

## **PERCEPTION AND BASIC BELIEFS: ZOMBIES, MODULES, AND THE PROBLEM OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD**

This book offers solutions to two persistent and I believe closely related problems in epistemology. The first problem is that of drawing a principled distinction between perception and inference: what is the difference between seeing that something is the case and merely believing it on the basis of what we do see? The second problem is that of specifying which beliefs are epistemologically basic (i.e., directly, or noninferentially, justified) and which are not. In concert with a growing number of contemporary epistemologists, and in opposition to the historically dominant tradition that holds that only beliefs about our current sensory experiences are directly justified, I contend that perceptual beliefs (beliefs about external objects) are themselves basic. In contrast with both the tradition and the current trend, I argue that what makes a belief a perceptual belief, or a basic belief, is not a matter of the subject's contemporaneous nondoxastic experiences, nor the content of the belief in question, nor the subject's auxiliary beliefs; what determines whether a belief is basic or perceptual is the nature of the cognitive system, or "module", that is causally responsible for the belief. The class of modules whose outputs are perceptual beliefs, I argue, is a subset of the class of modules whose outputs are basic beliefs. Thus, even zombies, who in the philosophical literature lack conscious experiences altogether, can have basic, justified, perceptual beliefs.

It is doubtful that a theory of either perceptual belief or basic belief can be cogently defended in an epistemological vacuum. The theories of perceptual and basic beliefs developed in the monograph are embedded in a larger reliabilist epistemology. Not only does the reliabilist background theory lend substance and credibility to the theories of perceptual and basic beliefs I defend, but these theories in turn make for a better fleshed out, new and more tenable, version of reliabilism. My theory of basic beliefs is an externalist theory (i.e., whether a particular belief is basic cannot be ascertained by the agent on the basis of mere reflection), but this theory of basic beliefs actually bolsters reliabilism against a famous class of objections usually thought to argue for a kind of internalism. I develop a detailed reliabilist theory, one that draws an explicit distinction between basic and nonbasic beliefs, using the general framework of my theory of basic beliefs to work out a reliabilist theory of inferential justification. The central theses of this book link traditionally important epistemological categories with a certain class of cognitive modules; as such, the book is an instance of a thoroughgoingly naturalistic approach to epistemology. Many of my arguments appeal to the general theoretical background assumed by contemporary cognitive science, sometimes to particular empirical findings. The theory that I endorse reserves a central role for the cognitive sciences—in particular, cognitive neuroscience—in filling in the details of an applied epistemological theory.