

PHL340: Issues in Philosophy of Mind

University of Toronto

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Course Instructor:

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Office Hours and Location: Immediately After Lecture

Course Description

The Perceptual Turn: what do philosophers of mind care about? In the 80s, it was mental representation: how we manage to have thoughts about objects and their properties. In the 90s, it was consciousness: how the world as described by physical science relates to the qualitative character of conscious experience. The 2000s brought a new (and at the same time not so new) focus: perception.

Consider Sophie. She can see colours, hear sounds, taste flavours, touch textures, and smell scents. For Sophie (as for us) to see, to touch, and to hear each *feel* different. But what else (if anything) distinguishes these senses? If Sophie glances around, she'll see a world populated by objects: chairs, tables, books, and so on. But would she still justifiably think of the world as populated by objects if she could only hear, if she could not also see and touch? In other words, which of her senses (if any) present the world as objective and mind-independent?

Sophie's senses also allow her to know about the world. How does she know that a cat is sitting on her mat? By looking. How does she know whether the piano is in tune? By listening. Yet perception doesn't always behave. Sometimes the world looks to Sophie a way it really isn't: a red rose may look green, or she might hallucinate a pink elephant. But if perception sometimes leads her astray, shouldn't Sophie be sceptical of its ability to provide knowledge of the external world?

A precondition for *knowing* about the world, however, is a capacity to *think* about it: for Sophie to know that the cat is on the mat, she must first be able to think about both the cat and the mat. And in this case she can think about the cat in part because she has seen it. So perception isn't just a source of knowledge; it must also provide a subject matter for our thoughts about the world.

In this course we'll examine recent attempts to shed light on these and other questions about the nature and role of perceptual experience. Issues include: perceptual objectivity, perceptual justification, perceptual content, perceptual attention, and perceptual demonstrative thought. These issues concern perception, but also sit at the intersection of larger debates in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language. In addition, we'll touch on important methodological questions about the significance of, and constraints on, a philosophical theory of perception.

Course Reading

Weekly readings will mostly be made available on Blackboard, and lecture handouts will be distributed in class. Students should also try to acquire the following texts (I've had the UTM campus bookstore order copies):

- Brewer, Bill. *Perception and Its Objects*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Wu, Wayne. *Attention*. Routledge, 2014.

- *Attention: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*. Eds. C. Mole, D. Smithies, and W. Wu. Oxford University Press, 2011.

I know that books are expensive, academic books especially so. With this fact in mind, I originally intended for all the course readings to be available online. But I later discovered that due to copyright constraints, I cannot provide electronic copies of the readings from these three books.

A shopping guide: if you can buy only one, get the Brewer text; if you can buy two, get the first and third (since both contain required readings).

Evaluation

Grading: We adhere to a blind grading policy. So when you submit your assignments, please only include your student number.

1. Five Short Papers: 60%. Due: Every Saturday (starting Week 2)

- *Instructions:* You will write **five** short papers. They will require the close reading and analysis of a passage from one of the readings. I'll send out a list of passages, along with more detailed instructions, well before each paper is due. The papers must be no longer than 600 words. Your TA has been instructed to penalize anyone who goes over the word limit. Submit these papers on Blackboard before 11:59 p.m. (EDT) on the due date. *NOTE:* all papers must be submitted in .doc format.
- *Grading Scheme:* While you will receive a grade for every paper, only the *highest four* grades will count. *Caveat:* if you submit fewer than five papers, I will weight the average of your N paper grades as $N \times 12\%$ rather than 60% of your final grade. The same will happen if you submit all five papers, but receive a failing grade on one or more of them. So submit and pass all five papers.
- *Long Paper Alternative:* some may wish to write a long paper for this course. To take advantage of this alternative, you must meet two requirements: (1) receive a B+ or better on *both* of the first two short papers; (2) notify me of your decision to write a long paper before Saturday of Week 4. The paper must be no longer than 2000 words, and is due on Saturday of Week 6. On this scheme, the two short papers would together be worth 25%, and the long paper 35%

2. Final Examination: 35% Date and Location: TBA

- The final exam will take place during the official exam period. It is a two hour exam, and will be a mix of fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions. Only material discussed in lecture will be examinable.

3. Participation: 5%

Course Schedule

Reading Guide: I've assigned at least one article (or book chapter) per lecture as required reading. These texts are quite difficult, and many of you have other commitments (e.g. jobs, class, etc.) that may cut into your reading time. But don't let this worry you. My lectures won't assume that you've read the assigned text. Instead, I suggest that you treat the lectures as an introduction to the readings. Armed with knowledge gleaned from lecture (as well as from our subsequent discussion), you'll be well positioned to extract something useful from the texts. So plan to do much of your reading after class.

Aside from the required readings, you'll notice that I usually assign texts marked as 'optional'. Sometimes they are fun pieces related to the lecture topic (e.g. Ch. 2 of Strawson's *Individuals*, which discusses the position of a subject who experiences a purely auditory world). Other times these texts provide a brief overview of a topic (e.g. the Soteriou chapter and Wu selections). Mostly these readings expand on themes or questions introduced by the required reading.

