

**Beyond Perception:
A philosophical expedition at the sensory frontier**

Office: HSS 873

Instructor: Matthew Fulkerson

email: mfulkerson@ucsd.edu

Office Hours: TBA

Class: Fri 1-3:50, HSS 7077

Course Description:

This course will cover aspects of human sensory ability that fall outside our ordinary categories of perceptual experience. These abilities connect us in interesting ways with both the external world and our own bodies, but for various reasons they fall outside our traditional ways of carving up sensory modalities and other cognitive capacities. So, what sorts of abilities do I have mind?

Try the following: bring a trusted friend with you to an empty parking lot or open field, and then place a thick burlap sack on your head and walk around for a while (while your friend keeps silent lookout). Question: After several minutes of blind walking, could you—still blind—find your way back to where you started?

Chances are that you could, and not by retracing your steps (or by smelling or hearing your friend) but by setting a direct course for the starting point. This rather amazing skill is called *dead reckoning* (or sometimes, less awesomely: *path integration*). It's an ability found throughout the animal kingdom, and one at which humans are pretty good. It's part of a more complex system of navigation that we colloquially call *the sense of direction*. As curious and intelligent people we should want to know: how do we do this? And as philosophers, we should be struck by the philosophical potential here: Is dead reckoning a sense? (wait, what's a sense?) Is it instead multisensory? (wait, what counts as multisensory?) Is there something it's like to dead reckon—does it *feel* like anything? Is this feeling representational? If so, what kind of content does it have? How are our navigational judgments justified? You get the idea.

Here's the thing: dead reckoning is just one among many extraordinary cases of human sensory ability. Possibilities for further philosophical reflection include a numerous forms of implicit perception; human echolocation; speech perception; our seemingly direct awareness of number, duration, distance, and orientation; our remarkable skills at mind reading (in the psychological sense) and empathy; synesthesia; sensory substitution; supertasting and supersmell; along with hunger, thirst, and bodily awareness. There's a lot to learn from these special forms of sensory awareness. And that's why we're going to devote a whole course to them.

Our philosophical approach will be broad, looking at these unique sensory abilities from the perspectives of philosophy of perception and the philosophy of mind, but also using the tools and methods of philosophy of psychology and neuroscience, epistemology, and metaphysics. The course is thus intended to engage students specializing in one or more of these areas, but also to provide students with a broad background in the subject matter.

Course plan:

The first 2 weeks of this course will be treated like a crash course in the philosophy of mind broadly construed (perception, psychology, neuroscience, etc.). For students with a strong background in these areas, these early weeks will function as something of a refresher course/master class on the topic. For those without such a background, these early weeks will be a chance to get up to speed with the essentials of a complex and ever-changing field of study (I recommend students without previous exposure to these topics read an introduction to the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of psychology prior to the first class.)

Required Texts: 2-3 articles per week, determined together as we go along.

Course Requirements: a presentation and a research paper.

Format: We will discuss two primary papers/chapters each week, for approximately one hour 1/4 each with a short break in between. Each paper will begin with a presentation of about 10-15 minutes, leaving the remainder of the time for open discussion.

Proposed Weekly Topic Schedule:

Week 1: Philosophy of Perception: The Basics

Week 2: Intermediate lessons in Philosophy of Psychology and Neuroscience

Week 3: The Senses (our base camp)

Week 4: Dead Reckoning (byob: bring your own burlap)

Week 5: The awareness of space (both inside and out)

Week 6: Varieties of interoception and drive states

Week 7: The awareness of duration (how long will this take?)

Week 8: Mind reading and empathy

Week 9: synaesthesia

Week 10: human echolocation, supertasting, and sensory substitution