

# The Perceptions Of The Human Consciousness And Layers Of The Imagination

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## Structures of Consciousness and Levels of Imagination

This installation examines *how* people experience the world through various structures of perception. Even though we experience things all the time, it remains a mystery as to how perception works on the most empirical level.

Here, I chose to abstract a pile of fruit in three different ways to physically represent the planes of perception and distortion. While fruit exists as a commonly identified and universally known object, it is practically impossible to divorce fruit from various meanings we have bestowed upon it. It has a connection to humanity and fruit has been symbolically utilized throughout art history. Cézanne explains it best: “With an apple I will astonish Paris.” He recognizes that fruit, and the classic still life of the fruit bowl, has been used to tell visual stories for ages. My collection of fruit represents a simple, recognizable existence.

Three planes of experience are represented in this installation. The work is meant to be experienced moving around the installation counter clockwise, so as to see all the levels in order of most real to most abstract. The first plane is represented by the pile of fruit itself and exemplifies the idea of “a thing-in-itself.” It is simply a set of objects that exist outside of the human mind. The second plane represents human interpretation of fruit. It captures the phenomenon of what it means to see and understand an object. I made a soft ground print because the process is complex, but outcome is simple. I feel as if the printmaking process parallels the way we see things. The third plane is one of pure imagination. Humans have left the “reality of object” to abstraction. The oil painting is made to be exaggerated with garish colors to indicate that it is what has been picked up by the brain.

This sculptural installation, in the end, is simply a physical reflection of how I understand perception to work in the mind.

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Throughout all of human history, there are sets of questions that come through to us, on an almost universal scale<sup>1</sup>, and go on to build up philosophy itself. These questions, considered “The Great Ambiguities”<sup>2</sup>, make up the heart of Philosophical studies. The feeble attempts at answers for these are the shifting and unstable sands upon which philosophers choose to build their houses. Philosophical ideas, and thusly the Great Ambiguities, permeate every possible part of knowledge and society--regardless of the idea that it, and its relevance, stay locked up in some Ivory Tower. Philosophy is integral to humanity and the human experience, whether we want it in such a position or not. To build up philosophical thought is to build up human thought, and try to understand ourselves.

The first of these ambiguities deals with the problem of reality, truth, and actuality[1]: What is Truth? It’s a fair question, even if it invites a slew of confusing arguments and headache--and one that’s been asked for the better part of human history. The first recorded<sup>3</sup> man to open a discussion on the nature of reality was the Ionian Greek philosopher Thales, born in Miletus, circa 636 B.C.E..

“Things appear to be ever-changing, but is there something about them that does not change?” --Thales

Thales’ questioning exposes a flaw in popular human perceptions of reality: we claim there to some sort of stable, everlasting truth (or we want for such a thing), and yet still live in a world which is anything but. This questioning of reality and Truth<sup>4</sup> is integral to examining how the perception functions. Is there a reality that does not change, despite the ever-changing appearances and natures of things we encounter? And, is such a reality one thing or various things?]<sup>5 6</sup>

Defining ourselves, and asking specifically, “What is Man?<sup>7</sup>”, has always been a pressing issue in humanity’s mind. Whether that be on a personal level (What kind of person am I?) or something much more cosmic (Who are humans as a species?), it’s quite impossible to say that the solutions haven’t been laboured over. Plato, who is often considered the most pivotal figure in the development of philosophy, especially the western sense<sup>8</sup>, was the first to record his (very physical) definition. Where others would go on to examine the mind, or wants, or character of Man, Plato began the discussion with terms fit for an animal.

“Man is an upright, featherless biped.” --Plato (c. 429 – 347 B.C.E.)

In response to his ideas, Diogenes of Sinope (c. 412 -- 323 B.C.E) brought out a chicken that he had plucked at Plato’s next lecture, and declared it man; the definition was shifted after this encounter.

“Man is an upright, featherless biped with broad, flat nails.” --Plato

“...[M]an is...a political animal... ] --Aristotle<sup>9</sup> (384 – 322 B.C.E.)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Greg and Alex’s class

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-3-most-essential-philosophical-questions> (Jeremy Arnold, Philosophy Department, University of Woolamalo)

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, there were people before this, but the history is lost, inaccessible, or unconfirmable at this point.

