Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

Central to the question of how we come to know the external world, objects and their properties, are the processes through which this information is acquired, interpreted, identified, stored. The ways to account for these different aspects have varied throughout the history of philosophy. Medieval authors shared the belief in human capability to perceive the world as it is both because they believed that we share with the world the same metaphysical structures – matter and form, substance and accident – and because we are naturally endowed with the necessary cognitive powers to grasp how things are. Perception is, in the context of the dominant Aristotelian philosophy of perception, understood as a particular case of a general theory of causation. But medieval thinkers were intrigued about the cognitive mechanisms that made it possible to be aware not just of isolated qualities but of objects endowed with certain specific properties. Although scholars have dwelt into medieval accounts of these mechanisms and the powers responsible for them, the precise nature of the relation between the senses and intellect remains to be thoroughly investigated. The present project investigates the roots of this question in late medieval theories of perception, especially in the period ca. 1250-1550.

The project is led by the research hypothesis of whether the development of a unified view of the mind is associated with an active account of perception in the Augustinian tradition. In order to do this, the project investigates the relation between the senses and intellect interact in perception-related functions, how are non-veridical perceptual experiences (hallucinations, sensory illusions) explained, what is the role (if any) of imagination and the cogitative power in actual in actual perception, whether judgment of any sort occurs with perception as in the perspectivist model of visual sensations, etc. The project has two main objectives:

(1) to offer the first systematic study of late medieval theories of perception, focusing on the relation between the senses and intellect

(2) to retrace the shift in late medieval philosophy of perception that led to the (a) progressive questioning of direct realism in cognition and (b) incremental reduction of all psychological functions to the mind.

With that purpose in mind, the research focuses on four main interconnected areas of inquiry:

A) The role of reason in perceptual experience, that is to say how human perception becomes increasingly intellectualized in late medieval theories of cognition. The project investigates the hypothesis that by the late medieval period a theory of the mind emerged according to which the borders between these different functions became blurred and how existing content
and structures influence the way sensory information is acquired. This explains the puzzle in historical philosophical research of the constitution of a conception of psychological functions characterized by an all-encompassing rationality, namely the interference of higher cognitive resources at basic sensory level.

B) The nature of perceptual experience: this line of research will focus on medieval debates over the veridical versus illusory perception; this will be done in an original way, by approaching the issue from the viewpoint of the functional partition of the soul, that is to say the relation between the different capacities (powers or faculties in medieval parlance). This also includes the issue of self-awareness in the perceptual process.

C) The metaphysical issue of the compositional versus simple nature of the soul: this concerns the ontology of soul, i.e. the nature of the structures and operations of mental life that is relevant to understand what kind of entity the mind is and how it operates. It includes also the issue of the distinction between human and non-rational animals.

D) The active versus passive nature of perception: this will offer the first systematic mapp

Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far

The starting focus of the project was in the two chronological end terms: postdoc 1 (Dr. Vili Lähteenmäki) examined the debates on perception and the nature of the mind in the transition between the medieval and the early modern period, with special emphasis on the Cartesian picture of the mind and the phenomenon of consciousness. His research focused on the nature and role of the Cartesian concept of the mind against the background of the received view that conscientia is definitive of the mind, i.e. that the rationalization of all psychological functions could be explained by appealing to conscientia as that which collects both (rational) thoughts and sensations into the immaterial substance. Within the same Cartesian theme, he worked on a number of papers on the possibility of animal awareness, which examines the shift in the nature of sensation through the specific case of animal cognition. At the same time, the PI continued his research on thirteenth and early fourteenth century Augustinianism, as well as authors in the so-called second scholastic, some of which did play a formative role in regards to Descartes — thus bridging the gap between the two research endeavors. The result of this research has resulted in number of publications, some of which have been published while others are in press or under review.

