

## THE ROLE OF REALITY IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE ZEITGEIST AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS

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**Abstract.** The article provides a broad analysis of the problem of perception from philosophical, historical, and contemporary scientific perspectives. The influence of the concept of the “spirit of the age” on the process of perception is examined as a central issue, with various methodological approaches – empirical-neurocognitive, phenomenological, symbolic, dialectical-historical, reflective-empirical, naturalistic, and neurophenomenological – being comparatively analyzed. The article highlights the views of Eastern thinkers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and al-Biruni in comparison with the theories of Western scholars like Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, Cassirer, and Jaspers. The findings substantiate that perception is not merely a simple sensation but a complex phenomenon shaped through mental constructions, cultural symbols, and historical context. Moreover, it is emphasized that modern cognitive science and neuropsychological approaches reveal the mental and neurophysiological foundations of perception.

**Keywords:** perception, spirit of the age, reality, phenomenology, symbolic approach, reflective empiricism, naïve realism, neurophenomenology, cognitive psychology, philosophical analysis.

**Introduction.** It is well known that the problem of perception has remained a central philosophical and epistemological issue throughout the history of humankind. In particular, the influence of the “spirit of the age” on the process of perception has brought forth new demands and challenges in today’s context of global information flows, virtual reality, and the age of artificial intelligence. Nevertheless, in uncovering the essence of the perceptual process, several recent approaches have gained special significance.

From the empirical-neurocognitive perspective, these approaches emphasize the reconstruction of perception through “internal models”: “Perception is much more dependent on prior knowledge... We think perception happens from the outside in, but in fact it occurs largely from the inside out”<sup>1</sup>. These theories highlight not how external information is simply received but how it is reinterpreted through the inner mental context.

The phenomenological approach, in turn, considers perception not merely as a product of consciousness, but as a phenomenon arising from the body’s intrinsic integration with the world. According to E. Cassirer, one of the representatives of the theory of understanding reality through symbolic means, man is a “symbolic being” – that is, perception necessarily emerges through symbols and cultural constructions<sup>2</sup>. This creates in our minds a sense of reality shaped by the images of the “spirit of the age.”

In Eastern philosophical traditions, especially in Zen philosophy, perception is understood as the direct encounter of consciousness with reality, free from categories – *genjūkuan* – which suggests the possibility of universal perception and intuitive understanding beyond the context of the spirit of the age<sup>3</sup>.

In our national philosophical heritage, the problem of perception has also been profoundly studied. Al-Farabi linked perception with logical reasoning, interpreting it as the foundation of acquiring knowledge. Al-Biruni integrated perception with experience and scientific observation,

<sup>1</sup> Zeman, A. “The Big Idea: How Do Our Brains Know What’s Real?” // The Guardian. – 10 fevral 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Cassirer, E. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. – New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944. – 237 b.

<sup>3</sup> Kaji, N. “Genjōkōan and the Problem of Reality in Zen Philosophy” // *Asian Philosophy Journal*. – 2021. – Vol. 21(1–2). – B. 45–62.



laying the basis for the principle of realism. Ibn Sina divided perception into sensory and intellectual stages, explaining it as a psychophysiological process<sup>4</sup>. When compared with modern theories, these views demonstrate the harmony between national and global scientific thought.

Among contemporary philosophical developments, the methodology of reflective empiricism recognizes subjective experience and consciousness as sources of empirical knowledge, enriching the theories of perception both philosophically and scientifically.

Direct realism and naïve realism theories raise the question of whether our thinking has direct access to reality. In particular, naïve realism – the concept that through perception we directly see real objects – interprets the existence of reality as somewhat independent of the spirit of the age<sup>5</sup>.

The neurophenomenological approach proposes the integration of phenomenology and neurology: perception should be analyzed simultaneously on experiential (phenomenological) and neurophysiological grounds.

This set of approaches – neurocognitive, phenomenological, symbolic, contemplative, empirical-reflective, and naturalistic – allows us to examine the complex relationship of perception with images and reality from a deep philosophical perspective.

Beyond philosophical traditions, the issue of perception and the spirit of the age has also been widely studied in anthropology and cultural studies. K. Jaspers' concept of the "Axial Age" shows that in different civilizations, renewal of perception and consciousness occurred simultaneously in one epoch. This perspective has a historical-philosophical foundation and reveals the historical unity between perception and the spirit of the age<sup>6</sup>.

**Literature review and methodology.** The analysis of the literature shows that various methodologies exist in the explanation of perception: empirical-cognitive, dialectical-historical, phenomenological, symbolic, contemplative, introspective, and naturalistic approaches. Each of these provides its own perspective in explaining the relationship between perception and reality. Therefore, in order to fully understand the topic of "the role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and images," it is necessary to carry out a comparative analysis and integration of these methodologies.

