

Syllabus updated on 7/14/2009. Fall, 2009.

Graduate seminar 5700: “**Action and Perception**” 3 credits. TR 12:30-1:45.

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**Texts:** Mohan Matthen, *Seeing, Doing, and Knowing* (Oxford, 2005) and Mark Rowlands, *Body Language: Representation in Action* (MIT, 2006). Both books will be on reserve in the library.

**Recommendations for extra reading.** Since you don’t need help finding out about the history of philosophy, from the ancients (Plato and Aristotle) to the mid-twentieth century (Russell, Ayer, Merleau-Ponty), I list only recent items. Although the guidelines for writing papers say you must base your papers on articles published in professional journals, any of the books marked with an asterisk will be acceptable. The items *not* marked fall outside the 5 year limit, a part of the guidelines that stays in force:

In September, I will put on reserve for 7 day circulation at Waldo Library these six books:

Our two textbooks, Matthen and Rowlands, and

\**Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* (2007)--55 original papers

\**The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (2009)– 26 original papers

\*Wright, ed., *The Case for Qualia* (2008)–19 original papers

\*Gendler and Hawthorne, eds., *Perceptual Experience* (2006)–16 original papers

Reviews of Matthen and Rowlands and other books are at the Notre Dame Reviews website.

[Http:// ndpr.nd.edu](http://ndpr.nd.edu)

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* articles you can find by searching under ‘perception’ and under ‘action.’ [Http:// plato.stanford.edu](http://plato.stanford.edu)

The books used in the last course I gave on Action and Perception:

\*Alva Noe, *Action in Perception* (2004)

Alfred Mele, *Motivation and Agency* (2003)

Other useful books by philosophers:

\*Alva Noe, *Out of Our Heads* (2009)

C. L. Hardin, *Color for Philosophers* (1988); also “Further Thoughts: 1993” (In 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.?)

\*Andy Clark *Supersizing the Mind* (2008)

\*Rowland Stout, *Action* (2005)

\*Fred Adams and Ken Aizawa, *The Bounds of Cognition* (2008)

\*L. Shapiro, *The Mind Incarnate* (2004)

\*Galen Strawson, *The Self?* (2005)

Two books by philosophically sophisticated neuroscientists:

\*Benjamin Libet, *Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness* (2004)

\*Marc Jeannerod, *Motor Cognition: What Actions Tell the Self* (2006)

Articles you can find (and print out) by searching *The Philosopher’s Index* through WMU’s library: [http:// www.wmich.edu/library](http://www.wmich.edu/library). Look under “articles” for the screen that lets you choose the Philosopher’s Index

Older anthologies of articles:

Smith and Jokic, eds., *Consciousness* (2002)—18 original articles

Ludlow, Nagasawa, and Stoljar, eds., *There's Something about Mary* (2004)—20 previously published articles.

Two non-philosophy journals with articles in the philosophy of mind:

*Trends in Cognitive Science* (see articles by Gallese *et al*, vol 8, and Saxe, vol. 9, Jacob and Jeannerod, vol 9)

*Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (see articles by Preston and de Waal, vol 25, and Grush, vol 27)

**Grades:** 20% Class participation, including reports (two minimum); 40% each of two papers, each 7-8 pages long (2250 words), one focused more on perception and one more on action. Term paper guidelines available at: <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~afalk>. Click on “guidelines.”

**Schedule of readings and term papers:** Generally Tuesdays will be devoted to perception (Matthen) and Thursdays to action (Rowlands), although the Matthen book is longer, and so we will steal all the Thursdays in Sept. for it. We will read roughly 25 pages of text per day.

<b>Week of:</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
Sept 8/10	Matthen “Prelude”	Matthen, ch. 1
Sept 15/17	Matthen, ch. 2	Matthen, ch.3 and Afterword to Pt. 1
Sept 22/24	Matthen, ch. 4	Matthen, ch. 5 and Afterword to Pt. 2
Sept 29/Oct 1	Matthen, ch. 6	Rowlands, ch. 1
Oct 6/8	Matthen, chs. 7-8	Rowlands, chs. 2-3
Oct 13/15	Matthen, ch. 9	Rowlands, ch. 4
	Paper proposal due	
Oct 20/22	Matthen, ch. 10	Rowlands, ch. 5
Oct 27/29	Matthen, ch. 11	Rowlands, ch. 6
	First paper due	
Nov 3/5	Matthen, ch. 12	Rowlands, ch. 7
Nov 10/12	Matthen, ch. 13	Rowlands, ch. 8
Nov 17/19	Matthen, Conclusion	Rowlands, ch. 9
Nov 24	Matthen, List of Defs & Theses	-----
Dec 1/3	Rowlands, ch. 10	Rowlands, ch. 11
	Paper proposal due	
Dec 8/10	Open	Open
Dec 15/17	Second paper due	

**Course description:**

I will organize the course around four theses about the relation of perception and action; our readings will challenge and defend them:

1. We cannot understand either perception or action without bringing in the other. Perception is the getting of answers to questions posed by the exigencies of action, and action is a response to the environment one perceives. Perceptions call for actions; actions change perceptions.

2. In the mental processing involved in each, there is a stage which is an analogue of Descartes's pineal body, that is, a place where mere physiology peters out, and intentionality and prescriptivity take over. Thus perceivers move from mere reception to perception, and agents move from the action (e.g., my raising my arm) to the event (my arm rising). Are these transitions merely a requirement imposed on the data by our feeble minds, or is the dualism built into things? If the latter, the dualism need not be ontological, just structural, in the sense that the mental properties are still grounded in physical ones without being reducible to them.

3. The semantics of each is two-dimensional. Perception connects sourceward ("upstream") as well as inward to the perceiver's desires, memories, and expectations ("downstream"). Similarly, action connects inward, so that it is always expressive of an inner representation, much the way acts of speech are, as well as directed toward consequences in the world.

4. Theory-ladenness is not only characteristic of perception; it is characteristic of action as well. Just as theory, which is usually thought of as formulated in "eternal sentences" enabling people to explain, predict, and control phenomena, can take on an indexical role as the language in which informed people report their perceptions, indeed as the conceptual scheme operative in their perceiving things, so also theory can take on the role of the conceptual scheme operative in people's doing things. They live up to a theory of themselves, or fail to, by the way they act.

We will consider cases to test these theses, such as the kind of perception called "empathy" and the kind of action called "free."

You may wonder about all the mental stuff that fits between the perceptions and the actions, like beliefs, desires, deliberations, etc. That stuff was the subject of my course in the spring of 2009, *Desire and Belief*, which I will teach again, maybe, in 2011. This course on action and perception does the bookends; the course on desire and belief does the book in between.

Actually, the analogy is unfair to perception and action. John Searle has it right when he says, the biologically primary forms of Intentionality, [are] perception and action. . . . Beliefs and desires are not the primary forms, rather they are etiolated forms of more primordial experiences in perceiving and doing. [Intending to act], for example, is not a fancy form of desire; it would be more accurate to think of desire as a faded form of intention, . . . (*Intentionality*, p. 36. Also see p. 105).