

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Course name: Topics in Philosophy of Psychology

Course level: MA / PhD (first-year)

Number of students: 6-12

### Background

Is the way we perceive the world influenced by how we think about the world? In our previous class, we discussed how this question relates to philosophical issues regarding, for example, the existence or number of natural mental kinds (metaphysics), the perceptual justification of beliefs (epistemology), the theory dependence of observation (philosophy of science), or the psychosemantic grounds of linguistic meaning (philosophy of language). From the next class on, we will refocus on the central issue that this question raises in philosophy of mind and psychology. Namely: Is perception continuous with or “penetrable” by cognition?

### Reading

Pylyshyn, Z. (1999). Is vision continuous with cognition?: The case for cognitive impenetrability of visual perception. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 22(3), 341-65.

Macpherson, F. (2012). Cognitive penetration of colour experience: Rethinking the issue in light of an indirect mechanism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 84, 24-62.

### Writing (home assignment)

Please write a short summary (max. 1000 words) of the main arguments *for* [*against*] the claim that perception is cognitively penetrable. Start by stating the thesis in your own words (no quotes please). Define or explain the key terms (e.g., perception, cognition, cognitive penetration), and specify precisely the scope of the thesis (e.g., whether it applies to all or only some perceptual representations or processes). Regarding the arguments, clarify their structure and main premises, but there is no need to get into much detail. The general goal is to convey to a professional reader who may be unacquainted with this area of philosophy what the main line of argumentation is for [*against*] the thesis that you state.

### Debate (class assignment)

Please form two groups, based on whether you argued for or against cognitive penetration in your written assignment. Discuss and prepare for presentation what you consider the three most convincing arguments for your position. Each group will have

6 minutes in total—or 2 minutes per argument—for the presentation. Ideally, a different person should present each argument. After the initial presentations, please reconvene with your group, and assess whether or how you could revise your arguments in light of the other group’s presentation. Each group will then have 2 minutes to make a final case, which should ideally be delivered by members who have not presented yet.

**Revision** (home assignment)

Please revise and elaborate your paper in light of our debate and subsequent discussion. Think of this version of your paper as an extended abstract (max. 1500 words) that you will submit for peer-review. Ideally, your paper should be able to convince an anonymous reader that you have at least a prima facie strong case for [against] a cognitive penetration thesis. Note that you need not stick to the arguments of the papers that we originally read and discussed. On the contrary, you are encouraged to consult further papers on the topic—you can find a list of recommended readings here [hyperlink]—on the basis of which you may also construct arguments of your own.

**Review** (home assignment)

Now that you have submitted your paper, please prepare a formal review of an anonymous peer’s paper that I have sent you (max. 1000 words). Start by placing the issue of cognitive penetration in context, and explain why the paper under review is relevant (max. 1 paragraph). Then summarize the thesis and main arguments of the paper as precisely and concisely as possible (max. 3 paragraphs). Now point out at least one but no more than three substantive issues that you would advise for reconsideration (1-3 paragraphs). For example, you may mention what seems to you like a major flaw in the argumentation, an inappropriate or inconsistent use of technical terms, or a misrepresentation of theoretical views. Of course, in all cases, you should clearly explain and justify your position. After this, you may also mention some minor issues, and recommend corrections or changes accordingly in language, structure, presentation, or whatever else may strike you as relatively easily mendable. Finally, conclude the review with a sentence or two regarding your assessment of the overall quality, interest, or relevance of the paper. (As a general rule: be charitable! The purpose of a review is not to criticize for the sake of it, but to contribute and to help improve!)

**Discussion** (class assignment)

Please form pairs, and read and discuss each other’s review. Are the reviews clear and fair? Do they provide appropriate guidance as to how and what might be changed? Could they be used as a basis for deciding whether a paper might capture the interest of a wider audience? Accordingly, would they help in deciding whether a paper should be (provisionally) accepted for publication?