

PHIL S140: Perception, Illusion, and Hallucination

Introduction to Philosophy of Perception

Session A (June 7-July 9)
M/W/F, 9-11:15 a.m. EDT

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Office hours: TBD

Course Description

Sometimes dreams can seem very much like ordinary, waking experiences. So what's the difference? Aren't your dreams something in your head – your mind, consciousness, or something like that – whereas in everyday life you are aware of physical objects that exist whether you are perceiving them or not? Or does the similarity between a vivid dream and normal perception suggest that even our ordinary, waking experience is really something in our heads? Is our normal perceptual experience fundamentally any different from a hallucination or an illusion? If not, how does perception give us access to a world independent of our minds?

This class will explore questions like these and others that philosophers have raised and tried to answer about perception. We will also discuss some of the differences between philosophical and scientific approaches to theorizing about perception, along with some ways in which the philosophy of perception and empirical sciences of the mind may mutually benefit each other. The course serves as an introduction to the philosophy of perception and presupposes no background in philosophy.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this class, you will be able to:

- explain the “problem of perception” and different theories of perceptual experience
- evaluate these theories in light of phenomenological, epistemological, and empirical constraints
- analyze philosophical arguments about perceptual experience
- articulate challenges for both philosophical and scientific approaches to theorizing perception

Required readings

All readings will be supplied through Canvas. We will read several chapters from William Fish's *Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 2010), marked “PP” in the course schedule: feel free to purchase a copy for yourself if you prefer, but all assigned chapters will be provided through Canvas.

Course schedule (subject to change)

Week 1

	Topic	Assigned reading
1.	Introduction to the course A framework for philosophical theories of perception: “two hats” and three principles	Fish, “Three Key Principles” (ch.1 in <i>PP</i>) Nagel, “What is it like to be a bat?” (selections)
2.	The “ordinary” conception of perception Illusion, hallucination, and the problem of perception	Selected philosophers (Broad, Strawson, Sturgeon, and others) on ordinary perceptual experience (handout, 5 pgs.) <i>Watch/Look:</i> [selected visual illusions, TBD]
3.	Generalized arguments from illusion and hallucination <i>Philosophical arguments (workshop #1)</i>	Crane and French, section 2 of “The Problem of Perception” Guide to philosophical arguments (handout) <i>Watch:</i> "How to Argue - Philosophical Reasoning" (Crash Course Philosophy #2)

Week 2

	Topic	Assigned reading
4.	Sense datum theory and indirect realism Traditional arguments from illusion and hallucination <i>Philosophical arguments (workshop #2)</i>	Fish, “Sense datum theories” (ch.2 in <i>PP</i> , pp.11-18) Ayer on the Argument from Illusion (except from <i>The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge</i>)
5.	Sense datum theory, contd.	Strawson, “Perception and its objects” (selections) Barnes, “The myth of sense data” (selections)
6.	<i>Interlude: Causation</i>	Fish, “Perception and Causation” (ch.7 in <i>PP</i>)

Week 3

	Topic	Assigned reading
7.	Intentionalist theories	Martin, “Perceptual content” (selections)
8.	<i>Case study:</i> Belief theories	Fish, “Belief acquisition theories” (ch.4 in <i>PP</i>)
9.	<i>Case study:</i> Representationalism	Dretske, “Experience as Representation” Fish, “Representationalism and the two hats” (ch.5 in <i>PP</i> , pp.78-82)

Week 4

	Topic	Assigned reading
10.	Disjunctivist naïve realism	Fish, “Naïve realism: the theory and its motivations” (selections; NB. this is not in <i>PP</i>)
11.		Logue, “Disjunctivism” (sections 1, 2, 5) Martin, “The Limits of Self-Awareness” (parts 1-3)
12.		Fish, “Disjunctive theories” (ch.6 in <i>PP</i> , pp.87-98) Martin, “The Limits of Self-Awareness” (selections from parts 4-10)

Week 5

	Topic	Assigned reading
13.	Comparison of philosophical theories of perception; catch up and review session	No new reading
14.	Philosophy of perception and empirical research	Noë and O’Regan, “On the brain-basis of visual consciousness: a sensorimotor account” Fish, “Philosophy and the sciences of the mind” (ch.8 in <i>PP</i>)
15.		Noë, “Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion?”

Course assignments

Participation:	10%
Worksheets (x3):	45%
Argument analysis:	20%
Final paper:	25%

Explanation of Assignments

Participation: [Details TBD depending on enrollment]

Worksheets: Worksheets are designed to help you review and apply the material we cover in class in order to deepen your understanding of new concepts and theories. Think of them as problem sets without the math. There will be three worksheets in total, with each worksheet consisting of 6-8 questions (15% per worksheet, 45% overall). Due by end of day Saturday of Weeks 1, 3, and 4, respectively.

Argument analysis: A short writing assignment (3-4 pages, double-spaced) in which you analyze and evaluate an argument in one of the readings we have discussed, drawing on our in-class

workshops on philosophical arguments. I will provide a selection of excerpts from which you may pick one. Due by end of day Saturday of Week 2.

Final paper: There will be a final paper (5-7 pages, double-spaced) on a topic of your choice. I will distribute a range of paper topics via Canvas. Due by end of day Saturday of Week 5.

Course policies:

Attendance: Attendance at all course meetings is expected. Unexcused absences from the seminar will result in a reduction of the final course grade.

Late assignments: Late assignments will receive a grade reduction of two steps (e.g., from A to B+) for each day that they are late.

Plagiarism and academic integrity: Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas as if they were your own. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. Plagiarism is a serious offense, and assignments containing plagiarized material will result in a grade zero for the given assignment. If you have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, don't hesitate to ask! For some helpful guidelines, check out <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>.

Accessibility and inclusion

If you have a documented learning disability, please let me know by the end of the first week of class and contact the Student Accessibility Services (<https://sas.yale.edu/>) to make sure your needs are being met. All such conversations will remain confidential.