

Philosophy of Perception

DRAFT Syllabus: Subject to Change

Fall 2019

Gabe Dupre

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Instructor: Gabe Dupre

E-mail: gdupre@humnet.ucla.edu

Office: Dodd 346

Office Hours: 12-2pm Monday

Lecture Times: 10-11.50am Monday and Wednesday

Lecture Location: Royce 154

Course Overview

Our ability to know about the world in which we live seems to be essentially dependent on our ability to *perceive*. For this reason, an understanding of what perception, and the perceptual capacities, are has been central to much philosophical investigation. However, for obvious reasons, most of this work was done without the benefit of precise and empirically confirmed scientific theories of perception. In this course, we will discuss the philosophical puzzles generated by our perceptual capacities and the theories aimed to resolve them. We will do so, however, by closely engaging with contemporary work in the perceptual and psychological sciences.

The course will be roughly divided into three units. In the first unit, we will look at perhaps the central debate concerning perception in the history of philosophy: that between *realists*, who view perception as essentially a relation between a perceiver and an object of perception, and *representationalists*, who view such relations as derivative on representational states of mind which intervene between agent and environment, and thus view perceptual relations as inessential. The former position has largely been motivated through philosophical reflection on the nature of perception and perceptual knowledge and experience. The latter, however, seems to mesh better with contemporary work in the cognitive sciences.

After presenting this clash between philosophy and psychology, we will turn to conceptual questions concerning the latter. We will closely examine work from this branch of science, with the aim of drawing conclusions about what a philosophical account of perception must look like.

Most of the work in the first two units will take vision as the paradigmatic perceptual system. There is good reason for this: vision is perhaps most central to most human beings' conscious experience, and scientific work on vision is better developed than that of any other perceptual system. However, in our third unit we will turn to a different subject matter: language perception. As well as sharpening the issues discussed in the first units of the course, language perception offers entirely new, and complex, puzzles about our perceptual abilities.

As well as presenting students with an understanding of some of the central puzzles in philosophy of mind, science, and epistemology, a central aim of this course is to provide the tools for students to integrate the insights of philosophy and the sciences. This interdisciplinary approach, focusing both on philosophical argumentation and scientific theorizing, is perhaps the best methodology we have for understanding ourselves and our place in nature.

Course Difficulty

While there are no prerequisites for this course, it will be intellectually demanding—requiring you to master novel theoretical concepts and critically engage with complex arguments in your own writing. In short: the class is not an easy A. As with many other courses, to do well in Phil 181 you will need to:

- Attend lectures regularly and take (mental or physical) notes;
- Complete all the course readings, slowly and carefully, typically multiple times;
- Work hard on your papers, including proof-reading and re-drafting multiple times, and submit them on time.
- **Optional, but highly recommended:** Meet with me to discuss questions regarding the course material or your paper topics.

This class is not about memorizing facts or correctly reproducing slogans; this class is about developing your own opinions and critical perspective on the topics discussed and enriching your ability to articulate and defend those opinions in a written form. Students who are prepared to work hard, challenge themselves, and attend lecture and section regularly will do well.

For pro-tips on reading and writing philosophy:

<https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

If you would like further help with writing, please visit the UCLA Undergraduate Writing Center. This service provides free one-to-one feedback on any written assignment. They are excellent, and many previous students have improved their writing drastically with their help.

Course Materials

There will be no official textbook for the course. All of the required readings will be available digitally through the course webpage. Please check the course website regularly for updates.

Course Requirements

1. **Paper 1:** 10% of final grade.
2. **Paper 2:** 30% of final grade.
3. **Final Paper Essay Plan:** 10% of final grade.
4. **Final Paper:** 45% of final grade.
5. **Attendance and Participation;** 5% of final grade.
6. **Be familiar with and abide by UCLA's policy on Academic Integrity:** This policy can be found at <http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Academic-Integrity>
 - Students needing an academic accommodation based on a disability should notify the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) located at (310) 825-1501 or A255 Murphy Hall. When possible, students should contact the CAE within

the first two weeks of the quarter, as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit <https://www.cae.ucla.edu/>

- Unless requested by the Office for Students with Disabilities, ***The use of computers, phones, and tablets is not allowed in lecture.*** This component of the course's requirements is not intended to be mean or punitive, but rather to aid your understanding — and the understanding of those around you — of the contents of the lectures.

7. **Late assignments:** Late papers will be docked by 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hour period after the due date. There will be no credit for late essay plans. Extensions may be granted if you have a valid reason.

Waitlist

In order to keep the class size manageable, and ensure that each enrolled student receives the attention to which they are entitled, I will not be giving out PTE numbers. If you are on the waitlist, the only way for you to get into the class is for someone to drop the class; you are thus advised to find a back-up class as soon as possible.

