

Stimulus, Context, and Control in Perception

PHIL 6355

Winter 2023 / York University

Website: <https://eclass.yorku.ca/course/view.php?id=60648>

Meetings

In-Person

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office hrs: BY APPT.

Course Description This seminar will survey a number of debates at the cutting edge of empirically-oriented philosophy of perception. We will begin by asking fundamental questions about the nature and function of perception. We'll then look at the nature of stimulus-dependence, cognitive penetration, mental agency, attention, memory, expectation, and learning, and their roles in perception. Throughout, we will examine ways in which our perception depends on (i) properties of proximal sensory stimuli, (ii) aspects of our perceptual and cognitive context, and (iii) aspects that are under our own mental control, and what these dependencies mean for the nature and function of perception.

Goals The seminar has three goals. (1) To introduce students to some of the latest big debates in empirically-oriented philosophy of perception. (2) To better understand the roles of sensory stimulus, perceptual and cognitive context, and mental control in perception. (3) To train students in good professional practices, including developing ideas, presenting to seminars or reading groups, getting papers published, and contributing to peer review.

Assignments	Due	%
Two Presentations	Sign-up	10%
Reflections & Follow-ups		15%
– 8 reflections (\approx 1 paragraph ea.)	Thu @ 10am	
– 2 follow-ups per reflection	Mon @ 5pm	
Paper		
– First submission (3k wds)	Mar 17	30%
– Peer review (750wds)	Mar 27	req.
– Resubmission (3k–5k wds)	Apr 21	45%
w/ statement of revisions (750 wds)		
Written assignments to be submitted @ course webpage.		

Attendance Policy
Students are expected to attend in-person, except where accommodations have been arranged in advance. If you are unable to attend class in-person due to illness or other exceptional circumstances, notify me in advance and I will arrange for you to be able to participate via Zoom.

Accommodations I am committed to fairly accommodating students with disabilities. Contact me and [Student Accessibility Services](#) as soon as possible, and we will work together to find a fair accommodation. Accommodations for specific assignments must be requested well ahead of time.

Other Resources

- Library: library.yorku.ca/web/
- PhilPapers: philpapers.org
- Writing: yorku.ca/laps/writing-centre/
- Accessibility: accessibility.students.yorku.ca
- Counselling: counselling.students.yorku.ca

Academic Integrity

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty: yorku.ca/laps/decisions-petitions/academic-honesty/

Coursework

1 Participation | WEEKLY

Our best ideas—and the best expressions of them—often come to light in the midst of talking with each other. For that reason, participation in seminar discussions is critical. The ability to engage in a productive conversation, to find ways to express our own ideas/questions and to help others express theirs, is a precious skill. This seminar will offer a safe and respectful space in which to practice and develop that skill.

2 Two Presentations (10%) | SIGN UP

Each student will take the lead on the discussion of two of the papers. Presentations can include handouts and short presentations as well as questions to stimulate discussion, and may take into account the reflections written by your peers.

Goal: You never learn something so well as when you have to explain it to others. Leading a discussion positions you to write on the topic if you choose. It is also a unique and valuable skill in its own right. Like teaching and unlike a conference presentation, you are reviewing and guiding discussion on someone else's work. But more like a conference presentation and (perhaps) unlike teaching, the aim is not just to help everyone to understand the work, but to position yourself and us to make our own contributions on a question in conversation with the work.

3 Reflections & Follow-ups (15%) | REFLECTIONS DUE THU 10AM; FOLLOW-UPS DUE THE FOLLOWING MON 5PM

Reflections (minimum of 8) By 10am the morning of a class meeting, post a “reflection” on the eClass discussion forum for that day’s meeting. They should be around 1 paragraph in length. Reflections are open-ended, but must substantively engage with the material for that week. Reflections and follow-ups will be graded CREDIT/NO CREDIT.

It is not sufficient merely to say that some point in the reading was interesting, confusing, etc. Instead, you might: voice an objection to something claimed in one of the readings; tease out an interesting implication of something the authors say; offer an additional argument for a point; draw a connection to or highlight a tension with another reading; or highlight something in the text that you found unclear and suggest what you think it might mean.

Goal: Reflections have three functions. First, they keep everyone engaged with the weekly material and serve as a form of preparation for class discussions. Second, they help everyone to get a sense of how we all felt about the readings—what points were easier to understand and which points harder. Third, they may provide the seed of a paper idea.

