

Philosophy of Consciousness: Philosophical and Empirical Approaches

Instructor: Brandon Ashby

1. Textbooks and reading materials

Required:

Block, Ned; Flanagan, Owen; & Güven Güzeldere (eds.), 1997, *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

All other required reading will be made available as PDFs on the course website.

2. What is The Philosophy of Consciousness?

Consciousness is one of the last great outstanding mysteries. Brains are made out of protons, electrons, and neutrons. So are shoes, frying pans, and rocks. So far as we can tell, there is nothing that it is like to be a shoe, a frying pan, or a rock. But there is something that it is like to be a human being. And, most (though by no means all) philosophers and scientists who work on consciousness think that the behavior of the brain, and the behavior of the brain alone, is what brings our conscious minds into existence. So, if you take the same stuff that you can use to make shoes, frying pans, and rocks out of, and arrange it just right, you get a conscious subject. But how? Why? If it turns out that consciousness is not implemented by the brain (or other physical systems), then how does it relate to the physical world? In this course, we will look at a range of philosophical and scientific efforts to answer these questions.

3. Assignments

- Micro-exams, worth 40% of your final grade.
- Essays, worth 50% of your final grade.
- Syllabus quiz, worth 2.5% of your final grade.
- Discussion forum questions, worth 7.5% of your final grade.

3.1 Micro-exams:

You will have a micro-exam every week. Micro-exams can cover any course material (lectures, readings, in-class discussions) presented in the last four weeks of the course. You will have two attempts to take each micro-exam. You will receive the highest score of your two attempts. I drop your two lowest micro-exam scores. Micro-exams will be worth 40% of your final grade. Micro-exams will be administered online via the course website. You will be able to see what questions you got wrong on a micro-exam, but you will not be told the answers to the questions.

3.2 Essays:

You will have three essays over the course of the term. Each will be 1500 words in length. You will have the option of submitting a draft of each paper before you submit it for a final grade. The essays are worth 50% of your final grade and are evenly weighted. I do not drop any essay scores. However, if you are satisfied with the grade that you receive on your first two essays, then you have the option of applying your combined score on your first two essays to your third essay. In other words, do well-enough on

your first two essays and you don't have to do the third. I do this to encourage you to work hard on your first two essays and polish them.

3.3 Syllabus quiz:

You will have a quiz on the syllabus and the structure of the course at the end of your first week of term. It is worth 2.5% of your final grade.

3.4 Discussion forum questions:

The class will be divided into two groups. You'll get your group number on the first day of class. For every reading, one of the two groups will be required to post or upvote three questions about that reading on the course website. Discussion forum questions will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. Your questions must be uploaded before 11:59PM the day before we discuss that reading in class. Your questions will be listed anonymously. Only I will be able to see your names attached to the questions. So, do not worry about asking "dumb" questions in front of the other students.

4. Course Schedule

Graded assignments are listed in red and are underlined.

Readings that are listed in footnotes are recommended but are not required.

Week 1: The Problem of Consciousness Part 1

- Textbook: Thomas Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?' pp. 519-528.
- Course website: Joseph Levine's (1983) 'The Explanatory Gap', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 64(October): 354-361.
- Course website: David Chalmers' (1995) 'Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness' in his (2010) *The Character of Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-27.
- Micro-exam 1

Week 2: Two Kinds of Consciousness?

- Textbook: Ned Block's 'On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness' pp. 375-416.
- Textbook: David Chalmers' 'Availability: The Cognitive Basis of Experience?' pp. 421-424
- Textbook: Tyler Burge's 'Two Kinds of Consciousness' pp. 427-434.
- Course website: Daniel Dennett's and Marcel Kinsborn's (1992) 'Time and the Observer: The When and Where of Consciousness in the Brain', *Behavioral Brain Sciences*, 15(2): 183-201.
- Micro-exam 2

Week 3: The Knowledge Argument Part 1

- Course website: Frank Jackson's (1982) 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32(April): 127-136.
- Textbook: David Lewis' 'What Experience Teaches' pp. 579-598.¹

¹ Recommended: Laurence Nemirow's (2007) 'So This Is What It's Like: A Defense of the Ability Hypothesis', in T. Alter and S. Walter (eds.) *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 32-51.*

- Course website: Daniel Dennett's (2005) 'What RoboMary Knows' in his *Sweat Dreams*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 103-130.
- [Micro-exam 3](#)

Week 4: The Knowledge Argument Part 2: The Phenomenal Concepts Strategy

- Textbook: Brian Loar's 'Phenomenal States', pp. 597-617.²
- Course website: Christopher Hill's (1997) 'Imaginability, Conceivability, Possibility, and The Mind-Body Problem' *Philosophical Studies*, 87(1): 61-85.
- Course website: David Chalmers' (2007) 'Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap' in T. Alter and S. Walter (eds.) *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 167-194.
- [Micro-exam 4](#)

