

Joshua Boone Trubowitz

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EMPLOYMENT

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame (beg. August 2025)
Elmer Kennedy Memorial Teaching Fellow in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought and the College, The University of Chicago, 2023–

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in The Department of Philosophy and The Committee on Social Thought, University of Chicago, 2016–2023.

BA in Fundamentals: Issues and Texts, University of Chicago, 2011–2015. With honors.

SPECIALIZATION

AOS: Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy

AOC: Mind; History of Moral/Political Philosophy; Early Modern Philosophy

HONORS AND AWARDS

Elmer Kennedy Memorial Teaching Fellowship, 2024–2025 (for excellence as a Teaching Fellow)

Graduate Student Essay Prize, University of Chicago Philosophy Department, 2021 (for best philosophical essay)

John U. Nef Summer Language Study Fellowship, 2017

PhD funding, The University of Chicago, 2016–2023

University of Chicago Nominee for the Rhodes Scholarship, 2015

University of Chicago Nominee for the Marshall Scholarship, 2015

Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung Fellowship, July 2015–March 2016, with Ludwig Maximilians Universität, Munich

Phi Beta Kappa, 2014 (early inductee, in junior year)

PUBLICATIONS

“Soul and Body in Aristotle’s Theory of Perception.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming).

“Aristotle on Perceptual Self-Consciousness.” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (forthcoming).

REFEREED AND INVITED TALKS (* = refereed, ° = invited)

* “Aristotle on Perceptual Self-Consciousness”

Symposium session, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting, Jan. 2025

* “Discrimination and Judgment in Aristotle”

The Fifth Annual Rackham Interdisciplinary Workshop in Ancient Philosophy, April 2024

° “Soul and Body in Aristotle’s Theory of Perception”

Georgetown University, Jan. 2024

* “Aristotle on Perception and Time: *De sensu* 448a26–30”

Colloquium session, American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting, Feb. 2023

* “Pleasure and Perception in Aristotle’s *De anima* 3.7”

Symposium session, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting, Jan. 2023

WORK IN PROGRESS

“Discrimination and Judgment in Aristotle.” [Draft available]

Argues that Aristotle understands perception as a power of judgment or discrimination because he understands the senses as criteria or canons relative to which we can authoritatively judge that something is e.g. pale or dark, sweet or bitter.

DISSERTATION

Title: *Spontaneous Activity and Truthfulness in Aristotle’s Theory of Perception*

Committee: Gabriel Lear (chair), Agnes Callard, Matthew Boyle

Aristotle maintains that perception is a form of truthful cognition or knowledge (*gnôsis*). My dissertation argues that it amounts to a form of knowledge precisely insofar as it involves a spontaneous, judgment-like act in which we identify something for what it is by distinguishing it from what it is not. This conclusion pushes back against the widespread view that perceptual knowledge is a matter of being accurately appeared-to. Some feel compelled to attribute such a ‘passive’ conception of perceptual knowledge to Aristotle because they consider the Aristotelian soul a perceiver’s capacity for passive phenomenal awareness. I show that on the contrary, it is a principle of spontaneous activity. What emerges is a new picture of the aims and philosophical significance of Aristotle’s theory of perception.

TEACHING AS INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD

Classics of Social and Political Thought II (Winter 2024 and Winter 2025)

Two seminar sections reading early modern political thought, esp. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. The course is in the University of Chicago’s undergraduate Core Curriculum.

Classics of Social and Political Thought I (Autumn 2023 and Autumn 2024)

Two seminar sections reading ancient political thought, esp. Plato and Aristotle. The course is in the University of Chicago's undergraduate Core Curriculum.

Reality and Truth: Plato and the Problem of Being (Spring 2022)

An intensive, tutorial-style seminar focused on Plato's *Sophist* with readings from Presocratic philosophers and other Platonic dialogues.

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

Responsibilities: leading two weekly discussion sections of approx. 10 students each, grading papers, and meeting with students throughout the term.

1. Ancient Philosophy/History of Philosophy I (for G. Lear, Autumn 2018)
2. Heidegger's Being and Time Division I (for R. Moati, Autumn 2019)
3. Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy/History of Philosophy II (for D. Moerner, Winter, 2020)

SERVICE

Coordinator, Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop, academic years 2021-22 and 2022-23. Responsible for running a weekly workshop, inviting and hosting external faculty, and coordinating a reading group.

Chair, Social Thought Colloquium, academic year 2020-2021. Responsible for running a series of talks by internal and external faculty.

LANGUAGES

Ancient Greek, Latin, German (reading), French (reading)

GRADUATE COURSEWORK IN PHILOSOPHY (* indicates audit)

Ancient Philosophy: Aristotle's Metaphysics M-N (E. Katz); Actuality and Potentiality: Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta (C. Shields); Plato's Statesman (G. R. Lear); *Plato's Gorgias (A. Callard); *The Socratic Elenchus (A. Callard); *The Ethics and Poetics of Mimesis (G. R. Lear and J. Lear); *Topics in Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (G. R. Lear); *Aristotle on Friendship (G. R. Lear); *Plato's Timaeus (E. Fletcher).

Ethics and Political Philosophy: Tragedy and Philosophy (M. Nussbaum); Advanced Topics in Moral, Political, and Legal Philosophy (B. Leiter); Conceptual Foundations of the Modern State (Q. Skinner); Current Issues in General Jurisprudence (B. Leiter); Virtues of the Intellect: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics VI and Heidegger's Comment (J. Lear, I. Kimhi).

