

Seminar in Philosophy of Mind: Colors and Sounds

Phil 321C

Fall 2006

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1 Details

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2 Background and Course Description

Short version. Philosophers interested in the mind and perception have paid a lot of attention to vision. This “visuo-centric” thinking has shaped the way we think of perceiving, experience, and the mind. We’ll spend roughly half the semester talking about work on perception dealing with vision and the nature of the things we experience in vision (colors, objects, causation). Then, we’ll explore whether and how thinking about other (well, at least one other) perceptual modalities influences our understanding of perception. We’ll do this primarily by working to develop a theory of sounds and auditory experience, and seeing how this theory resembles and differs from theories of vision and the things we experience visually. Finally, we’ll consider how interactions among the senses impact the project.

Long version. Perception has enjoyed philosophical attention since antiquity. Plato distinguished appearances from reality and grappled with this distinction’s consequences. Perception engages philosophers (in particular,

philosophers of mind) because it forms a subject's primary mode of access to the world—it furnishes the materials of experience, grounds thought, and guides action. Perception shapes our understanding of things and events in the world and provides the data according to which experience can be evaluated as “accurate”, “illusory”, or “misleading”. Contemporary advances in science have only enforced the importance of investigating the relationship between the world as it is characterized and explained by scientific inquiry and the world as it is encountered and experienced by perceiving creatures. Empirically informed philosophical theorizing is essential to investigating the relationships between what Wilfred Sellars characterized as the “scientific image” and the “manifest image” of the world.

Philosophical thinking about perception has been shaped to a remarkable extent by attention to vision. Humans, it is frequently said, are visual creatures, and vision has not disappointed philosophers as a source of insight into perception. But “visuo-centrism” has shaped our understanding of perception and its role. Vision has furnished the questions and puzzles with which philosophical theorizing about perception must deal. Thought experiments dealing with color spectrum inversion and Mary the blind color scientist, as well as phenomenological and empirical facts involving the waterfall illusion, blindsight, and change and inattentional blindness have all driven philosophical views about perception in recent years. Even the terminology used to conduct philosophical debate about perceptual experience—*appearance, scene, image*—is predominantly visual. Non-visual language—*imagine, experience, perceive*—has even acquired a palpably visual tinge.

The more or less implicit assumption has been that what we learn about perception by studying vision generalizes to the other sense modalities. Put another way, vision is the representative paradigm of perception and holds the key to understanding the nature of perception. According to the traditional line of thought prominent from the early modern era to the present, in the philosophically interesting respects at least, as things are with vision, so they are with hearing, touch, olfaction, et al. The perceptual modalities have been treated as analogous in that, from the perspective of a philosophical account of perception, understanding auditory, tactile, or olfactory perception involves little more than extrapolating or transposing from an account of vision. A not-accidentally-related line of thought has been particularly strong in the case of the secondary or sensible qualities. The assumption is that as things are with colors, so they are with sounds, tastes, and smells.

This seminar is predicated on skepticism about this kind of claim, and optimism that other perceptual modalities and their objects warrant philosophical interest in their own right. The guiding question into which we will

try to gain insight through the course of the semester is:

Does attention to non-visual modalities force reconsideration of visuo-centric hypotheses about the nature, character, and function of perception?

We'll begin by working through (i) philosophical theories of color and color experience, and discussing how they influence theorizing about perception. Next we'll take up an area complicated in interesting ways by color theory—(ii) perception of ordinary (material) objects—and an area—(iii) the perception of *causation*—that forces us to examine an important aspect of the methodology employed so far, which deals with the relevance and reliability of phenomenological claims. With that background, we'll turn to the task of developing (iv) an account of auditory perception and the nature of its objects, and evaluating how this impacts our overall theory of perception. Finally, if time remains, we'll discuss how an important class of (v) cross-modal perceptual illusions and interactions holds promise for unifying these projects.

3 Texts

1. *Color for Philosophers: Unweaving the Rainbow* [UR], C.L. Hardin (Hackett, 1988). The main resource for our discussions of color and color perception.
2. *Readings on Color, Volume 1: The Philosophy of Color* [C], edited by Alex Byrne and David Hilbert (MIT, 1997). A recent collection of papers on color and color perception. This will supplement our readings from the first part of the course. It is not required, but is recommended.
3. Other essays and selections will be made available through WebCT.