The PI has continued his work on the Augustinian philosophy of perception in four main aspects: first of all, in developing a more fine-grained interpretation of this active model of perception both in Augustine and in late medieval Augustinians. With that purpose in mind, the PI has focused on the nature of causality involved in the bringing about of perceptual acts and on the nature of the content of perceptual experiences. With respect to later medieval Augustinians, he proposed a novel classificatory model for the different versions of the active theory of perception, which is forthcoming in scholarly articles and is the basis for a monograph on the topic. Second, the PI has concentrated on the nature of perceptual judgments, namely what kind of powers are involved in their production. One of the main results with respect to this aspect is the unclarity in many of the sources and their contemporary interpreters on the nature (sensory or rational) of certain faculties, as well as what constitutes the content of those acts of judgment. Of particular interest in this line of research is the so-called perspectivist tradition of geometrical optics and its association -- to be further investigated -- between this tradition and both the Augustinian and Averrhoist tradition (Blasius of Parma being a clear example). Third, the PI has investigated the question of how the compositional or unified nature of the soul figures as an argument for the rationality in perception and for the activity in perception. In this, the PI's research has combined elements from the different lines of research and also the work done by the other team members. Finally, the fourth aspect is the research done on the question of the merging of the Augustinian issue of the activity of the soul in perception and the Averrhoist debates concerning the existence of an agent sense. That investigation will continue in the second part of the project but the results presented and in the process of publication indicate that this activity doctrine became an influential perspective in very late medieval thought. To tell the story of this alternative theory has been from the start a core element of the project, with implication to the way the nature of the cognitive process
and the cognitive powers responsible for it are described.

One of these aspects has been precisely on what constitutes rationality and that has the focus of the work done for the project by PhD student (then Postdoc) Anselm Oelze, who completed his dissertation to the Faculty of Philosophy at Humboldt-Universität Berlin on Theories of Animal Rationality in the Later Middle Ages.

**Progress beyond the state of the art and expected potential impact (including the socio-economic impact and the wider societal implications of the project so far)**

The research conducted during the first half of the project allowed for the group to elaborate on the starting hypotheses and identify limitations in the existing literature. This is the case with the existing accounts of the role of reason in perceptual experience, the active nature of perception, the notion of rationality on which the human-animal is build, and the simplification in the relation between localised brain functions and cognitive operations. The work done until now, which will be lead to a number of important publications, has the potential to substantially contribute to a re-evaluation of these topics in the literature of the field.

Moreover, the emphasis during the first half of the project was to establish the project (namely, hiring the researchers, build the website, start its activities) and to achieve visibility in national and international academic communities and networks. The project has established cooperation with international institutions (e.g. Italian, Swedish, Portuguese, French research centers) as well as nationally. That is visible in the number of invited papers of team members especially the PI and the number of events we will be organizing: the II Finnish workshop in medieval philosophy with the other ERC project on medieval philosophy in Finland (November 2016, [http://blogs.helsinki.fi/rationality-in-perception/](http://blogs.helsinki.fi/rationality-in-perception/)) the Nordic Network for the History of Philosophy ([https://nhpnordic.wordpress.com](https://nhpnordic.wordpress.com)) hosted in Helsinki in 2017, the joint Conference with the Representation and Reality research group ([http://representationandreality.gu.se](http://representationandreality.gu.se)) that took place in Helsinki in June (9-11) 2017, with some of the most important scholars working on the history of philosophy; the jointly organised workshop From Thought to Perception at the University of Uppsala in April 2017.

The project has also contributed to the dynamism of the field within the university of Helsinki, via its own activities such as the permanent reading group on perception open to everybody as well as the activities of the PI, giving talks and organizing two seminars — one in the history of philosophy ([https://helsinkihistoryofphilosophy.wordpress.com](https://helsinkihistoryofphilosophy.wordpress.com)) and the other in theoretical philosophy ([http://www.helsinki.fi/teoreettinenfilosofia/tutkimus/research_seminar.html](http://www.helsinki.fi/teoreettinenfilosofia/tutkimus/research_seminar.html)). These activities are important to bring visibility to the project and to potentiate its social and academic impact.