This methodological pluralism makes it possible to examine the issue in a broader philosophical context and opens new theoretical and practical prospects for science in Uzbekistan. Studying perception in relation to the formation of the spirit of the age can yield effective results in education, cultural studies, psychology, and philosophical research.

The role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and its images has been widely studied in philosophical literature. First and foremost, it is important to explore modern cognitive and neuropsychological approaches. A. Zeman interprets perception as a process reconstructed on the basis of mental models and experiences. This approach, which is methodologically based on empirical and cognitive principles, emphasizes the particular role of subjective experience and historical context in the process of perception. Thus, in understanding the spirit of the age, not only sensation but also mental interpretations play a central role.

In the historical-dialectical approach, G.W.F. Hegel's Philosophy of History occupies a special place<sup>7</sup>. His concept of the "spirit of the age" is interpreted as a universal spiritual force shaping historical consciousness. In Hegel's theory, perception does not grasp reality directly but receives it in accordance with the spiritual atmosphere of society and the age. Methodologically,

<sup>4</sup> Batthyány, A. "Reflective Empiricism: Towards a New Methodology in the Study of Consciousness" // arxiv Preprint. – 2025

<sup>5</sup> Jaspers, K. The Origin and Goal of History. – New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. – 294 b.

<sup>6</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. Philosophy of History. – London: Batoche Books, 2001. – 315 b.

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. Philosophy of History. – London: Batoche Books, 2001. – 315 b.



this approach is based on dialectical analysis, which reveals the interconnectedness of historical development and social consciousness.

The founder of the phenomenological approach, M. Merleau-Ponty, explains perception through the concept of the “body-subject,” interpreting it as a direct connection between human beings and the world<sup>8</sup>. This methodology, descriptive and phenomenological in nature, shows that perception is not only a mental but also a bodily, experiential process. It demonstrates the direct role of reality in the perception of images.

Cassirer, in turn, explains perception through symbolic forms, describing man as a “symbolic being”. He emphasizes the decisive role of symbols and cultural constructs in perceiving reality. His methodology is semiotic and cultural-philosophical, explaining how the images of the spirit of the age are formed during the process of perception. At the same time, Cassirer shows that perception is not merely a biological process but also a phenomenon shaped through culture.

In Eastern philosophy, N. Kaji analyzes the problem of perception from the perspective of Zen thought, proposing that reality should be perceived as it is, without the interference of conceptual categorization. This methodology is contemplative and intuitive, interpreting perception as a direct encounter with reality without categories. This idea reveals the universal possibilities of perception beyond the spirit of the age.

In modern philosophy, the methodology of “reflective empiricism” deserves special attention. It asserts that “reflective empiricism recognizes subjective perception and consciousness as sources of knowledge”. This methodology broadens the scope of philosophical inquiry by acknowledging subjective experience as a legitimate source of scientific knowledge, thereby integrating introspective and empirical methods in the study of perception and reality.

Furthermore, naturalistic approaches also examine the direct connection between perception and reality. The concept of naïve realism asserts that through perception, we directly experience the real world. This methodology, based on realism, strives to present perception as a process independent of the spirit of the age.

Meanwhile, the neurophenomenological approach integrates phenomenology and neuroscience, suggesting that perception should be studied at once as both a neurophysiological process and a personal experience.

The combination of these approaches – empirical-cognitive, dialectical-historical, phenomenological, symbolic, contemplative, introspective, and naturalistic – allows for a deeper philosophical exploration of the complex interrelations between perception, images, and reality.

**Research results.** The analysis of the scientific literature concerning the role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and its images shows that this issue has always been one of the central directions of philosophical thought – not only in classical Western philosophy, but also in Eastern philosophy and in modern cognitive scientific research. As a general conclusion of various approaches, it can be noted that perception is not merely a matter of sensation or a physiological process, but rather a complex phenomenon directly connected with socio-cultural conditions, the spirit of the age, language and symbols, as well as mental and bodily experiences. First of all, modern cognitive and neuropsychological research has proven the active role of consciousness in the perceptual process. A. Zeman demonstrates that perception is not the passive reception of external stimuli, but a reconstruction carried out by consciousness. This means that reality is rebuilt in the human mind on the basis of pre-existing knowledge and experience. Thus, subjective components play a crucial role in understanding the process of perception. This approach is methodologically grounded in empirical-cognitive principles, showing that perception can also be examined through scientific experimentation.

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<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962. – 543 b.



