

PHIL 2843/VLST 2230: Philosophy & Visual Perception

Fall 2022, University of Pennsylvania

Instructor: Tiina Rosenqvist

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Meeting time: MW 1:45-3:14 PM

Meeting room: LERN 101

Office: COHN 403

Office hours: Monday 12-1 PM (COHN 403) and Thursday by appointment (Zoom)

The syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class. Make sure to always check the up-to-date syllabus on our course Canvas site.

1. Course Description

This course is about seeing. What does it mean to see something? What do we see, how do we see it, and why do we see it?

Visual perception is an area of contemporary research in philosophy of psychology that interacts with empirical sciences and other areas of philosophy. This course is interdisciplinary. We will draw on research in visual ecology, psychology, and neuroscience, and try to bring these different streams into dialogue with one another. We will ask how empirical results bear on the plausibility of the philosophical theories we consider, and how they might guide our theory-building. The course is intended to be accessible to students with a previous course in either philosophy, psychology, visual studies, or cognitive science.

The main content of the course is divided into three sections (modules II-IV). We will start by thinking about the nature and structure of perceptual experience itself. What do we see and how do we see it? Do our perceptual states *represent* physical objects and their properties or do we see sense-data? Second, we will consider the perception of one particular perceptible quality: color. What, if anything, is colored? Is color a purely physical property or is it subject-dependent in some way? What is the fundamental goal of the color visual system? Third, we will ask how seeing relates to cognition and how it relates to other perceptual modalities. Do our beliefs and desires influence what we see? Do other perceptual modalities affect what we see (or vice versa)? What kind of properties are presented to us in visual experience: is it just simple properties like shape, color and motion, or can we literally *see* emotions, kinds, and types of animacy?

2. Course Objectives

Through active participation in this course, you will develop an empirically-informed understanding of key contemporary issues and debates in philosophy of perception, improve your overall critical thinking skills, and practice constructing and evaluating philosophical arguments.

3. Course Structure

In-person sessions:

The standard format for the in-person sessions is lecture and discussion. There will also be occasional group work. You are expected to do the assigned readings before class, and participate actively in discussions and other in-class activities.

If the public health and safety measures due to COVID-19 (etc.) require us to switch to partial or all on-line instruction, the class will meet synchronously on Zoom.

In some rare cases, asynchronous lectures might be used.

Out-of-class activities:

You are required to take short reading quizzes on Canvas before the in-person sessions. The quizzes are open-book, and **only the ten best quiz scores count towards your grade.**

You are also encouraged (though *not* required) to use the Canvas discussion board and Perusall to share your thoughts on course content, to ask questions, to share links to relevant articles, etc. Both your in-class participation and discussion board / Perusall contributions can count towards your participation grade. You are also asked to complete short reflections throughout the course that will likewise count towards your participation grade.

You are required to write two short papers and two drafts of a longer paper as well as participate in peer review. In addition, you will complete a group project on illusions in which you apply some aspect of what you have learned in this course. You are required to either create a poster or record a video presentation of the project, which will then be made available to the entire class through Canvas.

4. Assignments & Assessment

- Attendance & Participation (incl. in-class group work) —15%
- Reading Quizzes on Canvas —15%
- Short Paper 1 / Outline — 5%
- Illusion Project — 10%
- Short Paper 2 (900-1100 words) —15%
- Final Paper Draft 1 (800-1200 words)
 - **NOTE:** Failure to submit the draft on time will result in a **grade penalty of 10% for Draft 2**
- Final Paper Draft 1 Peer Reviews — 5%
- Final Paper Draft 2 (1800-2200 words) — 35%

5. Course Policies

Readings

All course readings will be posted (or linked) on Canvas. You are not required to buy any books.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory (please be on time!), but you are allowed to miss two classes without prior notice, unless you are scheduled to conduct peer reviews on that day. If you are going to miss more than two classes (or if you are going to miss the peer review day),

prior notice is required. Depending on the circumstances, your participation grade might be negatively affected, or you might be asked to complete a make-up assignment.

Masking

We will follow university guidelines. Please see the syllabus on the course Canvas site for updates.

