

ROBERT HOWTON

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Last updated September 15, 2017

EMPLOYMENT

University of Pittsburgh

Visiting Lecturer in Philosophy
Part-Time Lecturer in Philosophy

Aug. 2016–Present
Spring 2016

EDUCATION

University of Toronto

PhD in Philosophy
Certificate in Collaborative Programme in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy
DISSERTATION: “Aristotle’s Case for Perceptual Knowledge”
COMMITTEE: Jennifer Whiting (supervisor), Brad Inwood, Lloyd Gerson

2017

University of Pittsburgh

Visiting Scholar, Department of Philosophy

Fall 2015–Spring 2016

Yale University

Visiting Assistant in Research, Department of Philosophy

Spring 2015

University of Oxford

Visiting Graduate, Corpus Christi College Centre for the Study of Greek and Roman Antiquity

Trinity Term 2013

Texas A&M University

MA in Philosophy
THESIS: “Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato’s Method of Division”
COMMITTEE: Robin Smith (supervisor), Scott Austin, Craig Kallendorf

2010

Louisiana State University

BA Cum Laude in Philosophy
Minors in Greek, Classics

2008

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION AND COMPETENCE

SPECIALIZATION: Ancient Philosophy, Philosophy of Perception

COMPETENCE: Philosophy of Mind, Epistemology, Logic, Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy

PAPERS

Forthcoming and in Print

Why *De Anima* Needs III.12–13

To appear in a collection on *De Anima* III forthcoming from Peeters (Leuven)

Forthcoming

Review of Thomas Johansen, *The Powers of Aristotle’s Soul*, OUP 2012

Philosophical Review 125 (1): 135–138

2016

Under Revision

Perception and Hypothetical Necessity in *Posterior Analytics* II.19
Ancient Philosophy

Resubmission Requested 22 August 2017

PRESENTATIONS (*i* = invited)

- Comments on Rosemary Twomey, “Aristotle on Discriminating the Common Sensibles”**
2018 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association^{*i*} 3–6 January 2018
- Comments on Klaus Corcilius, “Generation of Animals V.1–8”**
Aristotle on Living Beings: The *Generation of Animals* International Symposium
Universität Tübingen 5 May 2017
- Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Discriminative Mean**
2017 Pennsylvania Circle of Ancient Philosophy
Duquesne University 4 March 2017
- 2016 BPPA Masterclass
University of Cambridge 21 May 2016
- Aristotle on Why Animals are Perceivers**
De Anima III: International Workshop in Honor of Michel Crubellier^{*i*}
Université de Lille 3 11 March 2016
- Perception and Hypothetical Necessity in *Posterior Analytics* 2.19**
Workshop on Aristotle’s Epistemology^{*i*} 17 April 2015
University of Pittsburgh
- 38th Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop 21 February 2015
- Aristotle on Why Animals Need *Phantasia***
Yale Working Group in Ancient Philosophy^{*i*} 15 April 2015
- Natural Teleology in Aristotle’s Account of Incidental Perception**
2014 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association 29 December 2014
2014 Western Canadian Philosophical Association Annual Meeting
University of British Columbia 4 October 2014
- Comments on Klaus Corcilius, “Hylomorphism, Aristotle’s Science of Life,
and the Explanation of Mental Episodes”**
2014 Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association^{*i*} 18 April 2014
- Comments on Marc Gasser, “Aristotle on Perceiving Universals”**
37th Annual Ancient Philosophy Workshop^{*i*} 5 April 2014
- Aristotle on the Epistemic Role of Perception: *Posterior Analytics* 1.31**
Fifth Annual Toronto Workshop in Ancient Philosophy^{*i*} 15 March 2013
University of Toronto
- Comments on David Charles, “Aristotle on Perception”**
Hylomorphism in Aristotle and Kant^{*i*} 11 November 2012
University of Toronto
- Virtue as *Dunamis* in Plato’s *Hippias Minor***
North American Meeting of the International Plato Society 6 October 2012
University of Michigan
- Second Graduate Conference of the Ancient Philosophy & Science Network^{*i*} 1 July 2012
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
- Comments on David Charles, “Aristotle: Actions as Processes”**
Fourth Annual Toronto Workshop in Ancient Philosophy^{*i*} 16 March 2012
University of Toronto

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

Robinson Fellowship in Ancient Philosophy Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto	2014–2015, 2015–2016
Ontario Graduate Scholarship University of Toronto	2013–2014, 2014–2015
Graduate Student Travel Stipend American Philosophical Association	2014
Michael J. Herman Fellowship Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto	2011
Association of Former Students Graduate Merit Fellowship Texas A&M University	2008–2010

TEACHING EXPERIENCE (at the University of Toronto unless otherwise noted)