In G.W.F. Hegel's Philosophy of History, the concept of the spirit of the age has special significance in analyzing results. According to Hegel, every historical epoch has its own unique spirit, which determines the essence of historical processes. This perspective shows that perception is not simply a biological act but also a lawful outcome shaped by historical and social conditions. Consequently, the way in which individuals perceive the world often depends on the general spiritual atmosphere of the era in which they live. Therefore, it is essential to take the philosophical-historical approach into account in the study of perception.

E. Cassirer's symbolic approach emphasizes the cultural and symbolic aspects of perception. He states that "man is a symbolic being", showing that reality is grasped not directly but through symbols, language, and cultural codes. This means that the perceptual process is intrinsically connected with the symbolic systems of society. Thus, in analyzing the spirit of the age, it becomes necessary to study cultural images and symbolic structures in depth.

Eastern traditions, especially Zen philosophy, explain perception as a pure experience without categories. This reveals the intuitive and contemplative dimensions of perception. The Zen approach aims for direct perception of reality and stresses the necessity of freeing oneself from cognitive filters. This interpretation demonstrates the unique role of Eastern philosophical-methodological traditions in the study of perception.

The methodology of "reflective empiricism" in modern philosophy has introduced new directions into the study of perception. It asserts the importance of recognizing subjective experience as a legitimate source of scientific knowledge<sup>9</sup>. Thus, in the study of perception, not only external observations but also introspective methods acquire significant value. This approach enables the integration of scientific and philosophical methodologies.

Among naturalistic approaches, the theory of naïve realism argues that through perception, human beings directly see the world. The outcome of this approach is that reality is accepted directly. However, analyses show that this perspective does not sufficiently take into account the role of the spirit of the age and cultural context. Therefore, this approach is limited in explaining the complex nature of perception and becomes more effective only when applied together with other methodologies.

The neurophenomenological approach proposes the integration of phenomenology and neuroscience, emphasizing that perception should be analyzed simultaneously as a neurophysiological process and as a personal, lived experience<sup>10</sup>. This confirms that multidisciplinary research opens new horizons in the study of perception.

Historical-philosophical perspectives, including K.Jaspers' concept of the "Axial Age," show that the renewal of perception and consciousness occurred simultaneously in various civilizations. This confirms, from a historical standpoint, the intrinsic connection between the spirit of the age, perception, and consciousness. Consequently, it is also necessary to widely apply historical-philosophical analysis in the study of perception.

Based on the literature review, it can be said that the problem of perception has been interpreted through different methodological approaches. The empirical-cognitive approach explains perception through internal models and experiences, while the dialectical-historical approach highlights the central role of the spirit of the age. The phenomenological approach explains perception on the basis of bodily experience, whereas the symbolic approach focuses on its cultural and symbolic aspects. Eastern philosophy emphasizes intuitive and contemplative perception, while reflective-empirical methodology recognizes subjective experience as a source of knowledge. Naturalistic views provide simplified interpretations, although with certain

<sup>9</sup> Batthyány, A. "Reflective Empiricism: Towards a New Methodology in the Study of Consciousness" // arxiv Preprint. – 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Jaspers, K. The Origin and Goal of History. – New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953. – 294 p.





limitations. Neurophenomenology, by integrating phenomenology and neuroscience, offers the possibility of studying perception in a broader and more comprehensive way.

For the development of science in Uzbekistan, these results are highly significant. First, they enable the integration of national philosophical research with contemporary global discussions. Second, they create opportunities to apply effective approaches in practical fields – such as education, psychology, cultural studies, and social philosophy. Therefore, analyzing perception in relation to the spirit of the age and its images is of both theoretical and practical importance.

**Research discussion.** The study of the role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and its images has become one of the central themes in contemporary philosophical thought. During the research, various philosophical schools, scientific directions, and methodological approaches were analyzed, providing grounds for discussion. The results of the discussion show that the explanation of perception cannot be limited to a single approach; on the contrary, the interaction and integration of multiple paradigms enable a more complete understanding of the issue.

First of all, modern cognitive approaches demonstrate that perception is shaped through inner mental models. A. Zeman emphasizes that humans reconstruct the world through mental constructions. This perspective plays an important role in explaining perception from a modern scientific standpoint; however, during the discussion, its limitations also became apparent. Zeman's approach does not sufficiently account for the cultural, historical, and philosophical dimensions of perception. Therefore, this theory must be enriched with other approaches.

