

# Philosophy of Psychology: Mind and Society

Philosophy 129, Summer 2018, A Session

GM Johnson, UCLA



Alfredo Sosabravo, *Personaje frente al sol*, 1967

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**Office:** Dodd 371

**Time:** TR 1:00-3:05pm  
**Place:** Public Affairs 2232

## Course Overview:

How, if at all, do humans have objective, value-neutral access to information about the external world? Contemporary empirical work on cases of so-called **cognitive penetration**, **stereotype threat**, and **implicit bias** suggest that in many cases, our background beliefs about social stereotypes and prejudices might unconsciously change and shape the way we view the world around us, the beliefs we form about others, and how we navigate the social world. By reading contemporary works in philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and computer science, students in this class will explore this topic and aim to answer questions such as:

- When do social biases affect our perceptions and beliefs about the world?
- Does it matter if we never have objective access to information about the world?
- How do the biases that individuals harbor relate to larger societal biases (do they contribute to institutional and structural injustices, are they the results of such injustices, or is it both)?
- What can we do to mitigate the effects of social biases on individuals and society?

The course is split into roughly three units. In the first unit, students are introduced to the puzzle and work to clarify it by exploring traditional theories of the organization of the mind and the relationship between perception and cognition. The second unit evaluates the merits of the puzzle by exploring the empirical evidence for both **perceptual biases** (including alleged cases of cognitive penetration, attention allocation, and priming effects) and **cognitive biases** (including alleged cases of implicit bias and stereotype threat). Time permitting, the final unit of the course will be dedicated to the philosophical implications of these psychological phenomena in larger societal domains, including the fair treatment of marginalized groups in many aspects of the social world, in particular academia and the criminal justice system.

There are no pre-requisites, but having some background in philosophy and/or psychology will help. The course draws in material from a wide range of fields including philosophy of mind, computer science, vision science, social sciences, and cognitive science.

### Course Materials:

**All required and supplementary materials (including readings, quizzes, and writing assignments) will be available through the course website.** It is very important to check it regularly for updates. There is no required textbook for the course.

### Course Policies:

Regarding classroom etiquette, the most important policy to keep in mind is to always abide by the **Principle of Charity (POC)**. Formally, the POC requires that you interpret a speaker's statements in the most persuasive way possible, so as to render those statements rational and worthy of philosophical engagement. Intuitively, this requires that you give everyone you interact with the benefit of the doubt. A student following the POC, for example, would not speak over their fellow student or be outright dismissive of the points they're intending to convey. This applies not only to your fellow students, but also those readings with which we'll be engaging. The primary aim of the POC is ensure a respectful, worthwhile, and collaborative intellectual environment. Thus, all students will be expected to always act in ways that further these aims.

Here are some additional course policies, the explanations for which are available on the course website and will be covered on the first day of class:

- No electronics (cell phones, laptops, tablets, etc.) are permitted in class.
- Participation and attendance are mandatory.
- Late writing assignments will be penalized for each day they are late.
- Students are expected to follow section policies put forward by TAs.

### Course Requirements:

Final grades will be calculated on the basis of 4 assignment categories:

- |                                 |                           |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) daily comprehension quizzes | (10% of your final grade) |
| (2) first paper, 1-2 pages      | (20% of your final grade) |
| (3) second paper, 2-3 pages     | (30% of your final grade) |
| (4) final paper, 4-5 pages      | (40% of your final grade) |

As you can see, this class requires a lot of writing. Philosophy is at its best when students are given the opportunity to engage deeply and critically with a topic—skills you will develop over time and with each assignment. The rising percentage distributions reward progress on these skills.

### Daily Quizzes:

Students will be expected to complete daily quizzes (starting with the second class). These quizzes are administered through the CCLE website. There are two each week, and they must be completed before class begins. Each quiz will consist of two multiple choice questions. One question is about the material covered in the previous lecture; you won't be able to answer this question on the reading alone. The other question is about the content of the reading for that day. Along with each reading will be study questions. The quiz question will come either from these study questions, or some other

obvious aspect of the reading. The purpose of the quiz questions is to test comprehension; they should be easy so long as you actually did the reading and attended class (provided you paid attention with each).

### Written Assignments:

Prompts and details for written assignments will be made available at least one and a half weeks before the assignment is due. All written assignments will be graded anonymously by TAs.

### Tentative Schedule:

This schedule might change—always consult the course website for updates

\* = optional readings

#### Week One

Tues., June 26th: Introduction and Overview

(1) José Luis Bermúdez - "What is the philosophy of psychology?", *Philosophy of Psychology: a contemporary introduction* (2005)

(Two or more of any of the following short articles:)

(2) "Do top athletes see the world differently?", NPR (2008)

(3) "Sad people see the world differently", *The Science Explorer* (2015)

(4) "Creative people really do see the world differently", *Independent* (2017)

(5) "People with high IQs really DO see the world differently", *Daily Mail* (2013)

Thurs., June 28th: Key Concepts - Consciousness vs Intentionality

(1) Kathleen Akins, "Of Sensory Systems and the "Aboutness" of Mental States" (1996)

(2) Daniel Dennett, "A Visit to the Phenomenological Garden" (1991)

\*(3) Beatrice de Gelder - "Uncanny Sight in the Blind" (2010)

#### Week Two

Tues., July 3rd: What is Perception?