<sup>4</sup> Capital T Truth

<sup>5</sup> <https://roangelo.net/logwitt/first-question-philosophy.html#the-philosopher-Thales> (Unknown)

<sup>6</sup> <https://roangelo.net/logwitt/first-question-philosophy.html> (Unknown)

<sup>7</sup> Man is to refer to Humans, as a species, for this paper, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>8</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato/>

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle’s *Politics* ; <http://files.libertyfund.org/pll/quotes/164.html>

“Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman<sup>11</sup>, a rope over an abyss...”  
--Nietzsche (1844 – 1900 C.E.)<sup>12</sup>

“Man is a historical idea and not a natural kind...” --Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961 B.C.)<sup>13</sup>

“Man is nothing else than his plan, it exists only insofar as it is realized, so it is nothing but the whole” – Sartre (1905 – 15 April 1980 C.E.)<sup>14</sup>

“Humanity is a discontinuous series of free men permanently isolate their subjectivity.” -  
-Simone de Beauvoir<sup>15</sup> (1908 – 1986 C.E.)<sup>16</sup>

“Man is a reed, the weakest of nature, but it is a thinking reed. It is not necessary that the entire universe arm itself to crush: a vapor, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But when the universe to crush him, man would still be nobler than what kills him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage that the universe has over him The universe knows nothing “ --Pascal

“Man is a creature of the distant...” --Heidegger (1889 – 1976 C.E.)<sup>17</sup>

“What kinds of philosophic questions did Miss Rand and all the others I mentioned have to answer in order to define their view of Man? Is Man a rational being, and if so, what does this mean? What is reason? Is man an autonomous entity, who functions and survives as an individual, or does his survival depend on erasing his individuality and merging into a group? Is man an integrated being of mind and body, or is there a clash, a dichotomy between these two elements? Does man possess any irrational elements--by his nature, now I mean--such as for instance mystic insight, or inexplicable instincts, or an indefinable --quote, creative spark, or a supernatural conscience? And if the answer is, there are no inherent anti rational elements, the what about emotions? Is man a puppet, shaped, moved, defeated by forces beyond his control by god or society, or his genes, etc. Or is he the shaper and master of his own destiny? Is philosophy a luxury, or is it a necessity to man by his nature, and if so, what is it necessary for?” --Leonard Peikoff (1933 -- Present)<sup>18 19</sup>

This third question is perhaps the most expansive one of the bunch, by virtue of the fact that it ties everything together: What is the connection between Man and Truth? In a way, this question is the one to make the other two more relevant to the world, and to each other. What use is Truth to Man, if he cannot experience it? Why discover what Man is, if all reality is still a question up in the air? Man’s responsibility, relation, and association with truth is the greatest wonder, as it makes up almost the entirety of empirical human existence. We, as humans,

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<sup>10</sup> That these undisputed dates (the first half of the Olympiad year 384/383 BC, and in 322 shortly before the death of Demosthenes) are correct was shown already by August Boeckh (*Kleine Schriften* VI 195); for further discussion, see Felix Jacoby on *FGrHist* 244 F 38. Ingemar Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition*, Göteborg, 1957, p. 253.

<sup>11</sup> Übermensch

<sup>12</sup> "Friedrich Nietzsche," by Dale Wilkerson, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzch/><sup>[permanent dead link]</sup>. 14 October 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Baldwin in Introduction to Merleau-Ponty's *The World of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2008): 2.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.histoiredumonde.net/Jean-Paul-Sartre.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.the-philosophy.com/man-philosophy> (Several)

<sup>16</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/beauvoir/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.iep.utm.edu/heidegge/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.peikoff.com>

<sup>19</sup> Lecture by Leonard Peikoff ; <https://campus.aynrand.org/campus/globals/transcripts/what-is-man-philosophy-and-human-nature>

constantly battle with deciding what to do with ourselves, and the world around us, and realising that we have our own rules of perception and reality. It's this question that I've chosen to focus on, mainly, in my research.

For this paper, I've chosen to focus mainly on the third of Philosophy's most essential questions (though all will be addressed, by virtue of how expansive they are), and explore the relationship and inherent connection that humans have to the world's realities; try to answer a small part of how Truth affects Man, as it were. Over the course of my research, I found myself most enamoured with the more physical and literal answers to questions, as I wasn't very exposed to this side of psychological thought. In conversations that I go through, the emphasis is always on What; What do we see? What is real? What is experience? What is normal? The question was always on what (which is an immensely interesting subject in its own right), but never on How. How do we perceive? I was drawn more to the specific limitations and abilities the structures of humanity's consciousness awarded us, as well as the processes that allow us to even have a responsibility and connection to reality. How do we, as humans, experience the world around us in the most direct sense? How do we (Man) shape reality (Truth)? In what ways do we distort reality, both purposefully and accidentally? How deep do distortion and existence go? What processes and structures allow us to experience what we do, and how do our processes and structures distort the truth around us?

In dealing with experiences, it is impossible to not come across ideas of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Epistemology. These disciplines, while being very different in their individual focuses, are undeniably connected to each other.

