

PHIL 455: Advanced Philosophy of Mind: Mind, Perception, and Nature  
CSUN Fall 2015

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:30–5:30 and Wednesdays by appointment

### 1. Course Description

The topic of this seminar is the nature of the human mind and, in particular, the place of the mind in nature. We'll approach this topic by considering how human beings perceive an external reality, as well as how the mind relates to the body. Prerequisites to this course include: 6 units in Philosophy, among which must be Phil 350, Phil 352, or Phil 355, or permission of the instructor.

### 2. Course Overview

The course will comprise two units: (1) In the first unit, we will focus on the position in philosophy of mind known as “conceptualism,” which is famously defended by John McDowell in his lecture series *Mind and World*. We will begin with a close examination of the historical and conceptual background necessary for understanding McDowell's project and will then read carefully through the text. In this section, key questions will include the intentionality of thought and action; how perceptual beliefs are justified; and how human and animal cognition might differ.

(2) In the second unit, we assess the plausibility of conceptualism. We do this phenomenologically, by drawing on (a) research in empirical psychology; and (b) the evidence of everyday experience.

The central figure of this second unit will be the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and our core questions will include the status of the body in perception; how the mind conceptualizes space; and what role reason might play in practical action. Our overarching concern is to use the problem of perception to answer the basic question: What is a human mind?

### 3. Course Aims and Objectives

This is an advanced seminar in Philosophy of Mind. As such, we will try to delve deeply and thoughtfully into a philosophical problem and examine various strategies for dealing with that problem. We'll do this both through the close reading of texts and through consideration of contemporary problems in historical context. By the end of the semester, you should:

1. Understand perception as a philosophical problem;
2. grasp what it means to talk about “perceptual content”;
3. be familiar with key terms such as “intentionality,” “transcendental argument,” “conceptualism,” “coherentism,” and “phenomenology”;
4. have some familiarity with the historical background of the relevant debates.

### 4. Required Texts

I have ordered the following texts for purchase at the Matador Bookstore:

1. Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind*
2. John McDowell, *Mind and World*

You should purchase these books prior to or during the first week of the semester. In addition to these texts, there will be a number of (required and recommended) readings made available via Moodle. It is your responsibility to bring these texts with you to class, either in hard copy or in an appropriate electronic format.

## 5. Schedule of Readings

Please note that the following schedule of readings is subject to change

### I. Introduction and Historical Background

- 8/25: Course Themes and Overview
- 8/27: David Hume, excerpt from *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*
- Immanuel Kant, excerpt from *Critique of Pure Reason*

### II. Some Myths and Some Dogmas

- 9/2: Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, §§1–2
- 9/4: Sellars, *Empiricism*, §§3–4
- 9/8: Sellars, *Empiricism*, §§5–8
- [Recommended: John McDowell, “Sellars on Perceptual Experience”]
- 9/10: Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”
- 9/15: Davidson, cont’d.

### III. Conceptualism

#### III.1 The First Oscillation: Receptivity and Spontaneity

- 9/17: John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture I
- 9/22: McDowell, Lecture I, cont’d.
- 9/24: McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture II
- 9/29: McDowell, Lecture II, cont’d.
- G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, §§40–44
- [Recommended: Sally Sedgwick, “Hegel’s Criticism of Kant”]
- 10/1: McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture III
- 10/6: McDowell, Lecture III, cont’d.
- [Recommended: Arthur Collins, “Beastly Experience”]

#### III.2 The Second Oscillation: Re-Enchanting Nature

- 10/8: McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture IV
- 10/13: McDowell, Lecture IV, cont’d.
- 10/15: McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture V
- 10/20: McDowell, Lecture V, cont’d.

### IV. Turning to Phenomenology

#### IV.1 What Is Phenomenology?

- 10/22: Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, chaps. 1 and 2
- 10/27: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences.”

10/29: Merleau-Ponty, "The Primacy of Perception," cont'd.

#### IV.2 The Phenomenological Debate with Conceptualism

11/3: Hubert Dreyfus, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental"

11/5: John McDowell, "What Myth?"

[Recommended: Dreyfus, "Return of the Myth of the Mental" and McDowell, "Response to Dreyfus"]

#### IV.3 Evaluating the Phenomenological Position: Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*

11/10: Merleau-Ponty, "Experience and Objective Thought: The Problem of the Body," and "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility," from *Phenomenology of Perception*

11/12: Merleau-Ponty, "The Spatiality of One's Own Body and Motility," from *Phenomenology of Perception*

11/17: Merleau-Ponty, "The Theory of the Body Is Already a Theory of Perception," from *Phenomenology of Perception*

11/19: Merleau-Ponty, "Sense Experience," from *Phenomenology of Perception*

11/24: Merleau-Ponty, "Sense Experience," cont'd.

11/26: No Class

#### VI. Rethinking Mind and Nature

12/1: McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture VI

12/3: McDowell, Lecture VI, cont'd.

12/8: Final Thoughts

12/10: Final Paper workshop day

12/15: Final Paper due

#### 6. Assignments and Grading

You will be graded in this course according to the following scheme:

1. regular attendance and active participation (10%)
2. one in-class presentation (25%)
3. one short (fewer than 500 wd.) response paper to a recommended reading (10%)
4. four short (fewer than 500 wd.) reconstructions of required readings (20%)
5. a final paper (35%)

#### Attendance and Participation

This course will be in a seminar format, and the class size is small. Your consistent attendance and active engagement are integral to the success of the course and will constitute a portion of your final grade. I will circulate an attendance sheet during the first five minutes of every class and it is your responsibility to arrive on time in order to register your presence. Please also note that late arrivals are extremely disruptive to the class, and I reserve the right to offer zero or only partial attendance credit to anyone arriving more than five minutes late.