(1) José Luis Bermúdez - "Morgan's Canon and Psychological Explanations" (2007)

(2) Tyler Burge - "Perception: Where the Mind Begins" (2014)

\*(3) Norman et al. - "Color Constancy for an Unseen Surface" 2014

Thurs., July 5th: The Puzzle

(1) Peter Godfrey-Smith - "The Theory-Ladenness of Observation", pp. 155-158 158-162 (2003)

(2) Norwood Russell Hanson - "Observation", pp. 4-20 (1958)

(3) Thomas Kuhn - "Revolutions as Changes of World View", pp. 111-129 (1962)

**Fri., July 6th: PAPER ONE DUE**

#### Week Three

Tues., July 10th: First Solution, Modularity and Encapsulation

(1) Peter Godfrey-Smith - "The Theory-Ladenness of Observation", pp. 158-162 (2003)

(2) Philip Robbins - "Modularity of Mind" SEP (2017)

(2) Jerry Fodor - "Observation Reconsidered" (1984)

Thurs., July 12th: First Solution, Replies

(1) Paul Churchland - "Perceptual Plasticity and Theoretical Neutrality" (1988)

- (2) Jerry Fodor - "A Reply to Churchland's 'Perceptual Plasticity and Theoretical Neutrality'" (1988)
- \* (3) Zenon Pylyshyn - "Is vision continuous with Cognition? The case for cognitive impenetrability of visual perception", (1999)

#### Week Four

Tues., July 17th: Top-Down Effects on Perception

- (1) Fiona Macpherson - "Cognitive Penetration of Color Experience" (2012)
- (2) Nicholas Silins - "Cognitive Penetration and the Epistemology of Perception" (2016)
- \* (3) Levin and Banaji - "Distortions in the Perceived Lightness of Faces" (2006)

Thurs., July 19th: The El-Greco Fallacy

- (1) Jeanine Stefanucci and Michael Geuss - "Big People, little world: The body influences size perceptions" (2009)
- (2) Chaz Firestone and Brian Scholl - "'Top-Down' Effects Where None Should be Found: the El Greco fallacy in perception research" (2014)
- \* (3) Chaz Firestone and Brian Scholl - "Cognition does not affect perception: Evaluating the evidence for 'top-down' effects" (2016)
- \* (4) Mukul Bhalla and Dennis Proffitt - "Visual-motor recalibration in geographical slant perception" (1999)

**Fri., July 20th: PAPER TWO DUE**

#### Week Five

Tues., July 24th: Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat, and how social biases affect how we think about and act in the world

- (1) Jules Holroyd, Robin Scaife, and Tom Stafford - "What is Implicit Bias?" (2017)
- \* (2) Steve Stroessner and Catherine Good - "Stereotype Threat: An Overview" (2013)
- \* (3) Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald - "Mindbugs" pp. 3-20 (2013)

Thurs., July 26th: Epistemic Costs of Social Bias

- (1) Jennifer Saul - "Skepticism and Implicit Bias" (2012)
- \* (2) Tamar Gendler - "On the epistemic costs of implicit bias" (2011)

#### Week Six

Tues., July 28th: Beyond the Individual

- (1) Alex Madva - "A Plea for Anti-Anti-Individualism: How Oversimple Psychology Misleads Social Policy", 2016
- (2) Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji - "Statistically Small Effects of the Implicit Association Test can have societally large effects" (2015)
- (3) Gabbrielle Johnson - "Algorithmic Bias" (MS)
- \* (4) "Machine Bias: There's software used across the country to predict future criminals. And it's biased against blacks", ProPublica (2016)

Thurs., August 2nd: Wrapping up  
No Reading

**Fri. August 3rd: PAPER THREE DUE**

## **Academic Misconduct:**

Students are expected to know and to follow the university's guidelines for academic honesty. Academic misconduct can occur in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. When in doubt about whether some academic practice is acceptable, ask your TA or the instructor for assistance. Always err on the side of avoiding misconduct. **Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Office of the Dean of Students.** (This is a course policy, and it is not subject to revision by your TA.) In other words, **there are no exceptions.**

## **Academic Accommodation:**

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) [formerly the Office for Students with Disabilities or OSD] at (310)825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

## **University Resources:**

For more information, check out the following resources:

Office of the Dean of Students:

<http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Academic-Integrity>

Student Conduct Code:

[http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Portals/16/Documents/UCLACodeOfConduct\\_Rev030416.pdf](http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Portals/16/Documents/UCLACodeOfConduct_Rev030416.pdf)

Student Guide to Academic Integrity:

<https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/portals/16/documents/studentguide.pdf>

UCLA Writing Programs:

<http://wp.ucla.edu/>

Center for Accessible Education (CAE):

[www.cae.ucla.edu](http://www.cae.ucla.edu)