REFLECTING NATURE

MESTERBREV VED EMILIE STRANDENÆS

What is the topic of your master's thesis?
My thesis is about the nature of perception. I discuss some central approaches to representationalism: the view that perceiving one's environment is a matter of having mental states that represent that environment. I discuss work by perceptual psychologist Irvin Rock, who is placed firmly within the representationalist paradigm. While his work has been influential, it carries controversial philosophical consequences. I contrast his work with recent psychological work on perception that makes use of Bayesian probabilities. Bayesian approaches to perception describe how to optimally solve a perceptual task given available evidence. An example of a perceptual task might be to detect distinct objects in a composite scenery. Bayesian probabilities can be used to describe the best guess about which objects are present in the scene, given available information. Bayesian perceptual science models the perceptual system as performing such computations. These approaches are increasingly popular, and their theoretical commitments require philosophical scrutiny. I compare Bayesian perceptual science to Tyler Burge's construction of representationalism. Finally, I present a view of perceptual representation as phenomenally conscious. I suggest that an individual's perceptual perspective on reality must have what I name a *phenomenal manner*: a way it phenomenally manifests itself in the psychology of an individual. In other words I investigate a strong kind of phenomenal intentionality about perception.

What do you argue in favour of/against?
I argue that the Bayesian approach to perception supports a form of representationalism, while avoiding the

unfortunate consequences of views like Rock's. I compare examples from Bayesian perceptual science to the framework presented by Burge and argue that these are compatible. Finally, I argue that Burge's picture of perception as presented in *The Origins of Objectivity* does not adequately address the phenomenal aspect of perceptual representation. I argue that representationalism is committed to the idea that perceiving subjects have a kind of perspective that is best understood as a phenomenal state.

Why should others read your thesis?
It provides an introduction to the contemporary philosophical debate about the nature of perception and to questions regarding mental representation in general.

What are your plans for the future?
I have just started working full time here in Oslo, and will be occupied with that for a year. After that, who knows!