Your final attendance grade for the course will be calculated according to the following scale:

- A (100) 0 absences
- A (95) 1–2 absences
- B+ (87) 3 absences
- B- (80) 4 absences
- C (75) 5 absences
- D (65) 6 absences
- F (0) 7 or more absences

Please note that I do not distinguish excused from unexcused absences. If extraordinary and documentable circumstances will mean that you must miss class for an extended period of time, you should see me well in advance to discuss possible solutions. I do not keep formal track of participation, but I do keep informal track, and active, productive participation will likely increase your overall grade (so, if you have a high B+, but actively participate, I may be inclined to bump you up to an A-).

#### In-Class Presentation

During the first week of class, I will circulate a sign-up sheet for in-class presentations. On the date of your presentation, you should be prepared to:

1. Briefly reconstruct the argument of the text you're responsible for, focusing on its main claim;
2. explain any objections that the author considers and how he or she responds to those objections;
3. point to key passages that you think warrant further discussion;
4. raise questions for the class and facilitate discussion.

There is no specific written component to this assignment, though you may find it useful to provide your classmates with a handout.

#### Response paper

On the schedule of classes, I have included several recommended readings that expand upon or clarify the required readings for this course. You are responsible for familiarity with at least one of these readings, to be demonstrated in a brief (fewer than 500-word) response paper due before the end of the semester. A response paper is relatively informal, but should always include a clear articulation of what you take the author's thesis to be.

#### Reconstructions

Over the course of the semester you are asked to write 4 short (fewer than 500-word) reconstructions of required readings. Which readings you choose to respond to are up to you, but you must hand in your reconstruction on the first day that the text you are working with is being discussed (that is, a response to Lecture 1 of *Mind and World* would be due 9/17). I will hand out a rubric that outlines the format of these reconstructions during the first week of class.

#### Final Paper

Your final paper will be on a topic of your choosing. It should engage carefully and thoughtfully with one or more required or recommended texts from the course. The minimum length is six pages and the maximum length is ten pages.

## 6. Course Policies

### Electronics

Cell phones must be turned off (not just set to vibrate!) during class time and kept in your bag. If you prefer to keep your class readings in an electronic format, make sure to bring a laptop or e-reader for this purpose. Having said this, the use of laptop computers for note-taking purposes is strongly discouraged. My policy is to treat any open laptop as a raised hand and I reserve the right to ask you to leave (or to cancel your attendance grade for the session) if your laptop use proves unreasonably distracting to yourself or your classmates.

### Written Work

All written work must be typed, and handed in on time via the course Moodle. This means that I only accept late work under exceptional circumstances that have been cleared with me in advance, and I do not accept work submitted via e-mail. Please also see the note on academic honesty, below.

### Correspondence

You are welcome to e-mail me any questions you have about the course (or about philosophy more broadly) and I will do my best to respond, where appropriate, in a timely manner. Note, however, that I will not respond to e-mails if the question you're asking is clearly answered on the syllabus. If you need to miss class for any reason, you're under no obligation to let me know, but you should make sure you follow up with a classmate to learn what you missed; I won't fill you in over e-mail. If you have more substantive questions or are concerned about your progress, the appropriate way to discuss these is in person, during my office hours.

### Assignments and Grading

I'll provide detailed instructions for your class assignments, as well as grading rubrics. My intention is to demystify the grading process as much as possible. When I calculate a grade, however, that grade is non-negotiable except in demonstrated cases of an error. You're responsible for keeping track of your own progress, and should be able to provide evidence if you believe my grade was calculated in error. If you have concerns or want to discuss your progress with me, I'm happy to chat with you during office hours. Please note that I do not offer extra credit assignments, and do not accept rewrites. However, I am more than happy to read drafts and offer feedback on your work up to a week before the assignment is due.

### Statement on Disabilities

If you need special accommodations (note taker, interpreter, extended time), please make sure to make me aware of these during the first weeks of the semester so that we can make the classroom experience productive. Please also reach out to the office of Disability Resources and Educational Services if you have any questions about available accommodations.

### Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is a serious offense, a violation of academic integrity, and a violation

of the trust of professors and fellow students. It will not be tolerated. Violations of academic honesty include plagiarism, cheating, dishonest communication about timely assignment completion, or other violations of community trust. Plagiarism of any assignment will result in a 0 on the assignment or failure of the course and will be reported to the University. Instances of cheating or other violations of academic integrity will result in a 0 on the assignment or failure of the course and will be reported to the University.

The CSUN statement on academic honesty states:

*The maintenance of academic integrity and quality education is the responsibility of each student within this University and the CSU system. Cheating or plagiarism in connection with an academic program at a CSU campus is listed in Section 41301, Title 5, California Code of Regulations as an offense for which a student may be expelled, suspended or given a less severe disciplinary sanction. Academic dishonesty is an especially serious offense and diminishes the quality of scholarship and defrauds those who depend on the integrity of the University's programs.*

For further information about these policies, including what constitutes plagiarism, what constitutes cheating, and what constitutes an appropriate penalty, please consult the University Catalogue.

N.B. Although I don't anticipate it, this syllabus and the course requirements are subject to change. Any changes will be communicated in class and announced on Moodle.