

PHILO 362 - THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE
Professor Laura Keating

Course Description:

A common sense view is that we are able to gain knowledge of the world through perceptual experience. For example, we say that we know there are cars in the street because we see or hear them. In this course we will consider three questions 20th and 21st century philosophers have raised in critically examining this common sense view: 1) Does reflection on cases of perceptual illusion and hallucination as well as on the causes of perceptual experience undermine that what we see or hear are physical objects such as cars and trees? What are the objects of perceptual experience? 2) What is the content of perceptual experience such that it can serve to justify our beliefs about the world? If experience does ground belief, then must it involve the exercise of our conceptual capacities? 3) How are the beliefs acquired through perceptual experience justified? What accounts for the nature of perceptual belief as justified belief about the world?

In working through the issues raised by 1)-3), we will consider sense data, intentionalist, and disjunctivist accounts of perceptual objects; we will consider whether perceptual experience involves non-conceptual content; and we will consider the main theories of epistemic justification as they apply to perceptual knowledge, Foundationalism, Coherentism, and Reliabilism, and the subsequent issue as to whether the basis for epistemic justification must something accessible to the believer (the debate between internalist and externalist theories of justification). If we have time, on the basis of considerations brought out in our study of issues 2) and 3) above, we will consider philosophical views on to what extent a human's and an animal's cognitive relation to the world might be different, in spite of our both being perceiving beings.

Required texts: Articles will be posted on ERes at the Hunter College Library.