Follow-ups (2 per reflection) If you have posted a reflection, then by 5pm the following Monday, make two comments on the forum for the week in which your reflection was posted.

- **1 comment must be on a peer’s reflection**, developing a point, raising a potential objection, or posing a question.
- **1 comment must be on your reflection**, elaborating your initial thought, revising it, or responding to a comment from one of your peer’s.

Goal: Your initial reflection shows your thinking prior to meeting with the group. Follow-ups allow you to revisit yours and your peers’ initial reflections in light of what we have learned from discussion. In addition to helping consolidate that discussion in your memory, the follow-ups offer further opportunities to find the spark for a paper idea.

4 Paper (75%)

Over the course of the term, you will develop a paper engaging with one of the questions covered in this course. The preparation of the paper will mimic the peer review process. You will write a first submission (3k words—NOT A DRAFT), a peer review, and a resubmission (3k–5k wds) along with a statement of revisions. We will discuss writing strategies throughout the term.

Goal: The primary aim is to refine your analytic skills and writing/rewriting process. The secondary aim is to introduce you to the components of the journal submission and review process. That process is prudentially important, if you plan to publish, but also intellectually important because I think that on the whole it does make for better work.

First Submission (3k wds + 250 wds abstract) | 30% This is not a “first draft.” It should be a polished paper, suitable for submission to a conference. You must include a 250 word abstract at the beginning of the document.

Format: 12pt font, double-spaced, 1in. margins, citations in a standard format (e.g. APA style), with page numbers.

Peer review (750wds) | required You’ll write an anonymous review of a classmate’s paper. You must submit a peer review to receive a passing grade on your first submission. You may be asked to re-write the review if it doesn’t meet the following standards.

Format: Your review should should *not* be a bullet list of minor revisions and spotted typos. It should (a) briefly re-state the aim and argument of the paper, as you understand it; (b) raise what you see as the most substantial potential objections to the paper’s main argument; and (c) offer suggestions for how to address those objections, or how to reframe the paper to avoid them. You should explain and motivate your points clearly so that the author will understand them and know how to prioritize them in revisions. It should be polite and professional. But don’t let the author off the hook: where there are areas to improve the paper, identify them.

Resubmission (3k–5k wds + 250 wds abstract + 750 wds statement of revisions) | 45% In response to peer and instructor feedback, you will rewrite your first submission, perhaps substantially. The resubmission may be (but does not have to be) longer than the first (up two 5,000 words total). It should include an updated abstract.

You must include at the very beginning of the document a “statement of revisions” (around 750 words) in which you explain how your resubmission addresses the feedback you received (or why you chose not to address certain feedback). This document is not just a list of revisions. In it, you will essentially present an *argument*, both to your reviewers and the “journal editor” (in this case, me!), that you have adequately addressed the feedback with your revisions.

Tentative Schedule

Readings with an asterisk (*) are required. The others are optional and may help you develop paper ideas. All things equal, it's better to carefully read the required articles rather than read both required and optional articles less carefully.

Week 1 (Jan 12) Introduction

Recommended: Tyler Burge (2014), "Perception: Where Mind Begins"

Week 2 (Jan 19) What is Perception For?

*Peter Graham (2014), "The Function of Perception"

*Ian Phillips and Chaz Firestone (2022), "Visual Adaptation and the Purpose of Perception"

Recommended:

Tyler Burge (2010), "Biological and Methodological Backgrounds" in *Origins of Objectivity* (pp. 301-308)

Mazviita Chirumuuta (2017), "Perceptual Pragmatism and the Naturalized Ontology of Color"

Donald Hoffman (2018), "The Interface Theory of Perception"

Manolo Martinez (2019), "Usefulness Drives Representations to Truth"

Week 3 (Jan 26) What is Perceptual Constancy?

*E.J. Green, (forth.) "Perceptual Constancy and Perceptual Representation"

*Tyler Burge (2022), "Perceptual Constancy: A Natural Psychological Kind" in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 64-105)

Recommended:

Egon Brunswik (1937), "Psychology as a Science of Objective Relations"

Edwin Land and John McCann (1971), "Lightness and Retinex Theory"

Peter Schulte (2020), "The Nature of Perceptual Constancies"

Todd Ganson, Ben Bronner, and Alex Kerr (2014), "Burge's Defense of Perceptual Content"

Week 4 (Feb 2) What is Stimulus-(In)Dependence?

