

Philosophy 53401/Social Thought 43920

Perception and Action

Syllabus

Course Description

The course will be devoted to exploring and assessing John McDowell's treatment of problems in the philosophy of perception and the possibility of a parallel treatment of problems in the philosophy of action. The course will also explore McDowell's account of the historical antecedents of his treatment of these problems in Kant and Hegel, as well as a number of the particular views in recent analytic philosophy of perception and action with respect to which McDowell situates his own approach. An alternative title for the course might be "Everything You Need to Know to Understand McDowell's Recent Work in the Philosophy of Action".

The Structure of the Seminar

The seminar is open to and intended for both graduate students and faculty. The seminar will meet during the Winter Quarter every Wednesday in Pick Hall, Room 506, from 3 to 6pm. In the Winter Quarter, the course will be conducted by James Conant and Robert Pippin; in the Spring Quarter, the course will consist of presentations of recent work on the philosophy of action by John McDowell and discussion of those presentations. (The time and location of the Spring Quarter meetings will be announced early in the Winter Quarter. McDowell will give five lectures on the philosophy of action spread over the last three weeks of May, 2007: on May 16, May 23 and 24, and May 30 and 31; and one lecture on the philosophy of perception: on May 25.) Although the course meetings will include participation in these McDowell lectures and discussions, and so will be distributed over two quarters, it will count for only one quarter of credit. Students who wish to take the course for credit must attend the entire two-quarter sequence of the course.

Course Requirements

The sole course requirement is a seminar-length (i.e., 15 to 30 page) paper due at the end of the Spring Quarter.

Required Texts and Readings

The following texts have been ordered for the course and are available at the Seminary Co-op:

John McDowell, *Mind and World*
John McDowell, *Mind, Value and Reality*
G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*
Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*

The rest of the readings will be available through the seminar's Chalk website. The readings for each week divide into required readings and background reading. Students taking the course for credit are expected to do the all of required reading. The background readings are strongly recommended for those who have not already read them at some point before, especially in those weeks when the required reading assignment is comparatively light.

Although McDowell's *Mind and World* and the articles collected in the first half of his *Mind, Value and Reality* will not be required reading for any particular week of the seminar, they will form a constant background against which the discussion of the other texts in the course will take place. So students will be expected to familiarize themselves with that material over the course of the seminar.

Though Anscombe's *Intention* is not assigned until the 10th week of the seminar, students not familiar with that book are urged to begin studying it already during the 8th and 9th weeks of the seminar. The required reading for the latter two weeks has been kept comparatively light to make this feasible.

Schedule of Readings

01/03 (1st week) Introduction to the Seminar

Background reading:

McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lectures 1, 2 & 4

01/10 (2nd week) The Pippin/McDowell debate on Kant and Hegel on Perception

Required readings:

McDowell, 'Hegel's Idealism as a Radicalization of Kant'
Pippin, 'Leaving Nature Behind'
McDowell, 'Response to Pippin's 'Leaving Nature Behind''
Pippin, 'Postscript: on McDowell's response to 'Leaving Nature Behind''
McDowell, 'On Pippin's Postscript'
Pippin, 'Reply to McDowell's 'On Pippin's Postscript''
Handout on "McDowell and Pippin on Kant and Hegel: Some Points of Disagreement"

Background readings:

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B-edition Transcendental Deduction
Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen*, 'Kantian Philosophy'
Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, chapter 2 ('Kantian and Hegelian Idealism')
Pippin, 'The Unboundedness of the Conceptual: On Finite and Absolute Idealism'

01/17 (3rd week) The Myth of the Given

Required readings:

Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, chapter 2
Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Part I

Background reading:

Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, chapters 1 & 3

01/24 (4th week) Two-Ply Theories of Perceptual Knowledge

Required readings:

Brandom, "Study Guide to *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*", pp. 119-131
Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge"
Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, from Chapter 4, pp. 213-221

Background reading:

Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, from Chapter 4, pp. 199-213, 221-229

01/31 (5th week) The Battle for the Soul of Sellars

Required readings:

Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Parts III-VIII
Brandom, "Study Guide to *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*", pp. 134-162
McDowell, "Why is it called 'Empiricism' and the Philosophy of Mind?"

Background reading:

Brandom, "The Centrality of Sellars' Two-Ply Account of Observation"

02/07 (6th week) Brandom vs. McDowell on Perceptual Experience

Required readings:

Brandom, "Perception and Rational Constraint"
McDowell, "Reply to Brandom"
McDowell, *Woodbridge Lectures*, I & II

Background readings:

McDowell, "Brandom on Observation"
McDowell, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception"

02/14 (7th week) Transition to the Philosophy of Action

Required readings:

McDowell, "What Myth?"
Davidson, "Intending"
Davidson, "Actions, Reasons and Causes"

Background readings:

Dreyfus, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental"
Dreyfus, "The Return of the Myth of the Mental"
McDowell, "Response to Dreyfus"
Hornsby, *Actions*, Chapter 3
Davidson, "Agency"

02/21 (8th week) Searle and O'Shaughnessy on Action

Required readings:

Searle, *Intentionality*, Chapter 3
O'Shaughnessy, "The Epistemology of Physical Action"

Background readings:

O'Shaughnessy, "Searle's Theory of Action"
Searle, "Response to O'Shaughnessy: The Background of Intentionality and Action."

02/28 (9th week) Sellars and Brandom on Action

Required readings:

Sellars, "Thought and Action"
Brandom, "Action, Norms and Practical Reasoning"

Background readings:

Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games"
Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, from Chapter 4, pp. 229-271

03/07 (10th week) Anscombe and Thompson on Practical Knowledge

Required readings:

Anscombe, *Intention*
Thompson, "Naïve Action Theory"

Background readings:

McDowell, "Virtue and Reason"

McDowell, "Some Issues in Aristotle's Moral Psychology"

McDowell, "Two Sorts of Naturalism"

03/14 (11th week) Pippin and McDowell on Hegel on Action

Required readings:

Pippin, "The Sociality of Action"

McDowell, "Toward a Reading of Hegel on Action"

Background readings:

Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Reason"

Pippin, "What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?"

Pippin, "Recognition and Reconciliation: Actualized Agency in Hegel's Jena *Phenomenology*"