Phenomenology (from Greek *phainómenon*, "That which appears" and *lógos*, "Study") is specifically the philosophical study of the structures of consciousness.<sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> This style of thought<sup>22</sup> attempts to explain the structures of the human consciousness and its related phenomena, via analysis of human behaviour, thought, and self reflection. It asserts that the central structure of an experience is its intentionality<sup>23</sup> directed towards something, as it is of or about some object. Intentionality (sometimes described as "Aboutness") (from Latin *intendere* "Directed towards some goal or thing") is the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties, and states of affairs;<sup>24</sup> it is the idea that the consciousness must be consciousness of something, and is intentionally engaging in phenomena. In its most basic form, phenomenology attempts objectively study topics usually consider subjective. The Consciousness and the content of conscious experiences such as judgements, perceptions, and emotions are all main focuses of study. Although phenomenology intends to be scientific, it does not attempt to study the consciousness from the perspective of clinical psychology or even neurology. Instead, it tries, through systematic reflection, to determine the essential properties and structures of experience.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, phenomenologists gather *capta*<sup>26</sup> over traditional

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<sup>20</sup> Dan Zahavi (2003), *Husserl's Phenomenology*, Stanford: Stanford University Press

<sup>21</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.crossingdialogues.com/Ms-A14-07.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Intentionality (Sometimes described as "Aboutness"): (Latin *intendere* "Directed towards some goal or thing".) The power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties, and states of affairs.

<sup>24</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intentionality/>

<sup>25</sup> Menon, Sangeetha; Anindya Sinha; B.V. Sreekantan (2014). *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Consciousness and the Self*. New Youk, Dordrecht, London: Springer. p. 172. ISBN 978-81-322-1586-8. Retrieved 17 December 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Conscious Experience

data. In contrast to the Cartesian method of analysis, which sees the world as objects, sets of objects, and objects acting and reacting upon one another, phenomenology regards everything as a phenomena, processed through the human mind. Phenomenology seeks to answer questions regarding processes. How do we perceive? What is perception? How is the consciousness structured? What is the genesis of meaning in all of our streams of experience? What is the consciousness? How are objects constituted, in both the real world and the transcendental consciousness<sup>27</sup>

Ontology (from Greek *ōnt*, “Being” and *lógos*, “Study”) is the philosophical study of being, becoming, existence, and reality.<sup>28 29</sup> Traditionally considered a branch of metaphysics, it deals with questions of existence, and relationships within existence itself. Ontology focuses on questioning the actual world around us, and how we define it. Simply, it is the the examination of what is meant, in context, by the word 'thing'. It seeks to answer questions questioning reality itself. What is existence? What things Exist? What categories do they belong to? Is there a such thing as objective reality? What does “to be” mean?

Epistemology (from Greek *epistēmē*, “Knowledge” and *lógos*, “Study”) is the study of knowledge, justification, and the rationality of belief.<sup>30 31</sup> It Deals with the theory of knowledge, and what and how humans know to be true/real. Most of the debate regarding epistemology centres around the philosophical analysis of the nature of knowledge, and how it relates to concepts like truth, belief, and justification; the idea and inherent problems that come about when skepticism is introduced; the sources and scope of knowledge and justified beliefs; and the criteria for knowledge and justification.<sup>32</sup> Epistemology asks us to examine our Truths and realities, and insists upon questioning that. What is Knowledge? What is truth? Do we really know what we think we know? How can knowledge be made more reliable? What makes justified beliefs justified? What does it mean to say that we know something?<sup>33</sup> How do we know what we know that we know?<sup>34</sup>

Over the course of this research, I was introduced to the idea that human perception had layers, or planes, most often referred to as the Imagination. Each layer of the Imagination<sup>35</sup> that we, as humans, possess further adds to and shapes the interpretation that we have of the world around us, as well as how the consciousness is structured.

Perhaps the most direct attempt to decipher the Imagination was Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s, in *Biographia Literaria*<sup>36</sup>. Coleridge, active in the 19th century (21 October 1772 -- 25 July 1834), was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher, and theologian. He was a founder of England’s romantic movement, and a member of the Lake Poets. His most major work was *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817). In the end, the majority of his writing ended up being quite indiscernible and barely structured; it is

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<sup>27</sup> Transcendental Consciousness = Plane of Transcendental Idealism By Kant

<sup>28</sup> <http://philosophyterms.com/ontology/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ontology>

<sup>30</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://philosophyterms.com/epistemology/>

<sup>32</sup> Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 3. Macmillan.

