

Peter Myrdal (main instructor)  
[peter.myrdal@oulu.fi](mailto:peter.myrdal@oulu.fi)

Fall 2024  
September 10–October 16

Vili Lähteenmäki (co-instructor)  
[vili.lahteenmaki@oulu.fi](mailto:vili.lahteenmaki@oulu.fi)

## APPEARANCE AND REALITY: THE PHILOSOPHY OF PERCEPTION

Tuesdays 14-16 (Lo130)  
Wednesdays 14-16 (SÄ111)

A question of fundamental theoretical as well as practical importance concerns the difference between appearance and reality—between the way things appear to be and the way they really are. This class will explore one primitive form of this issue: the difference between the way the world appears to us in sense perception and the way science tells us what the world is like. We will try to get clearer about this issue by exploring questions such as: What is the nature of the perception relation? What are the objects of perception? Is sense perception our basic source of knowledge of the world?

We will address these questions through a study of a variety of texts. We begin by considering the way the modern version of the issue is formulated by early modern thinkers such as Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley. We then go onto consider the way it is addressed in contemporary thought (from the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to present-day).

### AIMS

- (1) Reach deeper understanding of central issues in the philosophy of perception.
- (2) Develop your general skills to
  - read philosophical texts
  - analyze arguments and problems
  - engage in critical reflection both in discussion and writing

### READINGS

Each week (except the last) there will be **required readings** from one or two authors: we'll start with early modern thinkers René Descartes (1596–1650), John Locke (1632–1704), and George Berkeley (1685–1753), then proceed to 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> philosophy: from Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) we'll move onto contributions by contemporary philosophers Tyler Burge, Helen Steward, and John Campbell. This is just a small selection from a wide and diverse field. The choice of texts is guided by the thought that these authors help to bring out the continued—direct or indirect—importance of a set of problems about perception and the mind's relation to the world, which emerges in early modern discussions. The readings offer different approaches to these problems. (The list of readings may be revised as we go along.)

In addition to the required readings, we've indicated some background readings from William Fish's *Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Routledge, 2021. These are **not required**, but may help you to get a sense of the wider debate and we may occasionally refer to some useful section in Fish as we discuss the required readings.

All the readings will be made available on the course page in Moodle.

## REQUIREMENTS

The language of instruction is English, and the class is thus an opportunity for you to practice speaking and writing academic English.

The class requires **active participation**:

- We will have an **in-class discussion** in smaller groups of the week's readings **on Tuesdays**. The purpose of these discussions is for us to reach a better understanding of the material and issues it raises. This will also help you to develop the above-mentioned general skills.
- In connection with these discussions, you will submit **two short assignments**, which are meant to help you to work through the readings:

(1) To prepare for the discussion, we will ask you to **formulate a question each week about that week's readings**. Your question should be submitted through moodle. You will then have access to each other's questions, which will help you to orient the discussion.

Your questions are **due on Tuesdays at 12:00**.

(2) To help you to benefit from the in-class discussions, we will further ask you to write a **short follow-up reaction** on the material discussed. You may for example return to your initial question and try to answer it, or you may raise a new question that has occurred to you in the course of the week. You should:

- (a) state the question
- (b) say briefly what you think the author's (or authors') answer would be
- (c) offer your own brief comment/reflection on that answer: is there still something you don't understand or find problematic? Can you still think of some objection to what the author says? If you find things to be completely clear to yourself—a rare thing in philosophy!—think about what someone else could object and say why that objection is not a problem, according to you.

This assignment is **due on Fridays at 16:00**.

**Length:** max **250 words** (but shorter is fine).

- These weekly assignments prepare you for the **final assignment: a short critical reflection paper**. This paper will be an expanded version of the weekly assignments and is intended to help you to take stock and reflect on what we

have done in the course. The last week (Tuesday October 15) there will be no new readings. Instead, you should try to formulate the issue or question that you will want to focus on in your final paper. The specific details (including due date) will be determined later on.

### GRADING

- In order to pass the class you must fulfil all the above requirements, including participating in in-class discussions.
- Your weekly reaction assignments count towards 50% of your final grade, and the final paper 50%. For each weekly reaction assignment you can get a maximum of 5 points (4 assignments = maximum 20 points). You can get a maximum of 20 points on the final paper.
- Active participation in class discussions will be taken into account in grading your final paper.
- Grading scale:

20–23 points: 1  
24–27 points: 2  
28–31 points: 3  
32–35 points: 4  
36–40 points: 5

### SCHEDULE (tentative)

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

**September 10:** Overview

**September 11:** Background

*Readings* extracts from Descartes

#### **Week 2: The (Early) Modern Problem of Perception**

**September 17:** Locke

*Readings* *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.1 §§-1-9, 24-25; II.2 (ideas); II.8 (primary/secondary qualities); II.23 (inverted spectrum)

**September 18:** Locke (continued)

#### **Week 3: Berkeley and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Sense-Data Theory**

**September 24:** Berkeley and Russell

*Readings (required)* Berkeley: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Part 1 §1-24; Russell: *The Problems of Philosophy* chap. 1-2

**Background reading (non-required):** Fish, chap. 2.

**September 25:** Berkeley and Russell (continued)

## **Week 4: Perception as Representational**

### **October 1: Representationalism**

**Readings** Burge: "Perception: Where the Mind Begins"; Steward: "Minds and Objects"

**Background reading (non-required):** Fish, chap. 3.

### **October 2: Representationalism (continued)**

## **Week 5: Perception as Relational**

### **October 8: The Relational View**

**Readings** Campbell *Berkeley's Puzzle* chap. 1–2.

**Background reading (non-required):** Fish, chap. 5.

### **October 9: The Relational View (continued)**

## **Week 6: Taking Stock**

### **October 15: Questions for critical reflection assignment + recap**

### **October 16: Recap (continued)**