

Issues in Philosophy of Mind: Perception (PHL 340)

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Online, due to Covid-19

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Course description

This course is an introduction to some topics in the philosophy of perception. We will start by considering foundational questions about the nature of perceptual experience and our perceptual connection with the world. From there, we will move on to consider *what* we perceive. We will focus on vision and audition, though we will also touch on touch and olfaction. Do we only see colors and lines? Or do we see full-blooded objects, like tables and chairs? Can our beliefs influence what we see? What exactly are sounds? Can we hear anything other than sounds? We will also consider two special objects of vision and audition: photographs and audio recordings. When I look at a photograph of David Bowie, do I literally *see* David Bowie, as some have thought? When I hear a recording of David Bowie singing, do I literally hear his voice? What is the nature of such 'mediated' perception? Throughout the course, we will explore how the philosophy of perception intersects with issues in diverse areas of philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics, and aesthetics.

Online contact

All of our interaction will be online.

Initial group meeting: There will be a synchronous meeting on Monday, July 6th, at 4pm EDT, on bbcollaborate. Attendance is not required, but is highly recommended. The session will be recorded, so that those who cannot make it can watch later. (This means that if you do attend the session, you must consent to being recorded.) We will introduce ourselves, I will introduce the course with a focus on procedural issues, and you will have an opportunity to ask questions. My intent is that this meeting will make all aspects of course mechanics clear from the beginning.

Video lectures: I will post video lectures of roughly 10-25 minutes each to Quercus throughout the week. There will be several lectures for each topic listed on the calendar below. All video lectures on a particular topic will be posted on or before the date that topic is listed on the calendar.

Office hours: I will hold two, one-hour 'office hours' on bbcollaborate each week. Office hours are an opportunity to discuss course material and assignments. I will set up a poll to determine the optimal time to schedule these hours. If you are not available during the scheduled times, just email me and we can arrange another time. In the absence of normal class meetings, I hope that many of you will make use of office hours.

Course objectives

If you take this course seriously:

- You will become familiar with some topics and debates in the philosophy of perception and form your own views on some of these issues.
- You will gain a foundation for further study in philosophy of perception and adjacent topics in philosophy and cognitive science.
- You will become a better reader of difficult texts and improve your ability to analyze and assess complex arguments.
- You will improve your analytical writing skills and your ability to construct cogent arguments.
- You will learn to give high-quality constructive feedback to your peers, and to incorporate feedback you receive effectively.

The last three points will benefit you whether or not you go on in philosophy.

Assignments and Evaluation

There will be three evaluative components: four short writing assignments with peer responses, a longer writing assignment, and a final exam.

1. Short writing assignments and peer responses

There are four short writing assignments on the material covered in the first four weeks. For these assignments, you will summarize and critically assess that week's topic. I will distribute specific instructions each week.

Each assignment should be 500–800 words.

The short assignments are due on Mondays: July 13th, 20th, 27th, and August 3rd.

Each short paper is worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 40%.

- **Peer response**

You will write a brief comment on one of your peer's assignments for each of the four short assignments. I will distribute a document with instructions for how to complete these.

The responses are due on Wednesdays: July 15th, 22nd, 29th, and August 5th.

Each peer response is worth 2.5% of your grade, for a total of 10%.

2. Longer writing assignment

For the longer writing assignment, you have two options. The first is to expand one of your shorter writing assignments. I will provide further instructions for how to do this.

The other option is to create your own topic. If you choose this option, you must email me with your proposed topic and a preliminary outline by Friday, August 7th, and receive my approval. I recommend consulting me beforehand if you think you'd like to create your own paper topic; I can help you figure out an appropriate way to write about an issue that interests you.

For either option, your paper should be 1,500–2,000 words.

This assignment is due Friday, August 14th.

This assignment is worth 30% of your grade.