Discussion Guidelines

Since this is a philosophy course, there will a lot of discussion of ideas and arguments. To make sure that these discussions remain respectful, inclusive, and constructive, here are some guidelines that we should all follow:

- Be nice. You can be critical of ideas, but remember to argue your points respectfully. Don't make fun of other discussion participants, don't use offensive examples, don't interrupt.
- Don't dominate the discussion. Raise your hand to speak. Acknowledge your fellow students' insights. Listen attentively. Think about what *you* can do to encourage others to participate.
- Ask clarificatory questions, if something doesn't make sense.
- If you feel that these guidelines haven't been appropriately followed, please let me know.

(These guidelines are based on this more extensive list that David Chalmers has put together: <http://consc.net/guidelines/>.)

Submission of Assignments

You are expected to submit all assignments on time. That said, for the paper assignments you have a *total* of eight "late days" that carry no lateness penalties. If you submit a paper two hours late, you're thereby using one late day. If you submit a paper 25 hours late, you're using two late days, etc. After the eight days are used up, penalties apply (5% per day), except in truly exceptional cases (hospitalization, etc.). No submissions are accepted if more than seven days late, barring extenuating circumstances.

There are no make-up reading quizzes (remember that only your ten best quiz scores count towards your final grade). Plan ahead.

It is *your* responsibility to make sure that your assignments are properly submitted and readable. Corrupted files and other unreadable documents are treated as non-submissions. Formatting guidelines for the paper assignments will be provided.

Please take into account that writing good philosophy papers takes time and effort. You should start as soon as possible and write multiple drafts before you submit the paper. If you are struggling with an assignment, **please get in touch as soon as possible**. Philosophy is hard, but I'm happy to help.

Office Hours

You are invited and encouraged to attend weekly communal office hours. One-on-one meetings with me can also be scheduled, if there is something that you would like to discuss privately.

Email

I normally respond to emails within 24 hours, though I might take longer during weekends and holidays and conference travel. If you have not received a response within this time frame, feel free to prompt me with another email. Discussing substantial philosophical questions, paper ideas, or grades over email is not feasible (please come to office hours for that), but if you have questions about logistics or would like to schedule a meeting, email away!

Laptops, Tablets, and Phones

Use of laptops and tablets in class is permitted **only for accessing assigned readings**. No phones are permitted. Empirical research suggests that the use of electronics in class reduces long-term retention and negatively impacts class performance (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01443410.2018.1489046?journalCode=cedp20>), as well as distracts everybody around (<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2014-52302-001>).

If you have a reason for why you need to use electronics in class, please get in touch as soon as possible, and we can work something out.

Failure to comply with this policy may negatively affect your participation grade.

Academic Dishonesty

Do not cheat. Do not plagiarize. Familiarize yourself with the University's Code of Academic Integrity (<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>), and if in doubt, ask. Note that violations of the code will be reported to the relevant disciplinary authorities.

Accommodations

The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and received approval from Disability Services (<https://wlrc.vpul.upenn.edu/sds/>). You can contact Disability Services and make appointments to discuss and/or request accommodations by calling 215-573-9235.

Please let me know if the formatting of my slides/handouts/other course materials is not accessible to you.

I'm happy to discuss how to accommodate other access needs you have.

Religious and Secular Holidays

Accommodations can be made for students observing religious and secular holidays. You should inform me within the first two weeks of the course of your intent to observe such holidays so that appropriate arrangements can be made. You can review the University Policy on Secular and Religious Holidays here: <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/secular-religious-holidays/>

6. Resources

Penn Resources

- Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://caps.wellness.upenn.edu>

- [Weingarten Learning Resources: https://wlrc.vpupenn.edu/lr/](https://wlrc.vpupenn.edu/lr/): The Weingarten Center offers a variety of resources to support all Penn students in reaching their academic goals. All services are free and confidential. **To contact the Weingarten Center, call 215-573-9235.** The office is located in Hamilton Village at 220 S. 40th Street, Suite 260.
- Writing Center: <http://writing.upenn.edu/critical/wc/>

Philosophy Resources

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>
- Critical Thinking Web: <https://philosophy.hku.hk/think/critical/ct.php>
- PhilPapers (a comprehensive index and bibliography of philosophy): <https://philpapers.org>
- Existential Comics: <http://existentialcomics.com>

