

**Advanced seminar:
PHILOSOPHY OF ATTENTION**

Meeting: Di. 12:00 bis 14:00 c.t.
Room: [Geschw.-Scholl-Pl. 1 \(M\) - M 207](#)

Instructor: Dr. Azenet Lopez
Office: Ludwigstraße 31 (email me for appointment)
Contact: Lopez.Azenet@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

Short course description:

Our attention is what shapes our mental lives. The things to which we pay attention make a substantial difference to our experience of the world, our emotional state and our interactions with others. Nowadays, attention has even become a resource that big corporations compete for grabbing every day, in what has been called “an economy of attention”. In this seminar we will explore the nature of attention as well as its relevance for foundational philosophical problems, combining perspectives from contemporary analytic philosophy and cognitive psychology.

Objectives:

This course will enable you to:

- Distinguish some of the main philosophical theories of attention and their relations to our current scientific knowledge of attention.
- Understand some of the main issues and problems surrounding attention in contemporary analytic philosophy.
- Identify and develop your own views about the significance of attention on everyday life, as well as your own research directions within the philosophy of attention (including possible topics for a MA thesis).

Methodology:

Our weekly discussions will be centered around five main questions:

- (1) What is attention?
- (2) Can attention be directed in “good” or “bad” ways?
- (3) Can our attention make us better or worse moral agents?
- (4) How much voluntary control do we have over our attention?
- (5) How does our attention affect the way we experience the world?

Each of these topics will be discussed over the course of two sessions, during which we will discuss two different perspectives from recent philosophical articles. You must come to class prepared to answer and ask questions about the assigned readings.

Value of the seminar:

9 ECTS-points

Assessment/Grading:

Students can obtain credit for this course in two ways (choose only one):

- 1) Final paper** (7.000-8.000 words; about 15-16 pages, excluding bibliography).
- In this paper, you will engage with one of the problems discussed in class. You will present your own perspective or perspectives, and you will give arguments supporting your views.

- I will provide sample prompts, but you are free to choose your own topic. This can include discussion of articles beyond those read in class, if they are appropriate. Make sure to check this with me.
- If you pick this option, you must send me a short outline of your paper (no more than one page) by **July 31st**. I will give you feedback on this outline, that you must incorporate in your final paper. Final papers are due on **September 30th**.

2) Graded presentation (30 min. during class, plus a 5,000w/10p written version, excluding bibliography).

- For this presentation, you will pick one of the assigned papers, present its contents in class, and raise critical questions.
- If you pick this option, you must let me know, as soon as possible, which of the assigned papers you want to present. You may also present a paper not listed in the assigned readings; just make sure to check it with me first. The sessions on **July 12th** and **July 19th** are reserved for these presentations.
- After your presentation, I will give you feedback. You must incorporate this feedback in a written version of your presentation, in essay format. This written version is due on **September 30th**.

Course schedule:

Session	Topic & assigned readings	Complementary readings
26.04.	<p>1. Introduction: Why we need a philosophy of attention</p> <p>No reading assigned.</p> <p>Suggested: Watzl, S. (2017). <i>Structuring Mind</i>. Ch. 1. "Beyond brain mechanisms"</p>	<p>Mole (2021)</p> <p>Jennings (2020, Ch.2)</p>
03.05.	<p>2. Metaphysics of attention I - Subpersonal theories</p> <p>Fazekas, P. & Nanay, B. (2021). Attention is amplification, not selection. <i>British Journal for the Philosophy of Science</i> 72 (1):299-324. https://www.academia.edu/37429853/Attention_is_Amplification_not_Selection</p>	<p>Lindsay (2020)</p> <p>Mole & Henry (in press)</p>
10.05.	<p>3. Metaphysics of attention II – Subject-level theories</p> <p>Jennings, C. D. (2012). The subject of attention. <i>Synthese</i> 189 (3):535-554.</p>	<p>Watzl (2017, Ch.2 &4)</p> <p>Wu (2014, Ch. 3)</p>
17.05.	<p>4. Normativity of attention I – Good attention in epistemology</p> <p>Siegel, S. (2017). <i>The rationality of perception</i>. Ch.9: "Saliency effects"</p> <p>Irving, Z. C. (2019). Attention norms in Siegel's <i>The Rationality of Perception</i>. <i>Ratio</i> 32 (1):84-91.</p>	<p>Silins & Siegel (2020)</p>
24.05.	<p>5. Normativity of attention II – Beyond epistemology</p>	<p>Lynch (2014)</p>

