

Philosophy of Cognitive Science

Perception, Imagination, and Memory

PHIL 4082 3.00, Winter 2026

MC 101, Thursdays 2:30-5:20

Course Instructor

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Office Hours: Monday from 3:00-4:30 over Zoom (<https://yorku.zoom.us/j/3907002154>) or by appointment.

Course Description

Consider what it is like to see a red apple, to visualize a red apple, and to remember a red apple. Although each of these experiences is a way of visually representing an apple, they are also importantly different. For example, perception is more vivid and forceful than mere imagination, and while memory is restricted to the past and perception is restricted to the here and now, it seems like you can imagine anything you want to. In this course, we will consider what cognitive science can teach us about the similarities and differences between perception, imagination, and memory, with an eye towards developing a better understanding of what they are and how they relate to each other.

Course Goals

- (1) Gain an understanding of contemporary debates in philosophy and cognitive science about the relationship between perception, imagination, and memory.
- (2) Learn about empirical approaches to studying the mind, and about how empirical results can inform philosophical theorizing.
- (3) Practice reading and critically evaluating philosophical texts.
- (4) Enhance philosophical writing skills.
- (5) Develop original viewpoints and evaluate arguments through discussion

Requirements and Grading

Active Participation (15%): This class is heavily discussion-based. One of the best ways to practice doing philosophy is by engaging in discussion and dialogue, and by working through difficult ideas with your peers. Because of this, I expect students to attend and actively participate each class by asking and answering questions, registering the ideas you are confused about, and engaging with the points raised by your classmates. Reading responses and presentations are in place to help facilitate informed and engaging discussion. Participation will be graded on both quantity and quality. Students are allowed two unexcused absences. After that, any absences will need to be excused by a doctor's note or by university accommodation services or else will result in no credit for this category.

Five Reading Responses (25%): Students will turn in five 350-500 word reading responses. These are due on Wednesdays at 11:59pm, the day before the reading is scheduled. Each reading response should focus on one of the required readings, and (1) clearly state the main thesis, (2) summarize the main argument given for that thesis, (3) critically evaluate the argument by raising an objection, working through a point that is unclear, responding to some of its arguments, noting an interesting implication, and/or drawing a connection with another reading that we have already done, and (4) ask at least one question that you would like some clarification on. Students should not write a reading

response on the paper that they are presenting. My hope is that these reading responses will serve as a basis for class discussion, and as a potential starting point for the final paper. Students may submit as many reading responses as they would like. Only the five best responses will count towards this portion of the grade.

Presentation (15%): At the beginning of the course, students will sign up to present on one of the assigned readings. This will involve making a handout or powerpoint and spending 15-20 minutes summarizing and leading a discussion on the reading. The presentation should (i) clearly summarize the main points from the reading and (ii) end with at least three questions that we can discuss as a class. Materials should be submitted to the instructor at least 24 hours before the scheduled presentation. Students should not write a reading response on the paper that they are presenting.

Paper Outline (10%): Students should turn in an outline for their final paper. This outline should include an abstract with a clear statement of the main thesis, an outline of the main argumentative structure, and a short review of the main literature that you will draw on. Students should turn these in to the instructor for feedback, and also bring these outlines to class on 3/19, as a peer review session will be held in which students will give feedback in pairs.

Final Paper (35%): Students will turn in a ~3500 word paper at the end of the course. The paper can be on any question or topic that came up in the course and should substantively engage with at least one course reading. Papers should develop an argument for some philosophical claim, and not merely summarize existing literature.

Reading Schedule

Week 1: Course Introduction (January 8th)

No Reading

Unit 1: The Perception-Cognition Border

Week 2: Stimulus Dependence (January 15th)

Clarke & Beck "Border Disputes: Recent Debates along the Perception–Cognition Border"

Beck "Marking the Perception–Cognition Boundary: The Criterion of Stimulus-Dependence"

Further Reading:

Nes, Sundberg, & Watzl "The Perception/Cognition Distinction"

Phillips "The Shifting Border Between Perception and Cognition"

Week 3: Modularity (January 22nd)

Fodor "Modularity of Mind" Chapter 3

Macpherson "Cognitive penetration of colour experience: Rethinking the issue in light of an indirect mechanism"

Further Reading:

Deroy "Modularity of Perception"

Prinz "Is the mind really modular?"

Firestone & Scholl "Cognition does not affect perception: Evaluating the evidence for 'top-down' effects"

Week 4: Format (January 29th)

Quilty-Dunn “Perceptual Pluralism”

Clarke “Mapping the Visual Icon”

Further Reading:

Fodor “LOT2: The Language of Thought Revisited” Chapter 6

Block “The Border Between Seeing and Thinking” Chapter 5

Green “The Perception–Cognition Border: Architecture or Format?”

