

First-Year Seminar: Perceptual Justification

PHIL 6800

Fall 2022 / York University

Website: eclass.yorku.ca/course/view.php?id=60641

Meetings

FRI 10:30AM–1:30PM
Ross S432 (Yolton Library)
In-Person

Jacob Beck

e-mail: jbeck@yorku.ca
office: Ross S439
office hrs: BY APPT.

Kevin Lande

e-mail: lande@yorku.ca
office: Ross S443
office hrs: BY APPT.

Course Description When James Bond, chased by vigilant henchmen, went careening into the subway station and slipped into the train just as the doors closed, did he *know* the train was about to leave the station at just that moment? “Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation” begins with a [politician reprimanding the Impossible Mission Force](#): “From where I sit, your unorthodox methods are indistinguishable from chance and your results, perfect or not, look suspiciously like luck.” In “The Bourne Supremacy,” by contrast, Jason Bourne [can be seen](#) watching the subway and looking at the train schedule. Jason Bourne seems to be *justified* in his belief that the train will be in the station at just that moment.

Epistemology is concerned with understanding *knowledge* and *justification*, and their relation to *truth*. What differentiates knowledge from beliefs that are true by mere luck or accident? What distinguishes a belief that is justified but false (if there be such a thing) from an unfounded one? One of the dominant sources of our justification and knowledge is *perception*. Scientific theories are confirmed or disconfirmed, ultimately, by observation. We take many of our ordinary beliefs—beliefs about what’s in the fridge, the presence of potholes on the road, whether it is an overcast day, when the train will arrive—to be justified in virtue of what we see or have seen in the past. Skepticism about the external world questions whether perception confers justification on our beliefs about the world around us.

In this seminar we will examine whether and why perception justifies beliefs about the world. Topics will include: internalist versus externalist conceptions of justification; foundationalist and coherentist theories of justification; whether there is such a thing as “immediate justification”; and how one might distinguish between “basic beliefs” and “non-basic” beliefs. Many of the authors that we will read take a broadly naturalist approach to epistemology. While we may sometimes consider ideal agents or contrive surreal thought experiments, much of the focus will be on how real agents like us—organisms with evolved perceptual and cognitive systems—have justified beliefs.

Prerequisites This course is reserved for first-year PhD students in philosophy.

Goals The class is intended to help doctoral students develop skills toward professionalization in academic philosophy. Though the readings and discussions are focused on a central topic, perceptual justification, that topic is just a vehicle for developing skills in analytic reading, writing, charitable conversation, and academic presentation.

<table><thead><tr><th>Assignments</th><th>Due</th><th>%</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>8 weekly papers (1200-1500wds)</td><td>Thur @ 10:30am</td><td>70%</td></tr><tr><td>– Late papers not accepted</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>– Lowest grade dropped</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>– Option to revise 1 for full grade</td><td>12/8</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Participation</td><td>Weekly</td><td>25%</td></tr><tr><td>OGS/SSHRC Grant</td><td>9/28</td><td>5%</td></tr></tbody></table> <p>All assignments to be submitted online @ course webpage.</p>	Assignments	Due	%	8 weekly papers (1200-1500wds)	Thur @ 10:30am	70%	– Late papers not accepted			– Lowest grade dropped			– Option to revise 1 for full grade	12/8		Participation	Weekly	25%	OGS/SSHRC Grant	9/28	5%	<h3>Attendance Policy</h3> <p>Students are expected to attend in-person. If you are unable to attend class in-person due to illness or other exceptional circumstances, notify us in advance and we will arrange for you to be able to participate via Zoom.</p>
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<h3>Readings</h3> <p>Readings will be available on the course website. <i>Please read all designated materials (≈ 50 pgs / week) before the meeting for which they have been assigned.</i></p>	<h3>Accommodations</h3> <p>We are committed to fairly accommodating students with disabilities. Contact your instructors 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.</p>																					
<h3>Academic Integrity</h3> <p>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/</p>	<h3>Other Resources</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Library: library.yorku.ca/web/• PhilPapers: philpapers.org• Writing: yorku.ca/laps/writing-centre/• Accessibility: accessibility.students.yorku.ca• Counselling: counselling.students.yorku.ca																					

Coursework

Weekly Papers (70%) Students will be required to submit a paper of 1200–1500 words each week and will often be called upon to briefly present and defend their papers in class. The papers should respond to or develop an idea or argument that is central to the readings for that week (i.e. the readings assigned for the day on which the paper is to be submitted). They should be written as self-contained papers, with introduction and conclusion.

GOAL: By the end of the course, you'll have had extensive practice in writing. The short paper format will prioritize your ability to reconstruct and analyze the ideas and arguments of an author and carefully evaluate those ideas/arguments. You will have many opportunities down the line to work on the framing and organizational skills required for longer papers.

POLICIES:

- Papers are due 24 hours before the seminar and should be submitted electronically on the Course Website.
- Late papers will not be accepted.
- The lowest grade paper will be dropped.
- Students have the option of revising 1 previously submitted paper for a full replacement of the grade (revision due Dec. 8, but we strongly encourage revisions to be submitted within two weeks of receiving feedback).