Miscellaneous: Kant's Transcendental Deduction and its Contemporary Reception (J. Conant); Elementary Logic (T. Pashby); Intermediate Logic (A. Vasudevan); Problems of the Self (M.

Boyle); Special Topics in the Philosophy of Mind: Imagination (M. Boyle, J. Lear); Kant: Critique of Pure Reason (M. Boyle); *The Problem of Induction (A. Vasudevan)

REFERENCES

Gabriel Richardson Lear (dissertation committee chair)
Professor
University of Chicago Department of Philosophy
Committee on Social Thought
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Agnes Callard (dissertation committee member)
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Matthew Boyle (dissertation committee member)
Emerson and Grace Wineland Pugh
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Martha Nussbaum
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Professor of Law and Ethics
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Sean Kelsey
Rev. John A. O'Brien College Professor of Philosophy
University of Notre Dame Department of Philosophy
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Daniel Moerner (teaching reference)
(Formerly) Assistant Professor
University of Chicago Department of Philosophy
moerner@uchicago.edu

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Title: *Spontaneous Activity and Truthfulness in Aristotle's Theory of Perception*

Aristotle considers perception a form of truthful cognition, or knowledge (*gnôsis*). I argue that it amounts to a form of knowledge precisely insofar as it features a spontaneous, judgment-like act, and that the Aristotelian soul is the principle of this spontaneous activity. In doing so, I push back against a widespread tendency to attribute a thoroughly 'passive' conception of perceptual knowledge to Aristotle, and a corresponding conception of the soul as a capacity for passive phenomenal awareness. What emerges is a new picture of the basic aim and significance of Aristotle's theory of perception.

The dissertation centers on the locus of truth and falsity in perception, which lies, I argue, in what Aristotle calls a 'critical' or 'discriminative' (*kritikon*) act. In my chapter 'Perception as a Critical

Power: Spontaneity and Knowledge,' I argue that this 'critical' act is a matter of identifying something for what it is by distinguishing it from what it is not through the use of a standard or criterion. It is *like* judgment in that it is truth-evaluable and involves a contribution from our side of the perceptual encounter, but it is not confined to rational animals. It is 'spontaneous' in the sense that it is not a matter of being impinged-upon from without, but an active response to the objects with which our senses present us. (More precisely, it manifests what Aristotle calls an 'internal principle of motion,' not of 'being moved,' where the motion in question is internal to the activity.) I show that Aristotle accuses his materialist predecessors of relativism precisely because their materialism commits them to a thoroughly passive conception of perceptual knowledge unworthy of the name: for Aristotle, perceptual knowledge requires drawing distinctions.

Aristotle's doctrine of perceptual infallibility leads many scholars to think otherwise (esp. Burnyeat, Caston). If we cannot be deceived about simple perceptible qualities like color or flavor, it must be that perception does not involve judgment, which would introduce the possibility of error. Perceptual knowledge, they conclude, is a mere 'veridical awareness.' I argue against this view in my chapter 'Perception as a Critical Power: Truthfulness and Authority.' On my reading, Aristotle's doctrine of perceptual infallibility is meant to state, against the relativistic doctrines of his predecessors, that perceivers possess the relevant standards or criteria for judgment even with regard to simple qualities like color and flavor, so that (1) there is a fact of the matter about whether something is sweet or bitter and (2) we have the authority to judge it.

Another reason that scholars feel compelled to attribute a thoroughly passive conception of perceptual knowledge to Aristotle is that the Aristotelian soul (viz., its perceptual 'part') is widely mistaken for a power of passive 'receptivity' exercised in a correspondingly passive phenomenal awareness (esp. Lorenz, Johansen). On this picture, perceptual appearances come to be 'in' the soul as 'in' a space of consciousness, and perception is an 'act' of passive receptivity. In my chapter 'Bodily Receptivity: Aristotle's "Form Without Matter" Doctrine,' I show that this view has trouble explaining the fact that inanimate bodies receive perceptible forms, and cannot accommodate certain central features of Aristotle's theory of soul. I argue that the capacity to receive perceptible forms does not belong to us insofar as we are ensouled, but is a function of the sense-organs in their capacity as mere bodies. This makes space for the idea that the soul is a perceiver's capacity for spontaneous, judgment-like activity.

Then, in a chapter on Aristotle's conception of perceptual self-consciousness ('Body, Soul, and Perceiving That We Perceive'), I argue that for a perceptual appearance to 'reach' the soul is indeed *not* for it to 'enter consciousness' as an object of passive phenomenal awareness, but for it to figure in perceptual judgment. This allows me to explain a puzzling feature of Aristotle's theory of perception, that whenever we perceive, we 'perceive that we perceive.' Because perception involves an act of identifying *this* or *that* as, for example, *Socrates*, it carries with it the awareness that an external object (viz., *Socrates*) is apparent to us—or, in other words, that we perceive it.

Among the significant implications of my dissertation is that it places Aristotle's non-dualist but avowedly anti-materialist conception of soul in a new light. On the assumption that the perceptual 'part' of the soul is a capacity for phenomenal awareness, many scholars take it that Aristotle's anti-materialism is about rejecting a 'reductive' or 'eliminative' conception of 'the mental' in the

attempt to make space for phenomenal awareness in an otherwise material universe. If I am right, his anti-materialism is fundamentally about safeguarding the reality of spontaneous activity and, with it, the possibility of truthful cognition or knowledge.