As Instructor

PHIL 0080: Introduction to Philosophical Problems (University of Pittsburgh)	Fall 2017
PHIL 1040: Aristotle (University of Pittsburgh)	Spring 2017
PHIL 0450: Theories of Knowledge and Reality (University of Pittsburgh)	Spring 2017
PHIL 0460: Philosophy of Mind (University of Pittsburgh)	Fall 2016
PHIL 1440: Philosophy of Mind (University of Pittsburgh)	Spring 2016
PHL340: Issues in Philosophy of Mind: Perception and Singular Thought	Winter 2014

As Tutorial Leader

PHL205: Early Medieval Philosophy. Instructor: Deborah Black	Fall 2013
PHL200: Ancient Philosophy. Instructor: Lloyd Gerson	AY2011–2012
PHL210 17th & 18th Century Philosophy. Instructor: Adam Harmer	Summer 2011
PHIL240: Symbolic Logic. Instructor: Robin Smith (TAMU)	Spring 2010
PHIL240: Symbolic Logic. Instructor: Christopher Menzel (TAMU)	Fall 2009

As Grader

PHLB81: Theories of Mind. Instructor: William Seager	Fall 2014
PHL245: Introduction to Logic. Instructor: Nico Scharer	Winter 2013
PHL304: Aristotle. Instructor: Jennifer Whiting	Fall 2012
PHL246: Probability and Inductive Logic. Instructor: Colin Howson	Winter 2011
PHL202: Ancient Philosophy. Instructor: Thomas Mathien	Fall 2010

GRADUATE COURSEWORK (*a* = audited)

Courses in Ancient Philosophy

Aristotle's <i>De Anima</i> . ^a Instructor: David Charles (Yale)	Spring 2015
Aristotle on Definition and Essence. ^a Instructor: David Charles (Yale)	Spring 2015
Plato's <i>Philebus</i> and its Aristotelian Legacy. ^a Instructor: Jennifer Whiting (Toronto)	Fall 2013
Aristotle on <i>Phantasia</i> , Cognition and Action. ^a Instructor: Jennifer Whiting (Toronto)	Winter 2013
Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i> . Instructor: Lloyd Gerson (Toronto)	Winter 2012
Presocratic Philosophy. Instructor: Brad Inwood (Toronto)	Winter 2012
Plato's Ethical Dialogues. Instructor: Rachel Barney (Toronto)	Fall 2011

Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms. Instructor: Lloyd Gerson (Toronto)	<i>Winter 2011</i>
Plato's <i>Gorgias</i> . Instructor: Rachel Barney (Toronto)	<i>Fall 2010</i>
Ancient Determinism. Instructor: Robin Smith (TAMU)	<i>Fall 2009</i>
Independent Study: Presocratic Philosophy. Instructor: Scott Austin (TAMU)	<i>Fall 2009</i>

Courses in the Philosophy of Mind and Language

Perception, Singular Thought, Ontology. ^a Instructor: Imogen Dickie (Toronto)	<i>Winter 2014</i>
Rationality, Consciousness, Action. Instructors: Benj Hellie, Andrew Sepielli (Toronto)	<i>Winter 2012</i>
Reference and Communication. Instructor: Imogen Dickie (Toronto)	<i>AY2010–2011</i>

Courses in Logic

Formal Tools in Philosophy. Instructor: Jonathan Weisberg (Toronto)	<i>Fall 2011</i>
Modal Logic. Instructor: Christopher Menzel (TAMU)	<i>Spring 2010</i>
Mathematical Logic. Instructor: Robert Burch (TAMU)	<i>Fall 2008</i>

Courses in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy

The Philosophy of Peter Abelard. Instructor: Peter King (Toronto)	<i>Fall 2011</i>
Modern Philosophy. Instructor: Stephen Daniel (TAMU)	<i>Spring 2009</i>

Courses in Metaphysics and Epistemology

Actions, Events and Processes. ^a Instructors: David Charles, Ursula Coope (Oxford)	<i>Trinity 2013</i>
Epistemology. ^a Instructors: Timothy Williamson, John Hawthorne (Oxford)	<i>Trinity 2013</i>
Teleology. Instructors: Denis Walsh, Jennifer Whiting (Toronto)	<i>Fall 2010</i>
Trope Theory. Instructor: Robert Garcia (TAMU)	<i>Sprint 2010</i>
Epistemology. Instructor: Benjamin McMyler (TAMU)	<i>Spring 2009</i>

Other Courses

Wittgenstein. Instructor: Sonia Sedivy (Toronto)	<i>Winter 2011</i>
William James. Instructor: John McDermott (TAMU)	<i>Fall 2008</i>
Ethical Theory: Feminist Ethics. Instructor: Linda Radzik (TAMU)	<i>Fall 2008</i>

LANGUAGES

Reading knowledge of Ancient Greek, French, German. Intermediate speaking knowledge of French.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Steward for the Department of Philosophy, CUPE 3902 Unit 1 *2012–2015*

Duties included: liaising with CUPE 3902 Unit 1 on behalf of the Department of Philosophy Teaching Assistants, organizing information sessions about benefits and bargaining issues, assisting in member grievances.

