Phil 207: Core Philosophy of Mind

Topic: Motor Theories of Perception

The title 'motor theories of perception' covers a wide range of positions. What they have in common is the idea that motor control or motor behavior is a significant, perhaps constitutive (and not merely instrumental) determinant of perceptual content. I am currently writing an SEP entry on the topic (with Robert Briscoe). The seminar will be reading a draft of this entry as we work through the quarter.

1. 18th and 19th Century Philosophical work

We will read selections form Descartes, Locke, Berkeley (and possibly Bailey, Abbot, Bain, Mill, Lotze) as well as some secondary literature on these authors.

2. 19th and early 20th Century Empirical/Philosophical work

We will read selections from Wundt, Mach, Helmholtz, Poincare, and some behaviorism. Perhaps also James, Spencer, Pillsbury.

3. Sensory reafference theories

This will include discussion of mid-20th Century thinkers such as Sperry, von Holst and Mittelstaedt, Held, criticisms by Rock, Gibson and Welch. Also, the contemporary revival of the view by Noë and O'Regan.

4. Efferent readiness theories

Here we will look at work by Rock, Welch, Ebbenholz, Shebilske,

Coren, Vishton, and Taylor, and criticisms by Millikan and Fricker)

5. Skill theories

The main authors here are Gareth Evans and Rick Grush

6. Empirical work

Finally we will look at recent empirical work, including work that is taken to support (e.g. gallese, Wexler, Colby), as well as work that is taken to contradict (e.g. Milner and Goodale), the approach.

Format

The class will meet twice per week, for two hours per session (for a total of 4 hours per week). Each session will have one or two readings. The goal will be to keep the total page count reasonably enough so that everyone can be expected to have read everything *carefully*. No later than 36 hours before each session, each participant will be expected to post, to the course's google group, two questions or discussion points. These can be questions about some part of the text, objections, anything that merits additional discussion. The seminar time will be devoted to discussing these posted topics.

In addition, participants are expected to carry on written discussion of the weekly topics, which can take the form of responses to other's topics before we meet, replies to other people's replies, and so forth. This will obviously involve reading what others are writing, not just producing text yourself and throwing it onto the forum and logging out.

There will be no final paper. Rather, grades will be based on in class discussion and the weekly writing that is submitted to the google group. Around 1000-1500 words per week is a good ballpark estimate of the amount of writing that each participant should be producing (500-750 per session) – from responses to the readings, questions, replies to others responses and questions, and so forth.

I will be limiting the enrollment to 8, and in fact we may end up with fewer. This is good. The expectation is that before each session meets, everyone will not only have read the relevant reading carefully, but will have engaged in some significant online discussion of it. Our in-class discussion should then be fairly productive, and allow us to dig even deeper into the material and the questions/concerns raised online.

This might seem onerous, but in fact it's not too bad. It simply requires some good time management, but the payoff is that participants will end up gaining a deep grasp of the material.

Rough schedule. I'm still working on the specifics, but this should give you guys an idea. I'll post readings soon, especially for the first few weeks.

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1. Descartes (selections from Dioptrics), Locke (selections from the Essay, Book 2)

Descartes. We will focus only on Discourses 4, 5 and 6. But 1-3 are interesting too. Those with a physics background will appreciate Descartes' derivation of Snell's law from momentum principles (as opposed to the more modern minumum time principle):

Locke. We will look only at Chapters 1-9 (pages 18-36, they are very short chapters):

2. Berkeley NTV, Grush

Berkeley. I'm not assigning this for us to read per se. I think my article, which is on Berkeley's book, provides a sufficient summary. I'm including this so you/we can consult the original text as you/we see fit. But if you have time, read it. It's *the* classic text on this topic.

Grush. Yeah, like most of my articles it is long and dense. 30 pages doesn't *sound* too bad, but just wait until you get into it. Sorry.

3. Mach

Mach, Space and Geometry. We're only going to read the
first part, pages 5-37

4. Pillsbury

Pillsbury:

5. Sperry

Sperry:

6. Held & Hein

This is Held and Hein's classic from 1963:

7. Holst

8-9. O'Regan and Noe BBS article.

We'll only read the article itself, 939-971. It's still longer
than the page count suggests, since they are wordy two-
column pages. I'm including the commentaries and
replies in case anyone is interested. There are some
interesting things that get brought up.

10. Briscoe, 'Vision, action, and make-perceive'

11. Coren Vishetn, Taylor

12-13. Evans' 'Molyneux's Question'; Grush 'Skill and Spatial Content'

Evans' MQ. The whole thing:
Evans VR Ch. 6. We'll focus on pages 152-162:
Grush EJAP. We can do this whole thing.

14. Grush "Skill Theory 2.0'

Grush. Yeah, another long dense one. Be warned, there's some math here. If it's any consolation, it's a lot worse in some other pubs I have on the topic.

15. Peacocke/Campbell

16. Developmental challenges

17. Wexler, Colby, Gallese

18. Dual systems challenges (Clark, Milner & Goodale)