7. Class & Readings Schedule

Note on terminology:

- **“Required”** readings are the ones you are expected to read and engage with *before* the relevant in-class session, and the *only* ones you will be quizzed on. Normally you’re required to read one paper or book chapter or a collection of shorter excerpts per session.
- **“Recommended”** readings/podcasts/videos will give you a fuller understanding of the topic under discussion. They will likely be useful to you when writing papers. Some ideas in the recommended readings might also be discussed during in-class sessions.
- **“Optional”** readings/podcasts/videos are extra materials for when you are particularly interested in a topic.

o Module I: Getting Started

In the first module, we’ll cover some basics. We’ll talk about what philosophy is and how it differs (if it does) from the sciences. Since philosophical writing is usually *argumentative* writing, we’ll spend some time thinking about arguments. What are they? How can we spot them? What makes them good? Next we’ll zoom in on philosophy of perception, and think about how it relates to other areas of philosophy, and what kinds of questions philosophers of perception usually ask. Finally, we’ll think about how vision works, from the point of view of neuroscience and psychology. What happens when the light reflected from object surfaces hits the eye? Where does the information travel in the brain, and how is it processed?

8/31 (1) Syllabus and Logistics. What is philosophy? **PhilSkills: What is an argument**

- **Recommended:** Nanay (2010), “Philosophy of Perception: The New Wave” in *Perceiving the World*

(September 5 Labor Day, No class)

9/7 (2) Science of Vision (Group Work)

- **Required:** Wolfe et al. (2015), *Sensation & Perception*, Ch. 2: The First Steps in Vision (esp. pp. 31-47)
- **Required:** Wolfe et al. (2015), *Sensation & Perception*, Ch. 3: Spatial Vision: From Spots to Stripes (esp. pp. 53-55, 62-69)

o **Module II:** Visual Experience and Visual Illusions

We normally think that we can *just see*—that we are in direct, unmediated contact with ordinary objects and their mind-independent properties. The arguments from illusion and hallucination challenge this ordinary understanding of perception. When we hallucinate, we aren't aware of any ordinary object at all and when we have an illusory experience, we see an ordinary object, but not as it *really* is. So how exactly does visual perception work? Do we see sense-data instead of external objects? Do our perceptual states represent (and sometimes misrepresent) external objects and their properties? And what are illusions anyway?

9/12 (3) The Problem of Perception (Q1), **PhilSkills: How to Read Philosophy**

- **Required:** Fish (2010), *Philosophy of Perception*, Ch. 1: Introduction: Three key principles
- **Recommended:** Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy"
- **Optional:** Crane & French (2021), "The Problem of Perception" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

9/14 (4) Russell's Representative Realism and Sense-Data (Q2)

- **Required:** Russell (1912), *Problems of Philosophy*, Chs. 1-2 (pp. 1-10)
- **Required:** Dignāga, *Investigation of the Percept* (Ālambana-parīkṣā)
- **Recommended:** Hume (1758/1999), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sect. XII, Part 1: 118
- **Optional:** Fish (2010), *Philosophy of Perception*, Ch. 2: Sense datum views (Access through Franklin)

9/19 (5) Tye's Representationalism & Transparency (Q3)

- **Required:** Tye (2002), "Representationalism and the Transparency of Experience," *Noûs*
- **Optional:** Fish (2010), *Philosophy of Perception*, Ch. 5: Intentional theories (Access through Franklin)

(Paper 1 / Outline Topics Distributed)

9/21 (6) Independent Group Work: Argument from Perceptual Variation

- Instructions on Canvas

(9/25 – 9/27 Rosh Hashanah)

9/26 (7) Review & Discussion, **PhilSkills: How to Write a Paper Outline**

- **Required:** Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

9/28 (8) Visual Illusions? (Q4)

- **Required:** Purves, Wojtach & Lotto (2017), "Why the Concept of 'Visual Illusions' Is Misleading" in *The Oxford Compendium of Visual Illusions*

Paper 1 / Outline Due 9/30 11:59 PM

o **Module III:** Science & Philosophy of Color

Color is an extremely salient feature of visual scenes for many animals, but what kind of property is it— is it an intrinsic property of external objects, an illusion created by our brain, or some sort of a relation between objects and perceivers? If colors are *real*, then when are our color perceptions successful—is it when they match some property present in the object or are the

success standards more directly utility-based? Finally, what is the best way to approach these metaphysical and epistemological questions about color—should we start with the so-called common-sense conception of color or should we adopt a more naturalistic approach and start with what the relevant empirical sciences have to say?