Participation (25%) The heart of philosophy is informed, honest conversation. Participation begins with a careful reading of the material. As one reads, certain concerns, questions, and points of confusion begin to bubble to the surface. Prior to each seminar, you want to try and distill what those concerns, questions, and points of confusion are. In the classroom, you will try to express these to the group. Together we will cooperatively work to give the clearest form to those concerns, questions, and points of confusion, and then look at different ways in which they might be addressed. 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 is a precious skill. This seminar will offer a safe and respectful space in which to practice and develop that skill.

OGS/SSHRC Grant (5%) As a graduate student in this program, you are expected to apply to all scholarships for which you are eligible, and a strong application is typically the result of several revisions following feedback. One of the requirements for this class is the submission of a draft project for a SSHRC or OGS application, on which you will receive feedback from both course directors. Since the deadline for SSHRC and OGS is October 11, we expect these by September 28. There will be an Information Meeting organized by the DGS on how to apply for these scholarships on September 16 and a peer review workshop for application drafts on September 28, both of which you should attend.

Tentative Schedule

Readings with an asterisk () are required. The others are optional. All things equal, it's better to slowly and carefully read the required articles multiple times rather than read both required and optional articles less carefully.*

Week 1 (Sep 9) Introduction (JB)

Silins (2021), "Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Justification"
Siegel & Silins (2015), "The Epistemology of Perception"

Week 2 (Sep 16) Coherentism and the Given (JB)

*Davidson (1986), "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge"
*McDowell (1996), *Mind & World*, Lectures 1–2
Sellars (1956), *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*

Sep 16: Information Meeting for OGS/SSHRC organized by DGS

Week 3 (Sep 23) Externalism and Internalism I (KL)

*Goldman (1979), "What is Justified Belief"
*Bonjour (1980), "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge"
Smithies (2019), *The Epistemic Role of Consciousness*, Ch. 7 [for focus on conscious experience]
Goldman (1999), "Internalism Exposed" & Wedgwood (2002), "Internalism Explained" [for discussion of "guidance–deontological" conception of justification]
Srinivasan (2020), "Radical Externalism" [tying discussion into morally/politically charged cases]

Week 4 (Sep 30) Externalism and Internalism II (JB)

*McDowell (1995), "Knowledge and the Internal"
*White (2014), "What Is My Evidence that here Is a Hand?"
McDowell (1982), "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge"
Williamson (2000), *Knowledge and Its Limits*

Sep 28: OGS/SSHRC Grant Draft Due / Peer Review Workshop organized by DGS

Week 5 (Oct 7) Entitlement and Perceptual Capacities (KL)

*Burge (2020), "Entitlement: The Basis for Empirical Epistemic Warrant"
*Schellenberg (2016), "Phenomenal Evidence and Factive Evidence"
Graham (2012), "Epistemic Entitlement"
Schellenberg (2013), "Experience and Evidence"
Sosa (2000), "Reliabilism and Intellectual Virtue"

Oct 11: OGS/SSHRC Grant Due

Reading Week (No Class): Oct 8–14

Week 6 (Oct 21) Dogmatism (JB)

*Pryor (2000), "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist"
*White (2006), "Problems for Dogmatism"
Siegel (2012), "Cognitive Penetrability and Perceptual Justification"
McGrath (2013), "Dogmatism, Underminers, and Skepticism"
Munton (2017), "The Eye's Mind: Perceptual Process and Epistemic Norms"

Week 7 (Oct 28) Immediate Justification (KL)

*Pryor (2005), "There is Immediate Justification"
*McGrath (2017), "Knowing What Things Look Like"
McGrath (2018), "Looks and Perceptual Justification"
Lord (2021), "Enriched Perceptual Content and the Limits of Foundationalism"

Week 8 (Nov 4) Rationality of Perception (JB)

*Siegel (2013), "The Epistemic Impact of the Etiology of Experience"
*Jenkin (2022), "Perceptual Learning and Reasons-Responsiveness"
Siegel (2015), "Epistemic Charge"; *The Rationality of Perception*, Chs. 1–3
McGrath (2013), "Siegel and the Impact for Epistemological Internalism"

Week 9 (Nov 11) Emotional Justification (KL)

*Srinivasan (2018), "The Aptness of Anger"
*Echeverri (2019), "Emotional Justification"

Week 10 (Nov 18) The Content Constraint (JB)

*Silins (2011), "Seeing Through the 'Veil of Perception' "
*Bayne and McClelland (2019), "Ensemble Representation and the Contents of Visual Experience"
Chudnoff (2018), "Epistemic Elitism and Other Minds"
Westfall (2020), "Other Minds Are neither Seen nor Inferred"

Week 11 (Nov 25) Perceptual Learning and Expertise (KL)

*Chudnoff (2018), "The Epistemic Significance of Perceptual Learning"
*Ransom (2020), "Expert Knowledge by Perception"

Week 12 (Dec 2) Matrix Epistemology (KL)

*Chalmers (2003), "The Matrix as Metaphysics"
*Green and Rabin (2019), "Use Your Illusion: Spatial Functionalism & Vision Science and the Case Against Global Skepticism"