

APHI-441 Advanced Topics in Philosophy Perception in Philosophy and Psychology

Instructor: Dr. Alessandra Buccella; abuccella2@albany.edu

Meetings: MW 3.00 – 4.20 PM, room: HU 112

Office hours: MW 10.00 - 11.00 AM, HU 253; Available also for Zoom meetings *by appointment*.

Course description:

Perception is the sensory-cognitive ability that allows animals to be in touch with their surroundings. But how does perception work? What does it mean to have perceptual experiences? In this course, we will explore the several different "levels" at which philosophers think about perception and the different questions being asked. At the metaphysical level, the central question is: What kind of "things" do we perceive? What are we perceptually aware of? At the epistemological level, we will ask: Can we gain knowledge about the world through perception? Finally, at the psychological level, the main question will be: How do the neuropsychological processes studied by cognitive neuroscience relate to the metaphysical and epistemological questions?

Readings

All the assigned readings will be available in .pdf format on the Brightspace page of the course.

What you need to do to succeed in this course:

Do the readings. Readings will be challenging at times, but I expect you to read carefully and come to class prepared to discuss and engage.

Come to class, be on time, don't leave early unless it is an emergency. If you must miss a class or part of a class, please let me know in advance.

Complete the assignments on time (for my extension policy, see below).

Respect the teacher and your classmates. Hateful or discriminatory speech/behavior will not be tolerated.

Communicate and be responsive. If something I say in class isn't clear, ask. If you are falling behind, do not be afraid to reach out. If I email you, reply promptly (I will do the same!). If you have doubts about how to complete an assignment or have questions about what's expected of you, share those with me right away.

Take care of yourself. Semesters are long and taxing, and you will naturally have ups and downs. If you notice your mental health isn't great at any point in the semester, try your best not to isolate yourself: keep coming to class, and communicate with me so I can help you stay on track with your coursework.

Assignments:

Attendance & Participation: 10%

Questions & Replies: 20%

Week 3 worksheet: 5%

Midterm exam: 20%

Research paper: 30%

Final exam (oral): 15%

Extensions and late assignment policy:

I grant extensions only in well-documented exceptional circumstances. Please, communicate with me in a timely fashion if you are in need of an extension: do not allow yourself to have to scramble at the last minute!

If you submit an assignment past the deadline *and* you did not ask for an extension, I will take away points proportionally to how late you submit the assignment.

Religious Commitments

If you think your religious commitments may impact your course work at any point during the semester, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best strategy for accommodating your needs.

Academic Integrity

All forms of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to cheating and plagiarism (i.e. using the words of other people or AI bots as your own), will not be tolerated and will result in failing the course. As UAlbany students, you make a commitment to respecting the Standards of Academic Integrity Policy. You should familiarize yourselves with the policy and its subsections at <https://www.albany.edu/dean-students/community-standards/standards-academic-integrity> and take advantage of the resources offered by the University Libraries regarding cheating, plagiarism, and how to properly cite your sources.

A note about Generative AI use (ChatGPT etc.)

Generative AI bots like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc. *do not* replace your own ability to think. Indeed, extensive use of ChatGPT has been recently linked to declining academic performance, increased procrastination, and memory loss (<https://tinyurl.com/2byaafxh>).

In this course, using the words of AI bots like ChatGPT as your own on *any* assignment is considered cheating. As such, it will result in being failed for the course and reported to the appropriate UAlbany authorities.

AI bots can however be used to *assist* you in completing certain assignments, but their use **MUST** be disclosed and clearly explained in a note attached to the submission. Ask questions if something is not clear *before* you complete the assignment!

(Dis)ability and Learning

Students with disabilities who would like to request accommodations should get in touch with Disability Access and Inclusion Student Services (DAISS) at <https://www.albany.edu/dean-students/disability>. All information and documentation you provide is confidential.

Even if you do not require specific accommodation, please let me know if there is anything I can do (within reason) to make the course more accessible and facilitate your learning.

Use of electronics in the classroom

You are allowed to use computers or tablets in the classroom to take notes if you so choose, but they can be sources of distraction and interfere with your ability to follow what's going in class. You are not as good at multitasking as you might think: <https://time.com/4737286/multitasking-mental-health-stress-texting-depression/>

You are strongly encouraged to take notes by hand, if you can.

Communications

You are expected to read emails sent to your university account (username@albany.edu) regularly. I will try to answer your emails within 24 hours (excluding weekends): if you don't receive an answer from me by then, feel free to reach out again!

Assignment descriptions & Instructions

Attendance

I will keep track of class attendance. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences (i.e. you don't attend class without justification) without penalty.

Questions & Replies

Using the Brightspace discussion board, you will submit questions about the readings. The questions must be clearly formulated and contextualized, and you must state explicitly the reason why you are asking a certain question.

Examples:

- "I did not quite understand why the author says ... because ..."
- "Why should we think that ...? It seems to me that, in fact, we should say ..."
- "I found argument A in reading B particularly convincing because Did anyone else find it convincing? Why or why not?"

To get full credit for this assignment, you must ask a total of 5 questions and reply to 5 questions by your classmates.

