Perception, Illusion, and Hallucination

PHIL S140 | MW 1:00 PM - 4:15 PM
Instructor: Jacob Sheehan
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Location: TBD

Course Description
This course will explore philosophical questions of perception. The course serves as an introduction to the philosophy of perception perception and presupposes no background in philosophy. Our primary focus will be what philosophers call the problem of perception. This is the problem of squaring our ordinary view of perceptual experience with the fact that we sometimes suffer hallucinations and illusions. Ordinarily, we take perceptual experience to directly acquaint us with the mind-independent world. Sometimes, however, we undergo hallucinations: experiences in which we are not directly presented with an ordinary object but merely seem to be. If what we are directly presented with in hallucinatory experiences are not ordinary objects, how could it be that we directly presented with ordinary objects in everyday perceptual experience? Other questions considered will include: Is the visual world a Grand illusion? Are the colors we perceive objects to have really there? Is perception fundamentally a matter of our representing the world to be a certain way? And how can philosophical theorizing be informed by scientific approaches to perception?

Intended Audience
This is an introductory course. No background in philosophy is expected or required.

Policies
Office hours: I hope that you will visit me in my office hours over the course of the term. I am happy to assist you in understanding the course material and provide guidance with respect to course assignments. You needn’t make an appointment to visit during normal office hours. If you would like to meet but are unable to make my normal office hours, send me an email, and we will sort out

1This is a provisional syllabus; it may be modified before the course begins.
a time that works for both of us.

*Participation:* This course is both lecture-based and discussion-based. During class discussions, you should aim to contribute productively to our conversations, by asking questions or making comments that will help us understand the course material and engage philosophically with it. Some people find it challenging to speak in class. If you are one of those people, please come to my office hours early in the semester, and we can discuss strategies for helping you participate.

*Attendance:* Attendance is required and essential to success in the course. Repeated absences will negatively affect your final grade.

*Late work:* Late assignments will be marked down 5% for each day after the due date. For example, a paper that merits a 90% but is turned in two days late will receive an 80%. Extensions may be granted in exceptional circumstances but may only be requested at least three days in advance of an assignment’s due date.

*Academic integrity:* The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. One of the most severe violations of academic integrity is plagiarism, which is the use of someone else’s work, words, or ideas as if they were your own. Thus, if you use a source for a paper, you must acknowledge it. There is no reason to hide the fact that you have relied on others, for the very idea of writing in a university is to trace your participation in a conversation of scholars. Showing how your ideas derive from and comment on the ideas of others is one of the high achievements of mature academic writing. It would be a mistake to downplay this achievement in an attempt to suggest greater originality. What counts as a source and requires citation is a delicate matter. Some things are clear. For instance, anything derived from readings (including those found online), either from the syllabus or outside sources, must be cited. What is not clear is whether ideas presented in lecture, discussed in section, or derived from conversations with faculty, TFs, or other students must be cited. In general, it is better to err on the side of caution and cite sources too much rather than too little. Penalties for plagiarism are severe. Students caught plagiarizing can be subject to lowered or failing grades, as well as suspension or expulsion from the University. For more information, please consult Yale’s Academic Integrity Policy.

*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 to make sure your needs are being met. I welcome diverse perspectives on the course’s readings and themes. My primary aim in every meeting will be to join with students in creating an open and inclusive environment for the pursuit of learning and philosophical conversation.

**Assessments**
*Discussion board posts:* Students will be asked to write one short post on the course’s Canvas page for each class meeting. These posts will be used to help orient class discussion. In your post, you
might, for example, raise a question about the reading, raise an objection to an argument in one of the readings, write up an idea you had that is related to the readings, or simply flag a point of confusion. You are encouraged but not required to reply a post by one of your classmates.

**Argument Analysis:** Students will submit one argument analysis over the course of the semester. The argument analysis should, in 1-3 pages, outline the central argument presented in one of the course readings. You can choose to analyze any of the readings from the course.

**Papers:** Students will write two papers, each 5-7 pages long. I will distribute prompts for each paper. In writing your papers, you will not only explain philosophical ideas and arguments presented in the course but also critically engage with them.

**Exam:** There will be a final exam. The exam will ask you to write several short essays explaining ideas and arguments from texts considered in the course. I will distribute in advance a set of exam questions; you will be asked to answer a subset of these on the day of the exam.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- 15% Classroom participation
- 10% Discussion board posts
- 10% Argument analysis
- 15% Paper #1
- 25% Paper #2
- 25% Exam

**Texts**

Students should purchase a copy of William Fish's *Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction (2nd ed.)*. All other readings will be made available on Canvas.

**Schedule**

**May 29th**  Introduction
Chapter 1 of Fish Nagel, “What is it Like to be a Bat?”

**May 31st**  Arguments from Hallucination and Illusion
Crane, “The Problem of Perception” (selections) Argument workshop
June 5th  Indirect Realism  
Selections from Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Reid  Writing workshop

June 7th  Sense Datum Theories  
Chapter 2 of Fish  

June 12th  Sense Datum Theories Continued  
Hatfield, “Perception and Sense-Data”  
Barnes, “The Myth of Sense Data”  
Paper 1 due

June 14th  Adverbialism  
Chapter 4 of Fish  
Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (selection)  
Jackson, “On the Adverbial Analysis of Visual Experience”  
Peer review workshop

June 19th  Intentionalism  
Chapter 3 of Fish  
Crane, “The Problem of Perception”  
(selection) Martin, “Perceptual Content”

June 21st  Disjunctivist Naive Realism  
Chapter 5 of Fish  
Logue, “Disjunctivism”  
Exam review

June 26th  Vision Science and the Grand Illusion  
Chapter 6 of Fish  
Noë, “Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion?”  
Paper 2 due

June 28th  Color  
Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*  
(selection) Gow, “Colour”  
Exam