This graduate seminar will examine a selection of interrelated topics within contemporary philosophy of perception. Each week will focus on a different topic, but the series as a whole will also draw out important connections between the various issues.

The seminar will be co-taught, with the convenors leading students through the material by means of weekly presentations. Background reading will also be set each week, in order to provide relevant context for discussion.

The seminar will run for eight weeks. No prior knowledge of the philosophy of perception will be assumed, nor is any such background knowledge required in order to attend.

Below is the list of topics the seminar will focus on, with associated readings.

**Week 1: The case for representationalism**

The dominant theory of perception in contemporary literature is *representationalism*, otherwise known as *intentionalism*. This week will explore the central motivations for this view. A central aim will be to get clear on what reasons there are for accepting representationalism, and whether it deserves the widespread acceptance it currently enjoys.

**Primary Reading:**


**Secondary Reading:**


**Additional Reading:**

- Brewer, B. (2011) *Perception and Its Objects*. Oxford University Press. [Chapter 4]
- Peacocke, C. (1983) *Sense and Content*. Oxford University Press. [Chapters 1-2]
Week 2: Disjunctivism and the screening off problem

The main rival theory to representationalism is known as naïve realism. Unlike many theories of perception, naïve realists are disjunctivists: they hold that the kind of experience involved in good cases has a different nature to the kind involved in bad ones. This week explores a fundamental problem for this kind of view, namely, the screening off problem. We will also look at connected issues; for example, we will explore what naïve realists must say about the bad cases.

Primary Reading:


Secondary Reading:


Additional Reading:


Week 3: Sense data theories and the transparency intuition

A traditional, and once widely accepted, way of thinking about perception is in terms of the notion of sense-data. The received view among contemporary philosophers, however, is that the sense-datum theory is deeply flawed. This week we examine whether that’s really the case. We also examine related questions about the so-called transparency of experience. Does the ‘transparency intuition’, whatever it is, rule out a sense-datum theory? If so, what exactly are the constraints that this intuition places on developing a theory of perception?
Primary Reading:


Secondary Reading:

  PTFL has two copies of the 1950 2nd ed in BSF, but reading list stipulates 1932 ed

Additional Reading:


**Week 4: Perceptual experience and perception-based thought**

Is there an argument for substantive claims about perception from claims about perception-based thought? And what constraints on a right account of perception do claims about perception-based thought entail? This week examines these and related questions, with particular focus on John Campbell’s argument for naïve realism based on perception’s role in anchoring perceptual demonstrative thought.

Primary Reading:

- Campbell, J. (2002) Reference and Consciousness. Oxford University Press. [Chapters 1, 2, 6, 7]
Week 5: Perceptual perspective and the problem of illusion

This week focuses on cases of perceptual illusion and on the perspectival nature of perception. What problems are posed by cases of illusion, and what constraints do cases of illusion place on developing theories of perception? Relatedly, what exactly does it mean to say that perception is perspectival, and how is the perspectival nature of experience connected to the phenomenon of illusion? One central aim is to use these questions to extract constraints for developing a successful theory of perception.

Primary Reading:


Secondary Reading:


Additional Reading:

- Austin, J. L. (1962) *Sense and Sensibilia*. Oxford University Press

**Week 6: Causation and Perception**

In a famous paper, Grice develops a causal theory of perceiving. This week explores whether, and in what sense, we really should think of perceptual experience in causal terms. We also examine whether the causal theory can be developed even within a disjunctivist framework. A related question we’ll discuss concerns, more generally, the relationship between perceptual experience and the physical processes which underpin it.

**Primary Reading:**


**Secondary Reading:**

- Moran, A. The Causal Argument Revisited’, m.s.

**Additional Reading:**

- Price, H. (1932) *Perception*. Greenwood Press. [Ch. IV]

**Week 7: Perceptual awareness and structural features of perception**

Perceptual experience’s structural features are relatively invariant aspects of experience, such as our awareness of the boundedness of the visual field. Various thinkers have put structural features to work in explaining recalcitrant dimensions of our perceptual phenomenology (e.g. the perception
of absence). We shall look at what has been said about structural features, and investigate whether we ought to treat these features as affording a distinct kind of perceptual awareness of the outside world.

Primary Reading:


Secondary Reading:


Additional Reading:


**Week 8: Berkeley’s puzzle and the epistemology of perception**

What is Berkeley’s Puzzle? How is this puzzle to be solved? We focus on this puzzle, discussed in depth in a recent book by John Campbell and Quassim Cassam, as a way into more general questions concerning the epistemological implications of the naïve realist theory of perception.

Primary Reading:


Secondary Reading:


Additional Reading:

- Strawson, P. F. (1959) *Individuals*. Methuen. [Chapter 2]
- Brewer, B. (2011) *Perception and Its Objects*. Oxford University Press. [Chs. 5-6]