Orientation Chair, Graduate Philosophy Student Union *2012, 2013*

Duties included: organizing all activities for the Department of Philosophy Orientation Week for incoming graduate students.

REFERENCES

Dr. Jennifer Whiting

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy,
University of Pittsburgh
✉ whitingj@pitt.edu

Dr. David Charles

Professor of Philosophy and Classics,
Yale University

✉ david.charles@yale.edu

Dr. Justin Broackes

Professor of Philosophy,

Brown University

✉ justin_broackes@brown.edu

Dr. Brad Inwood

Professor of Classics and Philosophy,

Yale University

✉ brad.inwood@yale.edu

Dr. Imogen Dickie (Teaching Reference)

Associate Professor of Philosophy,

University of Toronto

✉ imogen.dickie@utoronto.ca

Aristotle's Case for Perceptual Knowledge

Sense experience, naïvely conceived, presents us with the properties of objects in our perceptual environment: their colors, sounds, smells, flavors, and tangible features. But is our ordinary experience sufficient for *knowledge* of these properties? In antiquity, as today, the question whether experience is a way of knowing perceptible properties was often thought to depend on whether this naïve conception is true—whether, in other words, experiences as of a perceptible property “reveal” its essential nature, so that how a property like Sky Blue or Middle C appears in experience is identical to how it essentially is. This dissertation clarifies Aristotle’s poorly understood position on this question. I show that Aristotle defends the naïve conception of sense experience against the objections of philosophers who denied that perception gives us access to the essential nature of what we perceive, and I trace Aristotle’s defense to a neglected theory of the psychological conditions under which perceivers are presented with objects’ perceptible properties.

I argue that Aristotle’s support for the naïve conception is driven by a distinctive view of the teleology of the senses. In his view, the senses contribute to the survival and flourishing of the animals that possess them because sense experience furnishes a “true”, or presentationally accurate, perspective on objects’ perceptible properties. Aristotle recognizes that this view faces challenges from arguments against the naïve conception of sense experience. Most salient among these is an argument Aristotle finds in Plato’s *Theatetus*, according to which perception cannot attain to truth because only the soul by itself—and not by means of the senses—can “discern”, or *krinei*, the essence of properties like a hard thing’s hardness and a soft thing’s softness. Commentators have not appreciated the extent to which Aristotle’s perceptual psychology is designed in response to this Platonic challenge. For this reason, commentators have failed to notice that a centerpiece of Aristotle’s account of basic sense perception is an argument aimed at showing that the senses do in fact have access to the essence of the properties they perceive.

Aristotle’s argument relies on an ontology of “perceptual qualities”—properties such as color, sound, and flavor that delineate the various sense modalities. I argue that Aristotle accepts a thoroughly *physicalist* ontology of perceptual qualities, according to which colors, sounds, flavors, and the rest each have a perceiver-independent essence rooted in their status as causes of a certain type of bodily affection. In Chapter 1 I show that standard interpretations, which hold that perceptual qualities are essentially dependent on perceivers, overlook a crucial distinction between a perceptual *quality* (e.g. a color) and a perceptual *object* (e.g. an object of vision). On my interpretation, Aristotle denies that perceptual qualities are essentially perceptible. But he maintains that perceptual qualities can nevertheless be manifest in experience as they essentially are. For, as I show in Chapter 2, Aristotle’s physicalism is one in which the quality as it inheres in an object is identical to the quality as it inheres in the motion affecting a perceiver; the same quality, in his view, is both “mixture and motion”.

This ontology informs Aristotle’s account of the psychological conditions under which perceptual qualities actually come to be present in a perceiver’s experience as they essentially are. The locus of this account is an obscure argument from *De Anima* II 11 (424a5–7), in which Aristotle purports to show that the senses “discriminate”, or *krinei*, perceptual qualities because the senses are “mean states” of those qualities. In Chapter 3 I develop a comprehensive interpretation of the sensory mean state, which I use in Chapter 4 to elucidate Aristotle’s argument for sensory discrimination. My account draws support from an analogy with Aristotle’s celebrated doctrine of the ethical mean, which famously analyzes character virtues as mean states of a different, though related, sort. Against recent interpretations, the analogy shows that sensory discrimination is in Aristotle’s view a process whereby perceivers are presented with perceptual qualities as they essentially are. Aristotle’s conclusion that the *senses* discriminate (or *krinei*) perceptual qualities therefore represents a decisive rejection of the Platonic view that only the *soul* by itself can discern (or *krinei*) the essence of the properties we perceive.

Aristotle’s argument for sensory discrimination makes a case for perceptual knowledge at least to the extent that it supports the naïve conception of sense experience. However, it may also support a view on which experience itself is a way of knowing perceptual qualities, in a way parallel to how more advanced cognitive states like scientific knowledge (*epistêmê*) constitute knowledge of their objects. I conclude by outlining ways in which this possibility could shed new light on perception’s role in Aristotle’s epistemology.