Classroom Etiquette

Classroom participation is strongly encouraged. The best way to learn philosophy is to *do* philosophy, and this involves discussion and argumentation, in the flesh as well as in written work. Such discussion may get heated and this is OK. However, what is not OK is behavior that discourages other students from engaging. Finding the line between passionate debate and personal attack is a vital skill for anyone in or outside of academia.

All other students in the classroom must be treated respectfully, as peers engaged in a collective activity. Behavior that will not be tolerated includes, but is not limited to: dismissing another student's opinion, talking over another student, personal attacks etc. In short: Don't be a jerk. Class discussion is every student's opportunity to engage with the material, and behavior which impedes this will not be tolerated.

Course Papers

You will be assigned three papers, in increasing order of length and difficulty. The idea is that you will gradually build up your philosophical skills of exegesis, argumentation, and novel contribution to philosophical inquiry. I will provide detailed feedback. In order to do well in this course, you will need to incorporate this feedback into later work.

Paper 1

A prompt for paper 1 will be assigned in the first lecture of week 2, to be submitted by Midnight on Monday of Week 3. This paper will be purely exegetical. You will describe a position or argument we have looked at in as clear terms as possible. This paper will be 1-2 pages long, double-spaced.

Paper 2

A prompt for paper 2 will be assigned in the second lecture of Week 6, to be submitted by midnight on the Thursday of Week 7. This paper will involve both explaining a particular debate we have examined, and explaining in detail which side of the debate you find most plausible. This paper will be 3-4 pages long, double-spaced.

Final Paper

For the final paper, the topic will not be assigned (although I am willing to help you find one). Once you have settled on a topic, you must check with me that this topic is suitable. You may choose any topic relevant to the issues we have discussed in this course. As this paper is the largest chunk of your grade of any single piece of work, it is highly recommended that you start thinking about this paper fairly early in the course, and begin discussions with me no later than week 7. An essay plan, of less than 1 page, must be submitted by Midnight on Monday of Week 9. This paper should be 5 pages long, double-spaced, and should contribute to the debates we have been discussing in a novel and informed way.

Reading Schedule

Readings marked with an ‘*’ are recommended, but not required. Readings are to be read before lecture.

Week 1: Introduction. Historical Preliminaries

30 September Reid, T. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Excerpts)(1785)

2 October Ayer, A.J. *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (Excerpts) (1964)

* Broad, C.D. *The Theory of Sensa* (Excerpts) (1923)

Week 2: Naïve Realism/ Disjunctivism

7 October Logue, H. *Why Naïve Realism?* (2012)

* Crane, T. *Is There a Perceptual Relation?* (2006)
Paper 1 Assigned

9 October Martin, M.G.F *The Reality of Appearances* (2004)

Week 3: The View from Vision Science

14 October Teller, D. *The Domain of Visual Science* (2014)

* von Eckardt, B. *The Representational Theory of Mind* (2012)

Paper 1 Due

16 October Burge, T. *Perception: Where Mind Begins* (2014)

Week 4: Problems for Naïve Realism

21 October Burge, T. *Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology* (2005) (Guest lecture by Bill Kowalsky)

23 October Barwich, A.-S. *A Critique of Olfactory Objects* (2019)

Week 5: Modularity

28 October Fodor, J. *Modularity of Mind* (Excerpts) (1983)

30 October Teachman, B.A. et al. *A New Mode of Fear Expression: Perceptual Bias in Height Fear* (2008)

Firestone, C. *How “Paternalistic” Is Spatial Perception? Why Wearing a Heavy Backpack Doesn’t—and Couldn’t—Make Hills Look Steeper* (2013)

* Prinz, J. *Is the Mind Really Modular?* (2006)

Week 6: How Rich is Perception?

4 November Siegel, S. and Byrne, A. *Rich or Thin?* (2017)

6 November No Reading. Siegel and Byrne Continued.

Paper 2 Assigned

Week 7: The 4E Challenge

11 November NO CLASS: Veteran’s Day

13 November Barrett, L. *Why Brains Are Not Computers, Why Behaviorism Is Not Satanism, and Why Dolphins Are Not Aquatic Apes* (2015)

* Goldinger, S. et al. *The Poverty of Embodied Cognition* (2016)

14 November Paper 2 Due

Week 8: Perception and Cognition

18 November Camp, E. *Putting Thoughts to Work: Concepts, Systematicity, and Stimulus-Independence* (2009)

20 November Byrne, A. *Perception and Conceptual Content* (2005)

Week 9: Language Perception

24 November Essay Plan Due

25 November Rey, G. *Representation of Language* (Chapter 10) (Forthcoming)

27 November Devitt, M. *Explanation and Reality in Linguistics* (2008)

Week 10: Language Perception II

2 December Collins, J. *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (2006)

4 December Wrapping Up.

9 December Final Paper Due