
Monday, 4/23	Churchland, 'Perceptual Plasticity & Theoretical Neutrality'	
Wednesday, 4/25	Siegel, 'Cognitive Penetrability & Perceptual Justification'	
Monday, 4/30	Student Presentations	
Wednesday, 5/2	Review	
Wednesday, 5/9		5-page paper due