Midterm exam

This will be an in-class, hand-written exam. During the exam, you are allowed to consult hand-written notes only. Exceptions will be made for students requiring relevant accommodations. The exam will consist of 6 open-ended questions.

Research paper

At the end of the course, you will write an essay (min. 2500 words, max. 3000) on a topic of your choice related to the course. The paper must be distinctively philosophical, that is, it must have a clearly specified set of claims that will then be defended/objected to by offering original arguments. You must talk to me about your chosen topic before you start writing.

First draft and peer review session

You must turn in a full draft of your research paper by Sunday, April 20th (11.59 pm). On Monday, April 21st, each of you will be assigned a classmate's paper to review and give written comments on. I will walk you through what 'peer reviewing' a philosophy paper means and how to give feedback that is kind, specific, and helpful.

After the peer review session, you will have until May 5th to incorporate the feedback and turn in the final version of the paper and a "letter to the reviewer" in which you explain how you addressed the reviewer's comments in your final draft.

Oral exam

The exams will be held in alphabetical order starting from a randomly extracted letter.

For example, if the letter extracted is “L”, the first person to take the final exam will be the first person on the class roster whose last name starts with “L”, followed by all others in alphabetical order. This implies that people whose last names start with “K” (i.e. the letter that immediately precedes “L” in the alphabet) would therefore be the last ones to take the exam.

Letter extraction will happen publicly during class on May 5th, and the exams will be held in the same room where the class meets on May 13th between 3.30 and 5.30 pm.

Grading systems and conversions

Questions and replies will be graded on a 3-point scale:

- 3: Excellent
- 2: Good
- 1: Acceptable
- 0: Fails completely

The midterm exam will be graded on a 60-point scale and then converted to a percentage. Each question will be graded on the following 10-point scale:

- 10: Excellent
- 9: Very good (A-range)
- 8: Good (B-range)
- 7: Acceptable (C-range)
- 6: Needs improvement (D-range)
- 5 – 0: Fail (completely incorrect/does not address the question/no answer)

Attendance, the research paper, and the oral exam will be assigned a letter grade and then converted to a numerical score/percentage in Brightspace following this conversion table:

- A: 93-100
- A-: 90-92
- B+: 87-89
- B: 83-86
- B-: 80-82
- C+: 77-79
- C: 73-76
- C-: 70-72
- D+: 67-69
- D: 63-66
- D-: 60-62
- E: < 60

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – 01/22

Syllabus read-out + initial discussion

No required readings

Part I. The Metaphysical Question: *What* do we perceive? (Weeks 2 – 5)

Week 2

01/27 *Read:* Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The Problem of Perception”, section 1.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-problem/>

01/29 No class (Dr. B away for a conference)

Week 3 – 02/03 & 05 (asynchronous – no in-person class)

Read: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The Problem of Perception”, section 2.

A. D. Smith, “The Argument” (pp. 21 – 35).

Complete the worksheet by Wednesday, 02/05 11.59 pm.

Week 4

02/10 *Read:* W. Fish, “Philosophy of Perception” (1st edition), pp. 65-78.

02/12 *Read:* A. Springle & A. Buccella, “Practical Perceptual Representations: A Contemporary Defense of an Old Idea”

Week 5

02/17 *Read:* W. Fish, “Philosophy of Perception” (2nd edition), pp. 101–111.

02/19 *Read:* M. Martin, “Sight and Touch”.

Part II. The Epistemological Question: What can we *know* through perception? (Weeks 6 & 7)

Week 6 – 02/24 & 26

Read: A. Marushak, “On the Hypothetical Given”

Optional: A. Gupta, “The Hypothetical Given”

Week 7

03/03 *Read:* S. Siegel, “Epistemic Charge”

03/05 Guest lecture: Christian Carrozzo (UAlbany Philosophy PhD candidate)

Week 8

03/10 Midterm review

03/12 Midterm exam

Week 9 – NO CLASS (Spring Break)

Part III. The Psychological Question: *How* do we perceive? (Weeks 10-15)

Week 10 - 03/24 & 26

Read: Hoffman & Singh, “Computational Evolutionary Perception”

Cohen, “Perceptual representation, veridicality, and the interface theory of perception”

Week 11

03/31 *Read:* J. Dewey, “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology”

04/02 No class (Dr. B away for a conference)

Week 12

04/07 *Read:* “James J. Gibson and Ecological Psychology”, in Käufer & Chemero, *Phenomenology: an Introduction*.

04/09 *Read:* A. Scarantino, “Affordances Explained”

Week 13

04/14 *Read:* Buccella, “The Problem of Perceptual Invariance”

04/16 *Read:* Buccella & Chemero, “Reconsidering perceptual constancy”

Week 14

04/20: deadline to submit full paper draft

04/21 Paper peer review session

04/23 Paper peer review continued

Week 15

04/28 *Read:* Y. Lee, R. E. Shaw and Z. Jin, “Gih (Qi): Beyond affordances”

04/30 No class (UAlbany Showcase day)

Week 16

05/05 Final exam review + exam letter extraction + deadline for Research paper (11.59 pm)

05/13 Final exam (3.30 – 5.30 pm, HU 112)