4 Course Requirements and Grading

5 Schedule of Topics and Readings

5.1 The Mind, the World, and Perception

5.2 Colors

Color Experience, Colors, and Color Perception.

What is the relationship between color experiences and colors themselves? What kinds of considerations could show us that nothing is colored? What do facts about color experience indicate about the colors? Do color experiences reveal the natures of colors? The arguments from: inter-subjective variability, microscopes, physics, perspectival variability, content, and neuroscience. Colors as: non-existent, sensations, dispositions, physical properties, simple properties.

Readings:

- Hardin, *Color for Philosophers*
- Byrne and Hilbert, *Readings on Color*

5.3 Illusion and Hallucination

What does the possibility of illusion show about the objects of experience? What does it show about the contents of experience? The arguments from illusion and hallucination. What are the *immediate* objects of experience? Is there such a thing as mediated *perception*?

Readings:

- Valberg, *The Puzzle of Experience*, Part I (ch 1–3)
- Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*
- Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*

5.4 Objects

Do we perceive objects?

Given the puzzle about experience and perceptual access to the world of material things and events, do we ever perceive objects themselves without perceiving something mental? What are the conditions on the experience of an object? What inclines us to think that we *experience* or *perceive*, as opposed to merely *inferring* from visual data, the presence of objects? What makes the experience of an object different from the experience of a color mosaic?

Readings:

- Harman, “The intrinsic quality of experience”
- Siegel, “The subject and object in visual experience”
- Palmer, ch 6 and ch 7
- Marr, *Vision*

Strawson, *Individuals*

Sanford, "The immediate objects of experience"

5.5 Causation

Do we perceive causation?

Intuitively, we experience the presence of objects. But there is a long-standing tradition of skepticism that we literally perceive certain sorts of relations among objects and events. In particular, Hume ignited a tradition of skepticism about our capacity to perceive causation. Do we enjoy an experience of causation, and what is this experience like?

Readings:

- Hume, *Enquiry*, IV, V, VII
- Siegel, "The visual experience of causation"
- Scholl and Nakayama, "Illusory causal crescents: misperceived spatial relations due to perceived causality"
- Scholl and Tremoulet, "Perceptual causality and animacy"
- <http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Discourse/Narrative/michotte-demo.swf>

Michotte, *The Visual Experience of Causation*

5.6 Sound

What kind of thing is a sound?

Is the experience of a sound more like the experience of a color or more like the experience of an object or particular? Are sounds more like colors or like things? Sounds as: sensible qualities, particulars, waves, events. The temporal characteristics of sounds.

Readings:

- *The World of Sounds*, Chs 1 and 2.
- Bregman, *Auditory Scene Analysis*

5.7 Sounds and Space

Spatial hearing.

What is the best explanation, perceptually and phenomenologically, for how we learn the locations of things and events through audition? Do sounds travel? Do sounds seem generated by their sources, and does this require

the experience of causation?

Readings:

- “Perceiving the locations of sounds”
- Strawson, *Individuals*, chapter 2, “Sounds”
- Shinn-Cunningham, “Virtual auditory space...”
- Blauert, *Spatial Hearing*
- Nudds, “Experiencing the production of sounds”
- O’Shaughnessy, selections from *Consciousness and the World*
- Malpas, “The location of sound”

5.8 Sound-Related Phenomena

Echoes, reverberation, resonance, transmission, Doppler effects.

How should a theory of sounds and auditory experience deal with cases in which the sources of sounds behave in ways uncharacteristic of the sounds we experience them to produce? What is the relationship between the source, the subject, and the sound? What are the conditions for deciding whether an experience is illusory?

Readings:

- “Echoes”
- “Explaining sound-related phenomena”

5.9 Hearing Recorded Sounds

Can you hear John F. Kennedy?