<sup>33</sup> [http://www2.phy.ilstu.edu/pte/publications/scientific\\_epistemology.pdf](http://www2.phy.ilstu.edu/pte/publications/scientific_epistemology.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.ethicsdefined.org/what-is-ethics/the-epistemology-of-ethics/>

<sup>35</sup> Not imagination in the popular sense, but rather as something that is not directly seen/is interpreted by our brains

<sup>36</sup> Specifically, *Biographia Literaria XIII*

meditative as opposed to linear. Coleridge's definitions (which make up the majority of *Biographia Literaria XIII*), as Robert D. Hume asserts in *Kant and Coleridge on Imagination*<sup>37</sup>, Coleridge's definitions are allegedly the summation of the elaborate analysis of the mind which he has been advised (that is, advised himself) not to print. By themselves they have no clear meaning. But they do provide us with some significant hints about what Coleridge was trying to do." Unfortunately, as W.J. Bate says<sup>38</sup> these definitions, "[Are] neither useful nor lucid, and elaborate explanations of them are a waste of time."<sup>39</sup>

Thankfully, there are others who chose to explore the topic, however fleetingly. The most notable of which is, of course, Kant. As the father of modern philosophy, he is never to be considered a dry well--especially in this sense. In fact, though he doesn't use the exact words, he plays a pivotal role in developing the ideas of the Imagination, and multiple planes of perception, appearance, and experience. In addition, the aforementioned Robert D. Hume is a scholar who sought to decipher the ideas of Imagination by using Kant and Coleridge both to fill in the gaps in explanation that the other left, as it were. The planes of the consciousness are never lost, even if they get retold in interpreted language.

While completing my work, I ended up developing my own explanations for the different planes of the Imagination--obviously, drawing from my sources' thoughts. Specifically, I found that Kant (and, by virtue of being he who introduced me, Robert D. Hume) was the most influential to my frame of thought and understanding.

The most simple plane of experience (and thusly, Imagination) is that which embodies Kant's concept of the Thing-In-Itself.<sup>40</sup> Described as, "...[T]he most obvious problem — and certainly one of the earliest — that Kant faces..." by Salomon Maimon,<sup>41</sup> the idea simply states that Things-In-Themselves would be objects as they are independent of observation. In this context, Things-In-Themselves are only objects that are not being viewed through the lens of human interaction; when that they are studied in the way they appear to us (as phenomena), the perception falls under the second plane.

Speaking of, the second plane is rooted in another one of Kant's notable ideas: the doctrine of Transcendental Ideology<sup>42</sup>. Kant maintains that the way humans experience things is just as they appear to us--as phenomena. This implies that our experience of our surroundings both is and requires a fundamentally subject-based component, rather than being an activity that directly (and therefore without any obvious connection) comprehends the things as they are in themselves. The structure of the human consciousness, and the truth of us experiencing and processing everything as phenomena, sets the stage for a second plane of perception, outside the world outside humans. The second plane is one where most philosophical ideas are built upon, most relevantly Transcendental Constitutive Phenomenology.<sup>43</sup> This is quite simply, because it deals most closely with what humans actually receive in terms of natural stimuli; human philosophers answer questions borne from the most human plane of existence.

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<sup>37</sup> *Kant and Coleridge on the Imagination*, Page 6

<sup>38</sup> Robert D. Hume's "Kant And Coleridge On The Imagination"

<sup>39</sup> This is ripped from Hume's essay, but Bate said it so I don't know who to credit

<sup>40</sup> German: *Ding an Sich*

<sup>41</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/maimon/>

<sup>42</sup> First described in the *Critique Of Pure Reason*

<sup>43</sup> A branch of Phenomenological Study

Beyond that, there lies the plane on the absolute other side of the Real--Imaginative spectrum: I don't have a word for it. Robert D. Hume puts it best in his interpretation<sup>44</sup> of how Kant describes Imagination in *The Third Critique*.<sup>45</sup> "We can make some generalisations about Imagination as Kant usually seems to conceive it in the *Third Critique*...[I]t works by apprehending individual wholes. (In contrast, the Understanding<sup>46</sup> works by abstracting and clarifying.) Imagination is not itself a comparative or argumentative faculty. If it is occupied with one view (or intuition) and another comes to it, the two merge; they do not remain distinct." This explanation can be further interpreted (and I did further interpret it) to mean something very simple. The plane of pure imagination takes the remembered stimuli we gather from more direct forms of perception, and distorts them to the point where they can no longer be considered their previous incarnation. In addition, it invents objects of (even more) questionable reality by smashing gathered phenomena into pieces, and rebuilding it to an impossible standard. This plane, in essence, is the only one wherein the human consciousness is supplying the majority of the phenomena it perceives, and distorting it as such.

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<sup>44</sup> *Kant and Coleridge on The Imagination*,

<sup>45</sup> *The Third Critique*

<sup>46</sup> A major point in *Third*