Writing Resources: For help with the writing assignments, you have two main resources. For issues of content, you can set up a virtual office hours meeting with me. For writing style, organization, and grammar, I encourage you to visit the writing center (<https://writing.utoronto.ca/writing-centres/arts-and-science/>) or the philosophy essay clinic (<https://philosophy.utoronto.ca/st-george/undergraduate-at-st-george/philosophy-essay-clinic/>). It is my understanding that the writing centers will be open for appointments online this summer.

3. Final exam

There will be an at-home final exam held during the official exam period. I will announce details about timing and format later in the term.

The exam will be worth 20% of your grade.

Policies

Readings: All readings will be available through Quercus. On weeks where there is a lot of assigned reading or where the assigned reading is particularly difficult, I might post an announcement suggesting parts of the reading to focus on. You may complete the reading before or after watching the video lecture, whichever you find suits your learning style best.

Email: Please only email me from your University of Toronto email account. During the week, I will do my best to respond within 24 hours. If I haven't responded within 24 hours, please send me a reminder email. Unfortunately, I cannot discuss substantive issues by email. If you'd like to discuss the course material, email me to set up a virtual meeting.

Assignments: You are responsible for ensuring that the assignments you submit are in a readable format and are not corrupted files. This means that you will receive a late penalty if you submit a corrupted file and need to resubmit your assignment.

Late assignments: If you submit an assignment after the due date, it will be penalized by 5% for each day it is late. If your assignment is more than 5 days late, it will receive a zero.

Extensions: If you are having a serious issue and want to request an extension, you must email me *at least 48 hours before the assignment is due*. I understand that in some situations asking for an extension 48 hours in advance will be impossible, and I will accommodate such situations as appropriate. However, if it is at all possible for you to do so, you must email me 48 hours in advance if you want me to consider an extension.

Academic honesty: Plagiarism will not be tolerated. It is your responsibility to recognize what counts as plagiarism. If you have any questions about this, please ask me. For more information on plagiarism and academic honesty, see

- <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppjun011995.pdf>
- <https://advice.writing.utoronto.ca/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize/>
- <http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca>

Accessibility: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. Please feel free to approach me or Accessibility Services (<http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>) if you have any accessibility concerns about the course or any course materials. We want to assist you in achieving academic success.

Religious accommodation: If you require an accommodation for religious reasons, please email me. For more information, see <https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/policies-guidelines/accommodation-religious/>.

Calendar

Readings are subject to change with notice.

Week 1: Introduction and representationalism

Monday, July 6th Course introduction

Wednesday, July 8th Representationalism

Reading: [Chalmers 2004](#), [Dretske 2003](#)

Optional: [Harman 1990](#)

Week 2: Naïve realism and radical externalism

Monday, July 13th Naïve realism

Reading: [Campbell 2002](#)

Optional: [Soteriou 2020](#)

Wednesday, July 15th Radical externalism

Reading: [Noë 2006](#)

Optional: [Clark and Chalmers 1998](#)

Week 3: Modularity and rich content

Monday, July 20th Modularity and cognitive penetration

Reading: [Fodor 1983](#) (excerpts), [Levin and Banaji 2006](#), [Firestone and Scholl 2016](#) (excerpts)

Wednesday, July 22nd Rich content?

Reading: [Siegel and Byrne 2017](#)

Optional: [Helton 2016](#)

Week 4: Extending sight? Photographs and egocentric content

Monday, July 27th Photographic transparency

Reading: [Walton 1984](#)

Optional: [Costello and Phillips 2009](#)

Wednesday, July 29th Egocentric perception and photography

Reading: [Noë 2003](#), [Cohen and Meskin 2004](#)

Week 5: Beyond vision: sounds and smells

Monday, August 3rd Sounds

Reading: [O'Callaghan 2010](#), [Kulvicki 2008](#)

Optional: [Casati and Dokic 2014](#), [O'Callaghan 2011](#), [Soteriou 2018](#)

Wednesday, August 5th Smells

Reading: [Batty 2011](#), [Budek and Farkas 2014](#)

Week 6: Audio recordings, review

Monday, August 10th Phonographic transparency?

Reading: [Martin 2012](#), [Cavell 1979](#), ch. 2

Wednesday, August 12th Review

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