	Watzl, S. (in press). The ethics of attention: An argument and a framework. In S. Archer (ed.), <i>Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry</i> . Routledge. https://philpapers.org/rec/WATTEO-29	
31.05.	6. Attention and moral agency I – Virtues of salience Chappell, R. Y. & Yetter-Chappell, H. (2016). Virtue and salience. <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i> 94 (3):449-463. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/90869/1/Chappell_Salience.pdf	Bommarito (2013)
07.06.	7. Attention and moral agency II – Attending virtuously Vance, J. & Werner, P. J. (in press). Attentional moral perception. <i>Journal of Moral Philosophy</i> : 1-24. https://philarchive.org/rec/VANAMP-8	
14.06.	8. Attention and voluntary control I – Free will Evans, C.O. (1975). Free will and attention. <i>Theoria to Theory</i> , 1975, pp. 189-205. http://www.mentalstates.net/freewill.html	Gillet & Liu (2012)
21.06.	9. Attention and voluntary control II – Action and responsibility Jennings, C.D. (2020). <i>The Attending Mind</i> . Ch. 6. “Attention, action and responsibility.”	Mole (2021, §3.5)
28.06.	10. Attention and consciousness I – Conscious experience with attention Watzl, S. (2017). <i>Structuring Mind</i> . Ch. 8. “Beyond appearances: The phenomenal contributions of attention.”	Lerman (2022) Beck & Schneider (2017)
05.07.	11. Attention and consciousness II – Conscious experience without attention Jennings, C. D. (2015). Consciousness without attention. <i>Journal of the American Philosophical Association</i> 1 (2):276--295.	Mole (2021, §3.1) Jennings (2020, Ch.5).
12.07.	12. TBD/ Student presentations	
19.07.	13. TBD/ Student presentations	
26.07.	14. Wrapping up & advice on writing philosophy papers	

List of complementary readings:

- Beck, J. & Schneider, K. A. (2017). Attention and mental primer. *Mind and Language* 32 (4):463-494. <http://www.jacobbeck.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/attention-and-mental-primer.pdf>
- Bommarito, N. (2013). Modesty as a virtue of attention. *Philosophical Review* 122 (1):93-117.

- Gillett, G. & Liu, S.C. (2012). Free will and Necker's cube: Reason, language and top-down control in cognitive neuroscience. *Philosophy*, 87, pp 29-50. doi:10.1017/S003181911100057X.
- Jennings, C.D. (2020). *The Attending Mind*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lerman, H. (2022). Attention, salience, and the phenomenology of visual experience. In S. Archer (ed.), *Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry*. London, UK: pp. 24-49.
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/people/lerman/lerman_aspve.pdf
- Lindsay, G. (2020). Attention in psychology, neuroscience, and machine learning, *Frontiers in Computational Neuroscience*, 16 April 2020 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fncom.2020.00029>
- Lynch, K. (2014). Self-deception and shifts of attention. *Philosophical Explorations* 17 (1):63-75.
<https://philpapers.org/archive/LYNSAS-2.pdf>
- Mole, C. (2021). Attention, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/attention>.
- Mole, C. & Henry, A. (in press). What is attention? Adverbialist theories. *WIREs Cognitive Science*.
<https://philpapers.org/rec/MOLWIA>
- Silins, N. & Siegel, S. (2020). Attention and perceptual justification. In Adam Pautz & Daniel Stoljar (eds.), *Festschrift for Ned Block*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press <https://philpapers.org/archive/SIEAAP.pdf>
- Watzl, S. (2017). *Structuring Mind: The Nature of Attention and how it Shapes Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wu, W. (2014). *Attention*. Routledge.

Proposed readings for sessions 12 & 13:

Joint attention:

- Battich, L. & Geurts, B. (2021). Joint attention and perceptual experience. *Synthese* **198**, 8809–8822 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-020-02602-6>.
- Battich, L., Garzorz, I., Wahn, B., & Deroy, O. (2021). The impact of joint attention on the sound-induced flash illusions. *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics*, 83(8), 3056–3068. doi: [10.3758/s13414-021-02347-5](https://doi.org/10.3758/s13414-021-02347-5)
- Harder, R. (in press). Joint attention and communication. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*. <https://philpapers.org/archive/HARJAA-6.pdf>

Attention and aesthetic experience:

- Mortu, A. (2018). Degrees of attention in experiencing art. *Estetika* 55 (1):45-66.
- Nanay, B. (2014). Aesthetic attention. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22 (5-6):96-118.
<https://philpapers.org/archive/NANAA-2.pdf>
- van der Berg, S., (2019). The motivational structure of appreciation, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 69(276): 445–466.

Attention and the self:

- Ganeri, J. (2017). *Attention, Not Self*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- (2018). Attention and self in Buddhist philosophy of mind. *Ratio* 31 (4):354-362.

Attention, emotions and well-being:

- Brady, M. (2013). *Emotional Insight: The Epistemic Role of Emotional Experience*. Oxford University Press.