Philosophy 134: Philosophy of Perception

When: Mon., Wed., Thurs. 11-11:50 am.
Where: TBA
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Office Hours: Thursday 1:00-3:00 pm
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Course Description
What do we see when we look at the world? Do we see tables and chairs, or table- and chair-shaped colored patches? How does our perceptual experience give us knowledge about the world? Does it at all? Can we be wrong about what we seem to see? Could we see the same things even if the world were radically different than it is? Does experience enable us to see things differently than we would otherwise? If so, how? Are the other sense modalities importantly different from vision? What, if anything, can philosophy contribute to our understanding of perception? What should be left to science?

The aim of this course will be to critically investigate these questions. We’ll begin the course with a 5-week crash course on a variety of theories of perception and consider how they answer questions like these. We’ll then have a brief historical interlude and look at some of George Berkeley’s work on perception. In the remainder of the class, we’ll attempt to work through two recent books on perception: Susanna Siegel’s The Contents of Perception and John Campbell’s and Quassim Cassam’s Berkeley’s Puzzle.

Requirements
Students will be expected to complete one set of QTs (questions & thoughts) weekly. These will be a series of short responses to the reading submitted online before class. There will be 2 short papers of 4-6 pages. Each student will be required to provide two peer reviews for each paper. Finally, students will chose to revise and resubmit one of the short papers at the end of the semester.

The 2 short papers will be worth 30% of the final grade, and the final paper will be worth 20%. The peer reviews will be worth 20%; participation and the QTs will be worth 30%.

Learning Goals
The class will aim to develop the full range of skills that are important in philosophy. A focus on learning to write clear, concise, tightly argued philosophical prose is the single most important goal. However, a number of other skills are important as well. These include:
-Analyzing philosophical arguments
-Asking philosophical questions, in writing and in conversation
-Providing constructive criticism of peer's work
-Making use of criticism in revising one's work

Grading
The final paper will be worth 50% of the final grade. The response papers will be worth 30%. Peer reviews and class participation will comprise the remaining 20%.

Late papers will be deducted one third of a grade (e.g. from a B to a B-) for each day they are late. No assignments will be accepted more than one week late. If you need an extension on an assignment, perhaps because you have work due in other classes on the same day or for personal reasons, please ask me. I am willing to grant short extensions, provided you ask for them at least a full day in advance. If you are unable to complete an assignment on time because of an unexpected illness, please let me know as soon as possible.

You should come to class prepared, having done the readings in advance. You should bring the texts with you to class! We will frequently be referring to the texts during class, so it is important that you have them.

Readings
There are four required texts for the course.
The required books are:
William Fish: Philosophy of Perception (A Contemporary Introduction)
George Berkeley: Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous
Susanna Siegel: The Contents of Experience
John Campbell/Quassim Cassam: Berkeley's Puzzle

Academic Integrity at Brandeis
Academic integrity is central to the mission of educational excellence at Brandeis University. Each student is expected to turn in work completed independently, except when assignments specifically authorize collaborative effort. It is not acceptable to use the words or ideas of another person without proper acknowledgement of that source.

Violations of University policies on academic integrity, described in Section Three of Rights and Responsibilities, may result in failure of the course or on the assignment, or in suspension or dismissal from the University. If you are in doubt about the instructions for any assignment in this course or about how to properly cite the sources you've used, it is your responsibility to ask for help. If you have questions about academic integrity, please do not hesitate to ask me, refer to the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, or contact the office of Student Development and Conduct.
Schedule

Note about the schedule: The following is a very rough guide to how we’ll spend the time in the class. We may spend more or less time on each section, depending on interest.

**Weeks 1-5: Introduction to the Philosophy of Perception (Ch. 1-6 of Fish)**

**Weeks 6-7: Historical Interlude: Berkeley's *Three Dialogues* and *New Theory of Vision***

Paper 1 due in week 8.
Peer reviews due approx. 1 week later.

**Weeks 8-10: Siegel's *The Contents of Perception***

**Weeks 11-end: Campbell and Cassam's *Berkeley's Puzzle***

Paper 2 due in week 12.
Peer reviews due approx. 1 week later.

Final paper due during exam period.