It is possible to do very well in this course without reading all the papers. I think this is a good thing. Better that you should carefully read a hard but classic paper—say Pryor’s ‘Skeptic and the Dogmatist’—than that you should instead skim two or three papers. Often I’ll let you know beforehand which bits of the set texts warrant special attention.

1. Course Introduction and the Arguments from Illusion and Hallucination

2. Classical Responses and Transparency

Reading: Tim Crane “The Problem of Perception” [A general purpose introduction to the issues by a leading theorist of perception]

Optional: P.F. Strawson “Perception and Its Objects” [A classic paper by a classy philosopher]

3. Representationalism

Reading: David Chalmers “The Representational Character of Experience”; Michael Tye *Consciousness, Color, and Content* (Chs. 3) [These are both relatively easy reads, but if you must pick one, stick to the Chalmers]

Optional: Charles Travis “The Silence of the Senses” [This is *very* hard]; Bill Brewer *Perception and Its Objects* (Ch. 4)

4. Direct Realism

Reading: John Campbell *Reference and Consciousness* (Chs. 6); Bill Brewer *Perception and Its Objects* (Ch. 5) [Campbell’s writing is somewhat opaque. My suggestion: Start with Brewer, then dive into Campbell if you have the time.]

Optional: Matt Soteriou *The Mind’s Construction* (Ch. 1)

5. Perceptual Content I: How Far Does It Go?

Reading: Susanna Siegel “Which Properties are Represented in Perception?”

Optional: Tim Bayne “Perceptual Experience and the Reach of Phenomenal Content” [This paper covers a lot of interesting ground, and does so quite elegantly, but presupposes some familiarity with the issues Siegel raises.]

6. Perceptual Content II: Beyond Vision

Reading: Casey O’Callaghan “Lessons from Beyond Vision (Sounds and Audition)”

Optional: P. F. Strawson *Individuals* (Ch. 2) [This is very fun]

7. Perceptual Justification I

Reading: Jim Pryor “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist” [This can be tough going, but stick with it]; Moore “Proof of an External World” [This is super-short, but necessary as background for the Pryor paper]

8. Perceptual Justification II

Reading: Roger White “Problems for Dogmatism”

Optional: Susanna Siegel “Cognitive Penetrability and Perceptual Justification”

9. Perceptual Objectivity: Berkeley’s Puzzle

Reading: John Campbell “Berkeley’s Puzzle”

Optional: Gareth Evans “Things Without The Mind” [This is *extremely* hard, but worth it]

10. Perceptual Attention: Access and Consciousness

Reading: Ned Block “On a Confusion about the Function of Consciousness”; Declan Smithies “Attention is Rational-Access Consciousness” [If you only have time for one of these, read Smithies]

Optional: Wayne Wu *Attention* (selections)

11. Perception and Thought

Reading: Declan Smithies “What is the Role of Consciousness in Demonstrative Thought?”; Imogen Dickie “Visual Attention Fixes Demonstrative Reference By Eliminating Referential Luck” [These are both very hard papers, but also very cool.]

Optional: John Campbell “Consciousness and Reference”; Wayne Wu *Attention* (selections) [Wu nicely summarizes this debate, for those who want a quick introduction.]

12. Review

Course Business

1. *Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.* The University of Toronto takes plagiarism (and academic misconduct more generally) very seriously. For a complete statement of the policies governing academic conduct, see the University’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is, and also for knowing the particular plagiarism penalties. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to) the use of a thinker’s ideas or words without proper citation; the purchase of assignments; the use of internet resources without proper citation; and the submission of work written (in whole or in part) by another. Penalties for plagiarism range from a zero on the assignment to suspension from the University of Toronto. Furthermore, TAs in the Philosophy Department are known to be excellent detectors of plagiarism: *if you cheat, we will catch you*. So don’t do it.
2. *How to Avoid Plagiarising:* Most students plagiarise because they believe themselves to be without options. But no student will ever be without options in this course. If you find yourself in trouble, and tempted to cheat, contact me *immediately*. If you haven’t *yet* cheated, a solution can always be found. In addition, the University of Toronto provides a host of resources designed to help students in academic need. UTM has a writing centre and friendly registrars, and the Philosophy Department has its own Essay Clinic (though you must book ahead). Students who wish to talk to someone may also contact the University’s Counselling & Psychological Services (CAPS).
3. *Late Penalties.* This will be a challenging and fast-paced course. It is highly recommended that you attend every class meeting and get your work in on time. Late penalties on assigned work are set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of three days (this includes weekends/holidays), unless accompanied by a documented medical explanation or due to a family emergency. Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.
4. *Your Course Contact.* I am your primary contact for this course. You must use your ‘utoronto’ email account if you need to correspond with me (or your T.A.). Course-related emails **MUST** have “PHL340” somewhere in the subject line. I will not answer emails that ask for information readily available on either Blackboard or the course syllabus, so it is always a good idea to begin by checking those two places. I will also not answer emails that ask for information easily obtainable through regular class attendance. Lastly, I will not answer emails that ask substantive philosophical questions—those with such questions should bring them to my office hours. I will respond to all other emails within two working days.
5. *Special Accommodations.* I am more than happy to assist with special accommodations for students registered with accessibility services. If you are registered with accessibility services, please don’t hesitate to have your accessibility services representative get in touch with me.