

Perception

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2023–24 Fall Term

No. of Credits: 4. No. of ECTS credits: 8.

Time Period of the Course: one semester.

Course Level: PhD.

Description

A common view in philosophy and science, with origins in antiquity, is that we perceive things – see and hear them, for instance – by having representations or images of them, of which we are directly aware. We shall consider the arguments for this view and show that they fail. These include arguments from illusion and hallucination, from the alleged possibility of an inverted spectrum, the Knowledge Argument, claims about what brains in a vat can think and experience, ideas about phantom limb pains, after images, and more. Along the way, zombies will be exorcised. We shall also look at arguments coming from physics, such as the time-lag argument. Time permitting, we shall also study Wittgenstein's private-sensation language argument, criticising the meaningfulness of talk about private representations. Our conclusion will be that no good reason has been provided to assume that perception is via representations.

Course requirements

- attendance
- readings
- participation in discussions
- term paper, for those taking the course for grade

Course Goals

Familiarity with philosophical issues and literature about perception. Arguments for representational perception and their flaws.

Learning Outcomes

Familiarity with philosophical issues and literature about perception. Arguments for representational perception and their flaws.

Week by week breakdown

Readings for each unit will be uploaded to the course e-learning site, occasionally including notes by the instructor. In addition, the course will include presentations by guests and hopefully students as well; at least four such presentations are planned. Moreover, students are encouraged to do their own research in response to topics discussed in class and to present it summarily in class. Accordingly, the course plan below is tentative and partial.

Some of the topics below might take more than one meeting. We might also adjust the plan to students' interests.

1. Introduction
2. Representations as futile for explaining illusion
3. Infallibility in Perception and Sensation
4. The Knowledge Argument
5. The Inverted Spectrum
6. The Alleged Possibility of 'Unconscious' Perception, 'zombies'; Brain in a Vat
7. "Primary" and "secondary" qualities illusions, the "phenomenal principle"
8. Phantom Limb Pain. Hot and cold hands in tepid water
9. Afterimages and related phenomena. Colour Blindness
10. Dreams
11. Blurred vision, perception and cognition

12. Time-lag Argument
13. Doppler Effect
14. Private-sensation language argument
15. Revision

Assessment

Term paper of approximately 2500 words (students should consult the instructor about the paper's subject). Participation in class can contribute up to plus one grade (from B to B+ etc.) to the final grade.