*Jacob Beck (2017), "Marking the Perception-Cognition Boundary: The Criterion of Stimulus-Dependence"

*Elisabeth Camp (2009), "Putting Thoughts to Work: Concepts, Systematicity, and Stimulus-Independence"

Recommended:

Justin Tiehen (2021), "Perception as Controlled Hallucination"

Tyler Burge (2022), "Perception and Cognition," in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 673-677)

Week 5 (Feb 9) What is Seeing?

*Jessie Munton (2022), "How to See Invisible Objects"

*Kevin Lande (2022), "Seeing and Visual Reference"

Recommended:

Bence Nanay (2010), "Perception and Imagination: Amodal Completion as Mental Imagery"

Tyler Burge (2022), "Perceptual Reference Requires Perceptual Attribution" in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 131-155)

Week 6 (Feb 16) What is Cognitive Penetration?

*Fiona MacPherson (2012), "Cognitive Penetration of Colour Experience: Rethinking the Issue in Light of an Indirect Mechanism"

*Jake Quilty-Dunn (2019), "Attention and encapsulation"

Recommended:

Sam Clarke (2021), "Cognitive Penetration and Informational Encapsulation: Have we been failing the module?"

Wayne Wu (2017), "Shaking up the mind's ground floor: The cognitive penetration of visual attention"

Dustin Stokes (2017), "Attention and the Cognitive Penetrability of Perception"

Zenon Pylyshyn (1999), "Is vision continuous with cognition? The case for cognitive impenetrability of visual perception"

Chaz Firestone and Brian Scholl (2014), "'Top-Down' Effects Where None Should Be Found: The El Greco Fallacy in Perception Research"

Tyler Burge (2022), "The Issue of Cognitive Penetration," in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 677-710)

Reading Week (No Class): Feb 18-24

Week 7 (Mar 2) What is Thought Control?

*Grace Helton (2020), “If You Can’t Change What You Believe, You Don’t Believe It”

*Pamela Hieronymi (2006), “Controlling Attitudes”

Week 8 (Mar 9) What are Attentional Guidance & Guided Attention?

*Wayne Wu (2011), “Attention as Selection for Action”

*Denis Buehler (2022), “Agential capacities: a capacity to guide”

Recommended:

Sebastian Watzl (2011), “Attention as Structuring the Stream of Consciousness”

Sebastian Watzl (2022), “The Ethics of Attention: An Argument and a Framework”

Tyler Burge (2022), “Perceptual Attention” in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 531–566)

Week 9 (Mar 16) What is (Perceptual) Memory?

*Sara Aronowitz (2018), “Memory is a modeling system”

*E.J. Green and Jake Quilty-Dunn (2021), “What is an Object File?”

Recommended:

Tim Brady, Talia Konkle, and George Alvarez (2011), “A review of visual memory capacity: Beyond individual items and toward structured representations”

Tyler Burge (2022), “Perceptual Memory I: Shorter Term Systems” and “Perceptual Memory II: Visual Perceptual Long-Term Memory” (pp. 567–624)

Mar 17 | First Submission Due (250 wds abstract + 3k wds paper)

Week 10 (Mar 23) What is Perceptual Expectation?

*Dominic Gregory (2017), “Visual Expectations and Visual Imagination”

*Nico Orlandi (2017), “Predictive Perceptual Systems”

Recommended:

Floris P. de Lange, Micha Heilbron, and Peter Kok (2018), “How Do Expectations Shape Perception”?

Andy Clark (2013), “Whatever next? Predictive brains, situated agents, and the future of cognitive science”

Tyler Burge (2022), “Perceptual Anticipation” in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 630–641)

Mar 27 | Peer Review Due (750 wds)

Week 11 (Mar 30) What is Perceptual Learning?

*Dan Burnston (forth.), “Perceptual Learning, Categorical Perception, and Cognitive Permeation”

*Zoe Jenkin (2022), “Perceptual Learning and Reasons-Responsiveness”

Recommended:

Robert Goldstone, David Landy, and Ji Son (2010), “The Education of Perception”

Philip Kellman and Patrick Garrigan (2009), “Perceptual Learning and Human Expertise”

Tyler Burge (2022), “Perceptual Learning” in *Perception: First Form of Mind* (pp. 625–630)

Week 12 (Apr 6) TBD

Apr 21 | Final Submission Due (750 wds statement of revisions + 250 wds abstract + 3k–5k wds paper)