10/3 (9) Why is color so difficult? (Q5) **PhilSkills: How to Talk Philosophy**

- **Required:** Chirumuuta (2015), *Outside Color*, Ch. 1: Color and Its Questions (pp. 1-14)

(10/4–10/5 Yom Kippur)
(Illusion Project Guidelines Released)

10/5 (10) The Science of Color Vision (Group Work in class)

- **Required:** Wolfe et al. (2015), *Sensation & Perception*, Ch. 5: The Perception of Color (excerpts)
- **Recommended:** Watch *How We See Color* on YouTube

(October 6-9 Fall Term Break)

10/10 (11) Introduction to Color Metaphysics (Q6), **Class Visit to the Penn Materials Library (?)**

- **Required:** Logue (2016), "Metaphysics of Color 1: Physicalist Theories of Color," *Philosophy Compass* (pp. 211-213)
- **Required:** Logue (2016) "Metaphysics of Color 2: Non-Physicalist Theories of Color," *Philosophy Compass* (pp. 220-221, 224-227)

10/12 (12) Reductive Physicalism (Q7), **Section Summaries**

- **Required:** Byrne & Hilbert (2003), "Color realism and color science," *BBS* (sections 3-4, pp. 7-18)
- **Recommended:** Logue (2016), "Metaphysics of Color 1: Physicalist Theories of Color" (pp. 213-216)

10/17 (13) Traditional Dispositionalism (Q8), **Argument Reconstructions**

- **Required:** Levin (2000), "Dispositional theories of Color and the Claims of Common Sense," *Philosophical Studies*
- **Recommended:** Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 8: 9-15, 22-26
- **Recommended:** Byrne & Hilbert (2003), Section 2.2
- **Recommended:** Logue (2016) "Metaphysics of Color 2: Non-Physicalist Theories of Color" (pp. 220-224)

Illusion Project Due 10/18 11:59 PM

10/19 (14) Visual Ecology (Group Work in class)

- **Required:** Gerl and Morris (2008), "The Causes and Consequences of Color Vision," *Evolution: Education and Outreach*
- **Recommended:** Watch *How Animals and People See the World Differently* | *National Geographic* on YouTube
- **Optional:** Watch *Life in Colour with David Attenborough* on NETFLIX (Ep. 1 & 2)

10/24 (15) The Function of Color Vision: Detection vs. Discrimination (Q9), Mind Maps

- **Required:** Hatfield (1992), "Color Perception and Neural Encoding: Does Metameric Matching Entail a Loss of Information?" *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, read until Section 4
- **Recommended:** The rest of Hatfield (1992)

10/26 (16) The Function of Color Vision: Perceptual Enhancement (Q10), PhilSkills: How to Write a Philosophy Paper

- **Required:** Akins & Hahn (2014), "Color Perception" in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*, Sections 5-7 (pp. 431-440)
- **Recommended:** Akins & Hahn (2014), Sections 1-4
- **Optional:** Listen to *New Books in Philosophy/ Chirimuuta: Outside Color* (podcast)

(Paper 2 Topics Distributed)

10/31 (17) Ecological Relationalism (Q11)

- **Required:** Thompson (1995), "Colour Vision, Evolution, and Perceptual Content," *Synthese* (pp. 1-11, 22-27)
- **Recommended:** Thompson (1995). *Colour Vision: A study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Perception* (excerpt, 3 pages)
- **Recommended:** Byrne & Hilbert (2003), section 2.5

o Module IV: Perception & Cognition

In this section, we'll think about how visual perception relates to other perceptual modalities, and how it relates to cognition. Do our beliefs, desires, and other cognitive states affect what we see or is visual perception cognitively impenetrable? Do other sensory modalities affect what we see or is visual perception informationally encapsulated? Do visual experiences sometimes represent complex properties like kind memberships or animacy?

