

PHIL441: Philosophy of Perception

University of British Columbia

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Instructor:

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Course Description

Sophie can see colours, hear sounds, taste flavours, touch textures, and smell scents. What is it for her to perceive these things? Also, if Sophie glances around, she'll see a world populated by objects: chairs, tables, books, and so on. Does she see them in a different sense than she sees the colours? And 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?

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. 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. And how does it do that?

We shall examine attempts to shed light on these and other questions about the nature and role of perceptual experience. The questions concern perception, but also sit at the intersection of larger debates in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of language.

Course Reading

Weekly readings will be made available on Canvas.

Assessment

1. Four Short Papers: 50%.

- *Instructions:* You will write four short papers. They will require the close reading and analysis of a passage from one of the readings. A list of passages, along with more detailed instructions, will be sent around well before each paper is due. The papers must be no longer than 600 words. Papers over the word limit will be penalised. Submit these papers on Canvas before 11:59 p.m. (Pacific Time) on the due date.
- *Grading Scheme:* While you will receive a grade for every paper, only the three highest will count. Caveat: if you submit fewer than four papers, the average of your N paper grades will be weighted as $N \times 12.5\%$ rather than 50% of your final grade. The same will

happen if you submit all four papers, but receive a failing grade on one or more of them. So submit and pass all four papers.

2. In-Class Midterm Exam: 20%.

- The mid-term will be a mix of fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions. Only material discussed in lecture will be examinable.

3. Final Examination: 30%

- The final exam is cumulative, and 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.

Course Schedule

1. Week 1: Argument from Illusion

Reading: Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (Ch. 1); David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section XII, Part I).

2. Week 2: Traditional Responses to the Argument from Illusion

Reading: G. E. Moore, 'A Defence of Common Sense' (Section 4)

Optional: Myles Burnyeat, 'Conflicting Appearances'

3. Week 3: Intentionality and the Phenomenal Principle

Reading: Elizabeth Anscombe, 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature'

Optional: Gilbert Harman, 'The Intrinsic Quality of Experience'

4. Week 4: Representationalism I

Reading: Christopher Peacocke, *Sense and Content* (Chs. 1-2)

5. Week 5: Representationalism II

Reading: David Chalmers, 'The Representational Character of Experience'

6. Week 6: Naive Realism

Reading: John Campbell, 'Consciousness and Reference'

7. Week 7: Midterm Break

8. Week 8: Argument from Hallucination and Disjunctivism

Reading: M. G. F. Martin, 'The Limits of Self-Awareness'

Optional: Umrao Sethi, 'Sensible Overdetermination'

9. Week 9: Assessment of Disjunctivism

Reading: Mark Johnston, 'The Obscure Object of Hallucination' (esp. until p. 134);
Susanna Siegel, 'The Epistemological Conception of Hallucination'

10. Week 10: What Do We Perceive?

Reading: Susanna Siegel, 'Which Properties are Represented in Perception?'

11. Week 11: Beyond Vision

Reading: Casey O'Callaghan, 'Lessons from beyond vision (sounds and audition)'

Optional: P. F. Strawson, *Individuals* (Ch. 2)

12. Week 12: Perception and Knowledge

Reading: John Pollock 'Perceptual Knowledge'

Optional: Jim Pryor, 'The Skeptic and the Dogmatist'

Course Business

1. *Late Penalties.* Late papers will be marked down by a letter grade increment per day (e.g. from A- to B+), unless permission for an extension is secured from Arts Advising. All requests for concessions (e.g. due to illness) should go through Arts Advising.
2. *Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.* Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. In addition, use of ChatGBT or similar online resources for assignments is not permitted, and constitutes a form of academic misconduct. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. Here is the link to the UBC Calendar entry on Academic Misconduct: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>
3. *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 the instructor *immediately*. If you haven't yet cheated, a solution can always be found.
4. *Your Course Contact.* The instructor is your primary course contact. The instructor will not answer emails that ask for information readily available on either Canvas or the course syllabus, so it is always a good idea to begin by checking those two places. Neither will the instructor answer emails that ask for information easily obtainable through regular class attendance. Lastly, the instructor will not answer emails that ask substantive philosophical questions—those with such questions should bring them to office hours. The instructor will respond to all other emails within two working days.
5. UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available at <https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>.

6. For those seeking advice on how to write a philosophy paper, the Philosophy Department runs an essay clinic: <https://philosophy.ubc.ca/undergraduate/philosophy-essay-clinic/>.
7. COVID-19 Information and Guidance:
 - (a) If you are sick, it is important that you stay home. Complete a self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms here: <https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en>. In this class, the marking scheme is intended to provide flexibility so that you can prioritize your health and still succeed.
 - (b) If you miss class because of illness, you will find that the handouts provide a good guide to any material you missed.
 - (c) If you anticipate that illness will cause you to miss the mid-term or final exam, contact the instructor immediately to discuss potential solutions. Do NOT come to either the test or the final while ill.
 - (d) If the instructor is feeling ill, class will be cancelled.