

# Philosophy of Perception

Geoffrey Hall

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## Course Description

The phenomena of illusion and hallucination challenge our intuitive conception of perceptual experience as acquaintance with our surrounding environment. When a perceiver is subject to an illusion, an object looks to be some way that it isn't. When a perceiver is subject to a hallucination, they seem to see objects in their surroundings that they do not. In this course we'll investigate what illusion and hallucination tell us about the nature of perceptual experience. As we will see, attempts to deal with these phenomena have resulted in some pretty wild theories. But there has also been a good deal of progress made in recent years suggesting a number of new and exciting research programs.

This course will serve in effect as an advanced introduction to contemporary philosophy of perception. For the majority of the course, we will be concerned with the major theories of the nature of perceptual experience: are there perceptual experiences that are such that, to have them is to be acquainted with one's environment? Or are all perceptual experiences mere qualitative representations of one's environment, so that any perceptual experience could possibly be had by a brain in a vat? Do perceptual experiences in hallucination have "objects"? That is, when one hallucinates a red apple before one, must there be something red that appears red to one? Must there be some *red* thing that appears red to one? In the later parts of the course we will also look at some more specific debates concerning the role that experience plays in cognition and on the bounds on the sort of information experience is able to provide, among other things.

## Course Objectives

Successful students will:

1. Investigate philosophical questions about the nature of perceptual experience.
2. Improve their ability to comprehend, dissect, and evaluate philosophical arguments.
3. Improve their ability to articulate philosophical ideas/arguments clearly and persuasively in their own writing.
4. Improve their ability to read and understand difficult texts.

## Grading

Final grades will be determined by 7 components:

- Participation: 15%
- TPQ: 15%
- Proposal: 5 %

- Bibliography: 5%
- Abstract: 5%
- Paper Draft: 5%
- Presentation: 15%
- Final Paper: 35%

The paper is required in the sense that failing to complete the final paper will result in a failing grade.

## Participation

You are expected to take an active role in class discussion. In order to get full participation credit you must do the readings every week before class, make a comment every class and contribute positively to the overall conversations. Each student will be required to lead a call discussion on an assigned day.

## TPQs

You will be required to submit two questions each week prior to the first class period of the week. The questions must be submitted at least 8 hours before the class period for which they are due. The questions will be submitted on a google document that will be shared with you. The questions must be "Thought Provoking Questions" in the following sense: (i) they must demonstrate that you have actually engaged with the text. If I can settle the question by a quick google search or by looking briefly through the text itself, then you have not done this. (ii) they should engage with the main arguments and positions that are talked about within the text. You should be looking for parts of the argument that you do not understand or that seem to you to be ill supported. Spend some time trying to work it out for yourself before submitting the question. Some weeks, I may ask that you attempt to write out the main argument of the paper in standard form in lieu of the TPQ (the term 'argument in standard form' will be explained in class.)

## Papers

Philosophical research requires time, and there are several key steps that must be taken prior to writing a good paper. For this course I am going to guide you through this process, with the end goal being a polished philosophical paper that makes *some* contribution (however small) to the literature. This process will involve the following components: (i) a proposal for a topic to work on, (ii) an annotated bibliography, (iii) an abstract of the argument to be given in the paper, (iv) a rough draft of the paper, and finally (v) a completed draft of the paper. **The proposal will be due near the very beginning of the semester, so I recommend skimming ahead a bit to find a topic that is interesting to you.**

## Tentative Reading Schedule

### 0.1 The Problem of Perception

**Week 1** Introduction.

1/16 No Readings

**Week 2** Illusion and Hallucination

1/21 A.D. Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, Chapter 1.

1/23 A.D. Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, Chapter 7. **Proposal Due**

### 0.2 Sense-Datum Theories and Adverbialism

**Week 3** The Argument from Hallucination.

1/28 Fish, Chapter 2; Huemer Sense-Data SEP

1/30 F. Jackson *Perception* (excerpts)

**Week 4** Adverbialism

2/4 Fish, Chapter 3

2/6 Michael Tye "The Adverbial Approach to Visual Experience"

### 0.3 Intentionalism

**Week 5** The Contents of Visual Experience.

2/11 Susanna Siegel, *The Contents of Visual Experience*, chapter 1.

2/13 Alex Byrne, "Experience and Content" (excerpts) **Bibliography Due**

**Week 6** The Contents of Visual Experience (Continued)

2/18 Susanna Schellenberg, "In Defense of Perceptual Content"

2/20 Adam Pautz, "What are the contents of experience?"

**Week 7** Intentionalism.

2/25 David Chalmers, "The Representational Character of Experience"

2/27 Alex Byrne, "Intentionalism Defended" **Abstract Due**

**Week 8** Transparency.

3/4 Michael Tye, "Representationalism and the transparency of experience"

3/6 Amy Kind, "What's so transparent about transparency?"

**Week 9** Objections.

3/18 Fiona Macpherson, "Colour inversion problems for representationalism"

3/20 Jeff Speaks, "Attention and Intentionalism"

### 0.4 Naive Realism

**Week 10** Consciousness.

3/25 Heather Logue, "Why naive realism?"

3/27 Fish Chapter **Rough Draft Due**

**Week 11** Disjunctivism

4/1 Martin, M.G.D "The Limits of Self-Awareness"; Katalin Farkas "Indiscriminability and the Sameness of Appearance."

4/3 Logue, Heather, Byrne Alex "Either/Or"

**Week 12** Content and Naive Realism

4/8 Siegel, Susanna "Indiscriminability and the Phenomenal"

4/10 Heather Logue, "Experiential Content and Naive Realism: A Reconciliation"

### 0.5 Some Debates

**Week 13** Content: rich/thin, conceptual/nonconceptual

4/15 Siegel, Byrne, "Rich or Thin?"

4/17 Jeff Speaks, "Is there a problem about nonconceptual content?"

**Week 14** The Rationality of Perception

4/22 Siegel, *The Rationality of Perception*

4/24 Siegel, *The Rationality of Perception*

**Week 15** Epistemology and the Doxastic Theory

4/29 Alex Byrne, "The Epistemic Significance of Experience"

5/1 Grace Helton, "Against the Doxastic Theory of Perception"

**Week 16** **Final Paper Due**