



Perception and Basic Beliefs: Zombies, Modules, and the Problem of the External World

Jack Lyons

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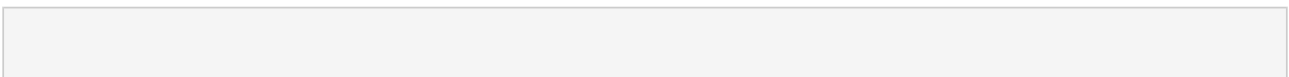
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Perception is our main source of epistemic access to the outside world. Perception and Basic Beliefs addresses two central questions in epistemology: which beliefs are epistemologically basic (i.e., noninferentially justified) and where does perception end and inferential cognition begin. Jack Lyons offers a highly externalist theory, arguing that what makes a belief a basic belief or a perceptual belief is determined by the nature of the cognitive system, or module, that produced the beliefs. On this view, the sensory experiences that typically accompany perceptual beliefs play no indispensable role in the justification of these beliefs, and one can have perceptual beliefs--justified perceptual beliefs--even in the absence of any sensory experiences whatsoever. Lyons develops a general theory of basic beliefs and argues that perceptual beliefs are a species of basic beliefs. This results from the fact that perceptual modules are a special type of basic belief-producing modules. Importantly, some beliefs are not the outputs of this class of cognitive module; these beliefs are therefore non-basic, thus requiring inferential support from other beliefs for their justification. This last point is used to defend a reliabilist epistemology against an important class of traditional objections (where the agent uses a reliable process that she doesn't know to be reliable).

Perception and Basic Beliefs brings together an important treatment of these major epistemological topics and provides a positive solution to the traditional problem of the external world.

"This book deserves kudos. It presents one of the more novel versions of reliabilism to appear in recent years. The style is fast-paced and energetic, with no sacrifice in philosophical precision. It applies original interpretations of perceptual science to central issues in traditional epistemology, and should thereby earn itself a prominent place in the naturalistic epistemology literature. Finally, the book is more comprehensive than its title suggests. It illuminates a great many issues of traditional epistemology beyond perception, providing an up-to-date and thoroughgoing basic epistemology." - Alvin Goldman, Philosophical Studies

"Perception and Basic Beliefs is a fine book. The overall dialectic is always kept clearly in view for the reader. The arguments are vigorously presented, are always provocative, and are often quite persuasive. The book is very well informed, both about the contours of recent epistemology and about pertinent work in cognitive science. The writing is elegant, crisp, and uncluttered. Lyons' way of parsing the landscape of epistemological positions concerning justified belief is very illuminating, especially because of his emphasis on the distinction between evidential and non-evidential forms of justification. The book was a pleasure to read, and I recommend it very strongly to any philosopher or philosophy graduate student interested in epistemology." - Terry Horgan, Philosophical Studies

"This is a bold and original book. The book is intrepid, striking, and forceful. It contains a great deal of very fine work. It is powerfully conceived, well crafted, and engagingly written. It is obviously the product of many years of careful reflection devoted to these topics, and the quality of argument is very high. In every way the book fits the gold standard of quality set by Oxford University Press." - Frederick Schmitt, Professor of Philosophy, Indiana University



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