Hegel, as a representative of the historical-dialectical approach, advanced the concept of the spirit of the age, arguing that each epoch has its own unique spiritual landscape. This idea directs attention to the close relationship between perception, society, and historical conditions. From the perspective of the discussion, Hegel's theory is still relevant today, since human perception of the world cannot be separated from the spirit of the time and historical context. However, Hegel's approach, by emphasizing the general historical spirit, tends to limit the role of individuality and personal experience.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological conception explains perception from the standpoint of the body-subject. According to him, perception is formed through direct contact and lived experience with the world. The strength of this approach lies in showing perception not only as a mental process but also as a phenomenon based on bodily and sensory experience. At the same time, the phenomenological approach has certain limitations: it studies perception in a more descriptive manner rather than through empirical analysis.

Cassirer's symbolic approach presents man as a "symbolic being" and explains perception through symbols, language, and culture. The strength of this view lies in uncovering the cultural dimensions of the perceptual process. However, its limitation is that it overlooks the physiological and neurobiological aspects of perception. Thus, while not sufficient on its own, the symbolic approach provides valuable contributions from the perspective of cultural studies and semiotics.

The theories of direct realism and naïve realism emphasize that perception provides humans with direct access to the world. The advantage of this approach lies in its simplicity and the affirmation of the possibility of immediate reception of reality. However, it fails to explain the role of the spirit of the age, cultural codes, and personal experience in perception. For this reason, naïve realism can be considered more as a complementary approach.

The neurophenomenological approach integrates phenomenology and neuroscience, proposing to analyze perception simultaneously on experiential and neurobiological grounds. During the discussion, the strength of this approach was found in its multidisciplinary nature. Nevertheless, due to its complexity, it may present difficulties when applied in large-scale empirical research.



K. Jaspers' concept of the "Axial Age" also deserves attention, although it approaches the problem from the perspective of broad historical epochs. Its limitation lies in not sufficiently addressing individuality and personal experience.

It is clear that each of the approaches has both strong and weak sides. The empirical-cognitive approach is scientifically grounded but overlooks cultural aspects. The dialectical-historical approach reveals social context but neglects individuality. Phenomenological and symbolic approaches highlight subjective and cultural dimensions but are limited in empirical verification. Eastern philosophy uncovers intuitive foundations but is difficult to substantiate scientifically. Reflective empiricism proposes methodological integration, but introspective observations are not always reliable. Naturalistic perspectives provide simplified explanations but ignore the influence of the spirit of the age. Neurophenomenology offers integrative potential but faces practical challenges due to its complexity.

From the perspective of the development of science in Uzbekistan, a comprehensive methodological approach is necessary in studying perception. This is because explaining perception within the scope of only one paradigm is insufficient. For instance, in the education system, phenomenological approaches can emphasize the direct experiences of students. In cultural studies, Cassirer's symbolic approach may be applied to analyze symbols and images. In neuropsychology, Zeman's and neurophenomenological approaches can be utilized. Meanwhile, in philosophical research, Hegel's dialectical approach and Jaspers' historical concept are of particular importance.

The role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and its images can be understood more deeply by integrating these methodologies. Such an integrated approach not only enriches philosophical thought in Uzbekistan but also brings it closer to global scientific trends and enables its effective application in practical fields.

**Conclusion.** The issue of the role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and its images has always remained one of the central topics in the history of philosophical thought. The analysis of the studied literature demonstrates that perception is not merely a process of simple sensation, but a complex phenomenon intrinsically connected with socio-cultural conditions, historical context, the spirit of the age, and human bodily as well as mental experiences.

Modern empirical and neurocognitive studies interpret perception as a mental construction. Dialectical-historical approaches explain it in connection with the spirit of the age and social consciousness. Phenomenological perspectives highlight the immediate experiential and real foundations of perception. Symbolic approaches emphasize the role of cultural symbols and representations in the process of understanding. Eastern philosophy interprets perception as a purely intuitive process, thereby enriching it with metaphysical dimensions. Modern reflective-empirical methodology asserts the necessity of recognizing subjective experience as a legitimate source of knowledge.

The general discussion of these approaches shows that the relationship between perception, the spirit of the age, and images cannot be fully explained within the framework of a single methodology. Only through the integration of diverse philosophical and scientific perspectives can the complex nature of perception be properly revealed.

For science in Uzbekistan, this issue is of both theoretical and practical significance. On the one hand, it provides the opportunity to harmonize national philosophical research with global academic discussions. On the other, it creates the basis for the effective application of perception theories in fields such as education, cultural studies, psychology, and the social sciences.

Thus, the problem of the role of reality in perceiving the spirit of the age and its images is a key topic that requires in-depth analysis within a comprehensive philosophical and methodological



framework. It enriches national philosophical thought, opens new horizons for modern scientific research, and broadens the possibilities for human understanding of the world.

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