It seems you hear a lecturer even when she speaks through a microphone. It seems you hear the person on the other end of the telephone when you’re having a conversation. It seems you hear the announcer over the radio. What about when there’s a delay? How about a delay of 48 hours? How about 48 years? Do recordings facilitate genuine hearing of the original source, even though that source may no longer exist?

Readings:

- Noë, “Causation and perception: the puzzle unraveled”
- Cohen and Meskin, “On the epistemic value of photographs”
- “Hearing recorded sounds”

5.10 Cross-Modal Illusions

Ventriloquism, McGurk effects, sound-induced flash illusions, and the philosophical work they do.

What is the significance of interactions that occur among the different sense modalities? That is, how should we make sense of cases in which vision leads to an auditory illusion of location, or in which hearing leads to an illusory visual experience? How do such illusions differ from synesthesia? How do such illusions help us to answer questions such as: If sounds are particulars produced by ordinary objects and events, how do we hear ordinary things and events by hearing their sounds?

Readings:

- Shams et al., “Visual illusion induced by sound” and “What you see is what you hear”
- “Cross-modal illusions and perceptual content”

5.11 Molyneux’s Question

Molyneux famously asked Locke:

A Man, being born blind, and having a Globe and a Cube, nigh of the same bignes, Committed into his Hands, and being taught or Told, which is Called the Globe, and which the Cube, so as easily to distinguish them by his Touch or Feeling; Then both being taken from Him, and Laid on a Table, Let us Suppose his Sight Restored to Him; Whether he Could, by his Sight, and before he touch them, know which is the Globe and which the Cube?

Readings:

- Degenaar and Lokhorst, “The Molyneux Problem”:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/molyneux-problem/>
- Evans, “Molyneux’s question”
- Campbell, “Molyneux’s question”
- Loar, Comments on John Campbell, “Molyneux’s question”
- Morgan, *Molyneux’s Question*

5.12 The “Other” Modalities

Smell, taste, touch, proprioception, kinaesthesia...

What do we have to learn from the “other” modalities?

Readings:

- Lycan, “The slighting of smell”
- Batty, “A representational view of olfactory experience”
- Nudds, “The significance of the senses”
- Noë, *Action in Perception*

6 Recommended Resources

6.1 Perception

1. Gendler and Hawthorne (OUP, 2006), *Perceptual Experience*
2. Noë and Thompson (MIT, 2002), *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*
3. Crane (CUP, 1992), *The Contents of Experience*
4. Villanueva (Ridgeview, 1996), *Perception, Philosophical Issues*, 7
5. Maund (McGill, 2003), *Perception*
6. Smith (HUP, 2002), *The Problem of Perception*
7. Foster (OUP, 2002), *The Nature of Perception*
8. Armstrong (Routledge, 1961), *Perception and the Physical World*
9. Austin (OUP, 1959), *Sense and Sensibilia*
10. Russell (1912), *The Problems of Philosophy*
11. Palmer (MIT, 1999), *Vision Science: Photons to Phenomenology*

6.2 Color

1. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Color”: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/color/>
2. David Hilbert (CSLI, 1988), *Color and Color Perception: A Study in Anthropocentric Realism*
3. Byrne and Hilbert (MIT, 1997), *Volume 2: The Science of Color*

4. Evan Thompson (Routledge, 1995), *Color Vision*
5. Michael Tye (MIT, 2000), *Color, Consciousness, and Content*
6. Barry Stroud (OUP, 2002), *The Quest for Reality: Subjectivism and the Metaphysics of Colour*

6.3 Sounds

1. Strawson (Routledge, 1959), *Individuals*
2. Bregman (MIT, 1990), *Auditory Scene Analysis*
3. Blauert (MIT, 1997), *Spatial Hearing*
4. Casati and Dokic (1994), *La Philosophie du Son*. I have not read it. Special bonus points for any skilled French speakers who can translate philosophical prose.
5. Spence and Driver (OUP, 2004), *Crossmodal Space and Crossmodal Attention*
6. Deutsch (Ed.) (1999), *The Psychology of Music. 2nd Edition*
7. Deutsch (2006), *Ear and Brain*
8. Gelfand (2004), *Hearing: An Introduction to Psychological and Physiological Acoustics*