11/2 (18) Class Visit to the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) (?)

- **Exhibition:** Sissel Tolaas: RE_____
- **Required:** Make a discussion board post about your visit (instructions on Canvas)

Paper 2 Due 11/4 11:59 PM

11/7 (19) Fodor's Modularity (Q12)

- **Required:** Fodor (1985): "Précis of the Modularity of Mind," *BBS*
- **Optional:** Michel (2020), Cognition and Perception - Is there really a distinction? Association for Psychological Science
- **Optional:** Pylyshyn (1999), "Is vision continuous with cognition: The case for cognitive impenetrability of visual perception" *BBS*

11/9 (20) Experimental Evidence for Cognitive Penetration (Group Work in class)

- **Required:** Banerjee, Chatterjee & Sinha (2012), "Is it light or dark? Recalling moral behavior changes perception of brightness," *Psychological Science*
- **Required:** Levin & Banaji (2006), "Distortions in the perceived lightness of faces: The role of race categories," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*

- **Required:** Hansen et al. (2006) "Memory modulates color appearance," *Nature Neuroscience*

11/14 (21) Evaluating the Evidence (Q13)

- **Required:** Firestone & Scholl (2016), "Cognition does not affect perception: Evaluating the evidence for "top-down" effects," *BBS* (pp. 1-19)
- **Recommended:** Re-visit papers from last time

11/16 (22) Another Look at Cognitive Penetration (Q14)

- **Required:** Clarke (2020), "Cognitive penetration and informational encapsulation: Have we been failing the module?" *Philosophical Studies*

(Final Paper Topics Distributed)

11/21 (23) Contents of Visual Experience, Siegel on K-Properties (Q15)

- **Required:** Siegel (2011), "Kinds" in *The Contents of Visual Experience*
- **Recommended:** Tye (1995), *Ten Problems of Consciousness*, pp. 100-105 (section 4.2)

(November 22-23 Thu-Fri Class Schedule on Tue-Wed)

(November 24-27 Thanksgiving Break)

11/28 (24) Thin vs. Rich Contents: The Debate (Q16)

- **Required:** Siegel & Byrne (2017), "Rich or Thin?" in *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Perception*

11/30 (25) Experimental Evidence for Rich Content?

- **Required:** Gao et al. (2009), "The psychophysics of chasing: A case study in the perception of animacy," *Cognitive Psychology*
- **Recommended:** Yale Perception & Cognition Lab Demos: <http://perception.yale.edu>
- **Optional:** Scholl & Gao (2013), "Perceiving animacy and intentionality: Visual processing or higher-level judgment?" in *Social Perception: Detection and Interpretation of Animacy, Agency, and Intention*

Final Paper Draft 1 Due 11/30 11:59 PM

(NOTE! Submissions not accepted after 12/2 11:59 PM)

o **Module V: Wrapping Up**

This last section of the course is dedicated to drawing connections between the different topics we've covered, to consolidating our knowledge, and to honing our philosophy skills. We'll start with a writing workshop and experiment with strategies for improving the exposition, argumentation, and philosophical engagement in paper assignments. We'll also view all the project videos and discuss them on Canvas. Then our guest speaker, Sam Clarke, will zoom in on some of the intricacies involved in the discussions of modularity and cognitive penetration. After this we'll have a peer review session: you'll provide feedback on two of your peers' final paper drafts and they'll do the same for you. We'll end with one last discussion of what we have learned and what new questions have arisen.

12/5 (26) Final Paper Writing Workshop, **PhilSkills: How to Take Your Philosophy Paper to the Next Level**

- **Required:** Bring a copy of your final paper Draft 1

*Final Paper Peer Reviews Due 12/7 11:59 PM
(NOTE! Submissions not accepted after 12/11 11:59 PM)*

12/7 (27) Class Visit to the Penn Museum (?)

- **Required:** Make a discussion board post about your visit (Instructions on Canvas)

12/12 (28) Final Paper Peer Reviews in Class

- **Required:** Bring copies of your final paper draft and your reviews

*Final Paper Draft 2 Due 12/15 11:59 PM
(Fall Term ends December 22, Submissions not accepted after 12/22 11:59 PM)*