Unit 2: Imagination

Week 5: Are There Literally Mental Images? (February 5th)

Kosslyn, Thompson, & Ganis “The Case for Mental Imagery” Chapter 2

Langland-Hassan “The Imagery Debate Exhumed and Reanimated”

Further Reading:

Kosslyn “Resolving the Imagery Debate”

Pylyshyn “Mental Imagery: In Search of a Theory”

Week 6: Imagery and Perception (February 12th)

Nanay “Perception and imagination: amodal perception as mental imagery”

Briscoe “Mental Imagery and the Varieties of Amodal Completion”

Further Reading:

Macpherson “Cognitive penetration of colour experience: Rethinking the issue in light of an indirect mechanism”

Lande & Green “Reconsidering the role of imagery in perception”

Van Leeuwen “Three questions on imagery and perception: A comment on Nanay's Mental imagery”

READING WEEK—NO CLASS (February 19th)

Week 7: Vividness (February 26th)

Kind “Imaginative Vividness”

Tooming & Miyazono “Vividness as a Natural Kind”

Further Reading:

Morales “Mental Strength: A Theory of Experience Intensity”

Fazekas “Vividness and content”

Week 8: Dreams (March 5th)

Ichikawa “Dreaming and Imagination”

Whiteley “Aphantasia, Imagination, and Dreaming”

Further Reading:

Rosen “The Imagination Model of Dreaming”

Windt “Dreaming: Beyond Imagination and Perception”

Macpherson "Perception in Dreams"

Unit 3: Memory

Week 9: Memory and Imagination I (March 12th)

Michaelian "Mental Time Travel" Chapters 4, 5, and 6

Further Reading:

Michaelian "Radicalizing simulationism: Remembering as imagining the (nonpersonal) past"

Hopkins "Imagining the Past: on the nature of episodic memory"

Week 10: Memory and Imagination II (March 19th)

Paper Outline Due. In-Class Peer Review Session.

Robins "Defending Discontinuism Naturally"

De Brigard "Simulationism and Memory Traces"

Further Reading:

Robins "A Place for the Memory Trace"

Sant'Anna "Is remembering constructive imagining?"

Week 11: Memory and Perception (March 26th)

Munton "How to See Invisible Objects"

Green "Can We Perceive the Past?"

Further Reading:

Megla & Bainbridge "The Interaction of Perception and Memory"

Barkasi "Memory as Sensory Modality, Perception as Experience of the Past"

Week 12: Metacognition (April 2nd)

Perrin, Michaelian, & Sant'Anna "The Phenomenology of Remembering is an Epistemic Feeling"

Teng "A Metacognitive Account of Phenomenal Force"

Further Reading:

Dijkstra & Fleming "Subjective signal strength distinguishes reality from imagination"

Mahr et al. "Mnemicity: A Cognitive Gadget?"

Final Paper Due (April 16th)

Course Policies

Readings:

All readings will be available on eClass. Please read all designated materials before the meeting for which they have been assigned. Materials under the heading "Further Reading" are optional. They are intended for students who wish to explore a topic in greater depth, and may be helpful for students who wish to write a paper on a certain topic. If you are short on time, please prioritize carefully and

attentively reading the required materials rather than quickly and superficially reading all of the materials.

Email:

I am available over email to answer questions, schedule meetings, and whatever else. I will do my best to respond within one business day. Please wait at least two business days before sending me a follow-up email. When emailing me, please include “PHIL 4082” in your email subject line; this helps me sort through things. If you email me a question whose answer is stated explicitly in the syllabus, I will reply to you with, “please see the syllabus.” If you email me with a question whose answer may be relevant to many students, or if I get several emails with the same question, I may post a course announcement instead of replying to you directly.

Office Hours:

These are dedicated hours in which I am available to talk to students! They will be held over Zoom (<https://yorku.zoom.us/j/3907002154>). Come with questions about course content, assignments, research, academic life, or whatever else. If you would like to chat but can't make my scheduled office hours, talk to me or send me an email and we'll set up another time.

Late Assignments:

If you need an extension on an assignment, you must request it from me at least 48 hours ahead of the official deadline. You do not have an extension until it has been approved by me in writing. Assignments submitted late without an extension will be penalized at a rate of one-third letter grade per day 24 hours.

Accommodations:

If you need accommodations for this course because of a disability, let me know in the first week of class so that we can arrange things through Accessibility Services.

AI Use:

The use of any generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) is strictly prohibited for all assignments in this course and will be considered academic dishonesty if detected. If any such use is suspected, students will immediately be asked to meet with the course director to discuss the work in question. The point of the assignments and activities is to help you practice thinking; you waste everyone's time if you outsource that to an LLM. Please feel free to reach out at any point in the semester (the sooner the better) if you have any questions concerning which tools are appropriate to use in support of your academic writing.

Academic Integrity:

You are responsible for knowing university policies regarding academic dishonesty. In addition to the usual (you are not allowed to collaborate, use technology, or cheat in other ways during in-class assignments), you are also not allowed to upload course content, your own notes, or your own written work to note-sharing sites of any kind. Violations of academic integrity will be taken to the university.

Technology Policy:

You are permitted to use computers or tablets during class. However, you must stay on class-relevant content. If I see you using your devices for non-course content, your technology privileges may be revoked and you will be required to do everything with good-old printing and pen-and-paper. That being said, I encourage you to print out readings and take in-class notes by hand. I am not requiring

this. But I strongly believe (and this is backed up by research!) that technology in the classroom can be a significant detriment to focus and information retention.

Grade Scale:

We will use the [standard York grading scale](#).

Taking Care of Ourselves:

We will all work to treat each other with kindness, support, empathy, and a focus on our common learning objectives. If you are experiencing severe stress, anxiety, or other mental health issues, please take advantage of the [Counseling, Health, and Well-being Resources](#).

Philosophy Resources:

Check out the course website for resources about reading philosophy, participating in philosophy classes, and other similar things.

Reach Out!

If there's a problem, I can't help you if I don't know about it. The earlier you reach out to me about any difficulties that arise for you during the semester, the more easily we can work together to find a solution. I want to do what I can to support you this term, and if you need things that are beyond my ability to deal with, I am happy to help figure out what campus resources there might be for you.