

PHI 4930 (01)
Special Topics in Philosophy of Mind: The Mystery of Consciousness
Sat. 11:00-5:15 (GC 278A)

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Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 2-3

Course Description

Any complete explanation of the mind needs to offer an account of the “phenomenal” aspect of experience, i.e. the fact that there is something it is like to feel pains, itches, see colors, etc...

Once considered off-limits to serious scientific study, consciousness – the last great mystery – is now rapidly expanding as an area of research for students of psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience.

We have learned much about how the brain works. We know how brain damage, drugs, and other physical changes affect our experience. But consciousness itself remains deeply puzzling:

The more we learn about the brain and behavior, the more obviously difficult the problem of consciousness seems to be...our scientific and philosophical thinking [seems] to end up with some kind of impossible dualism. Whether it is spirit and matter, or mind and brain; whether it is inner and outer, or subjective and objective, we seem to end up talking about two incompatible kinds of stuff (Blackmore, pp.7-8).

We will investigate the problems and possibilities for a theory of conscious experience.

Primary Text

Susan Blackmore (2004). *Consciousness: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Further mandatory readings to be provided by the instructor.

Course Requirements

Given the intensity of our schedule, students are required to give their highest effort in maintaining attendance, participating in class discussions, and keeping up with the readings. You will need to IMMEDIATELY begin work on your presentations and essay topics. NO LATE WORK IS PERMITTED.

1. Attendance: MANDATORY & leaving early constitutes an absence
2. Discussion leadership: 20%
3. Class participation: 20%
4. Outline of research paper – due on Thursday May 20 10%
5. Take home exam – due on Saturday, June 5 20%
6. Research Paper – due on Thursday, June 10 30%

Instructions for the above:

Discussion Leadership

Each week will begin with two students leading class discussion of some assigned readings. The discussion will last about 45 minutes.

Next, a second team leads discussion on another reading for 45 minutes.

Next, a third team, same format.

Discussion leaders must submit their notes to me by the TUESDAY prior to the Saturday they have been assigned, so that I can give you feedback by Thursday. Your notes will consist of (a) questions to ask your colleagues about the assigned reading intended to draw responses and generate discussion (b) observations you have made, and thoughts you were provoked to have. You should be prepared to (i) identify and explain the thesis, or the point of the reading; explain its significance (ii) identify the main points: explain and justify the key concepts, technical terms and assumptions (iii) identify and evaluate whatever arguments are offered (iv) offer some criticism of i-iii (v) say whether it has changed your mind (or not) about anything.

You may prepare short (1-2 pages) outlines to share with the class or show on the DOCCAM. Your notes and outlines should use short quotations (with citations).

Your grade will be determined by (1) the content of your notes (2) your style, i.e. whether you made a good attempt to engage the class (3) teamwork (you need to determine amongst yourselves how to divide the labor).

Class participation

This is based on your attendance AND your contributions to class discussions – you must be prepared to respond to the discussion leaders' prompts.

Outline of Research paper

The paper outline must be in my mailbox by 2 p.m. on Thursday May 22. The outline shall consist of (1) a polished introductory paragraph (concise, coherent, relevant, grammatical) which (a) introduces your topic (subject, authors to be discussed, problems to be tackled, strategy) and (b) a THESIS STATEMENT. You may revise your introductory paragraph when it comes time to hand in your research paper. (2) a brief outline (2-3 pages) indicating (i) the arguments you

will address, including premises and conclusions (ii) the assumptions, technical concepts, and jargon which need to be explained and evaluated (iii) some possible lines of criticism or alternative views to be considered (iv) a short bibliography including (1) a target reading and (2) two or three secondary readings offering criticism of (1).

Research Paper

This should be about 10-12 pages and must take my feedback into account. You must have a bibliography. You must support your assertions with short direct quotations, appropriately cited. Number the pages.

Useful resources: <http://consc.net/mindpapers#.1>

Course Structure

There are only FIVE sessions in addition to today's introductory meeting (May 8).

Each session will make use of class time in the following way:

1. first presentation (1-2 students) – 45 min. including discussion
2. second presentation (1-2 new students; same format)
3. third presentation (1-2 students; same format)
4. 20 minute break
5. Lecture / discussion approx. 1 hour and 30 min.
6. 20 min. break
7. Video and discussion (approximately 1 hour and 30 min.)

Topics and Readings

Week 1 (May 8): Introduction/Organization: The problem

Readings:

1. Blackmore, chapter 1
2. Güzeldere, "The Many Faces of Consciousness: A field Guide," Introduction to *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, Ned Block, Owen Flanagan, Güven Güzeldere (eds.), Cambridge: The MIT Press.

In class video:

Consciousness Explained, kind of (Chalmers interview on Blogginheads, 67 min.)

Week 2 (May 15): Theories of Consciousness & the Cartesian Theatre

Readings:

Background: Blackmore, chapters 2-6

First Team: Dennett, "Time and the Observer: The where and the when of consciousness in the brain."

Second Team:

- (a) Flanagan "The robust phenomenology of the stream of consciousness"
- (b) Block "Begging the question against phenomenal consciousness"
- (c) van Gulick "Time for more alternatives"

Third Team: Baars "In the theater of consciousness: Global Workspace Theory, a rigorous scientific theory of consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4: 292-309.

In class videos:

1. Dennett (TED 22 min.), The Grand Illusion
2. Blackmore (Youtube, 56 min.)

Week 3 (May 22): The Self & The Will

Readings

Background: Blackmore, chapters 7-9

First Team: Lycan "Freedom of the will and the spontaneity of consciousness"

Second Team:

- (a) Strawson, "Against narrative"
- (b) Olson, "There is no problem of the self"

Third Team: Libet "Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 8: 529-39 and commentaries.

In class video:

Patricia Churchland on neuroethics (TSN, 113 min.)

Week 4 (May 29): Evolution & Animal Minds

Readings

Background: Blackmore, chapters 10-12

First Team: Block "On a confusion about a function of consciousness"

Second Team:

- (a) Flanagan "Conscious inessentialism and the epiphenomenalist suspicion"
- (b) Jennifer Church "Fallacies or Analyses?"
- (c) Tyler Burge "Two kinds of consciousness"
- (d) Dennett "The path not taken"

Third Team:

- (a) Gallup "Can animals empathize?" *Scientific American* 9(4): 67-76.
- (b) Povinelli "Can animals empathize? Maybe not." *Scientific American* 9(4): 67-76
- (c) "Do animals feel empathy" *Scientific American Mind* (18) 28 - 35 (2007)
<<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=do-animals-feel-empathy>>

In class video:

Peter Spindel on animal consciousness (Youtube, 40 min)

N.b. Paper drafts to be returned

Week 5 (June 5): Machine Consciousness

Readings

Background: Blackmore, chapters 13-15

First Team: Searle "Breaking the hold"

Second Team: Shoemaker "The first-person perspective"

Third Team: Dennett "The practical requirements for making a conscious robot" in *Brainchildren*, pp.151-70.

In class videos:

1. Yudkowsky & Lanier (Dreaming of an AI, Bloggingheads, 61 min.)
2. Rodney Brooks ("Robots will invade our lives," TED 19 min.)

N.B. Take home due

Week 6 (June 12): The brain; borderlands

Readings

Background: Blackmore, chapters 16-18, skim 19-24

First Team: Humphrey, N. (2000). "How to solve the mind-body problem," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7: 5-20.

Second & Third Teams: commentaries on Humphrey and his reply.

In class video

Ramachandran (Youtube, Beyond Belief 2.0, 25 min.)