Week 5: The Problem of Consciousness Part 2

- Textbook: Collin McGinn's 'Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?', pp. 529-542.
- Textbook: Daniel Dennett's 'Quining Qualia', pp. 619-642.
- Course website: David Lewis's 'Mad Pain and Martian Pain' in his (1983) *Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 122-129.
- Course website: David Lewis's 'Postscript to 'Mad Pain and Martian Pain'' in his (1983) *Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 130-132.
- [Micro-exam 5](#)

Week 6: The Problem of Consciousness Part 3

- Textbook: Sydney Shoemaker's 'The Inverted Color Spectrum', pp. 643-665.
- Course website: Max Velmans' (2007) 'The Co-Evolution of Matter and Consciousness', *Synthesis Philosophica*, 22(2): 273-282.
- Textbook: John Searle's 'Breaking the Hold: Silicon Brains, Conscious Robots, and Other Minds', pp. 493-502.
- [Micro-exam 6](#)

Week 7: Anti-Physicalism about Consciousness

- Course website: David Chalmers' 'The Components of Content (revised version)' in D. Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, New York: Oxford University Press, 608-633.
- Course website: David Chalmers' (2009) 'The Two-Dimensional Argument against Materialism' in his (2010) *The Character of Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 141-191.
- [First essay is due.](#)
- [Micro-exam 7](#)

² Recommended: David Papineau's (2007) 'Phenomenal and Perceptual Concepts' in T. Alter and S. Walter (eds.) *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 111-144.*

Week 8: Empirical Approaches to Consciousness Part 1

- Textbook: Francis Crick and Christof Koch's 'Towards a Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness' pp. 277-292.
- Course website: David Chalmers' 'What is a Neural Correlate of Consciousness?' in his (2010) *The Character of Consciousness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 59-90.
- Textbook: Bernard Baars' 'Contrastive Phenomenology: A Thoroughly Empirical Approach to Consciousness', pp. 187-202.
- [Micro-exam 8](#)

Week 9: Empirical Approaches to Consciousness Part 2

- Course website: Stanislas Dehaene's and Lionel Naccache's (2001) 'Toward a Cognitive Neuroscience of Consciousness: Basic Evidence and a Workspace Framework' in S. Dehaene's *Toward a Cognitive Neuroscience of Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 1-38.
- Course website: Ned Block's (2007) 'Consciousness, Accessibility, and the Mesh Between Psychology and Neuroscience', *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 30(5-6): pp. 481-499.
- Course website: Guido Tononi's (2013) 'Integrated Information Theory of Consciousness: An Updated Account', *Archives Italiennes de Biologie*, 150: 290-326.
- Course website: Jessie Prinz's (2007) 'The Intermediate Level Theory of Consciousness' in M. Velmans and S. Schneider (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 247-260.
- [Micro-exam 9](#)

Week 10: Brain Damage and Consciousness Part 1

- Textbook: Martha Farah's 'Visual Perception and Visual Awareness after Brain Damage: A Tutorial Overview' pp. 203-236.
- Textbook: Edoardo Bisiach's 'Understanding Consciousness: Clues from Unilateral Neglect and Related Disorders' pp. 237-254.
- Course website: Paul Bach-y-Rita's (2002) 'Sensory Substitution and Qualia', in A. Noë's and Evan Thompson's *Vision and Mind: Selected Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 497-514.
- [Micro-exam 10](#)

Week 11: Brain Damage and Consciousness Part 2

- Course website: Thomas Nagel's (1971) 'Brain Bisection and the Unity of Consciousness', *Synthese*, 22(May): 396-413.
- Course website: Tim Bayne's (2008) 'The Unity of Consciousness and the Split-Brain Syndrome' *The Journal of Philosophy*, 105(6): 277-300.
- Course website: Lawrence Weiskrantz's (2002) 'Prime-Sight and Blindsight', *Consciousness and Cognition*, 11(4): 568-581.
- [Second essay is due.](#)
- [Micro-exam 11](#)

Week 12: Consciousness and Content Part 1: Representationalism and Phenomenal Intentionality

- Terence Horgan's and John Tiesnson's 'The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality' in D. Chalmers *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 520-533.
- Textbook: Michael Tye's 'A Representational Theory of Pains and their Phenomenal Character', pp. 329-340.
- Textbook: Ned Block's 'Inverted Earth', pp. 677-694.
- [Micro-exam 12](#)

Week 13: Consciousness and Content Part 2: High- and Low-Level Phenomenal Content

- Course website: Susan Siegel's (2005) 'Which Properties are Represented in Perception' in T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.) *Perceptual Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 481-503.
- Course website: Jesse Prinz' (2013) 'Siegel's Get Rich Quick Scheme', *Philosophical Studies*, 163(3): 827-835.
- Course website: Tim Bayne's (2009) 'Perception and the Reach of Phenomenal Content' *Philosophical Quarterly*, 59(236): 385-404.
- [Micro-exam 13](#)

Week 14: Consciousness and Content Part 3: Miscellaneous

- Textbook: Christopher Peacocke's 'Sensation and the Content of Experience: A Distinction' pp. 341-354.
- Textbook: Martin Davies' 'Externalism and Experience' pp. 309-328.
- Course website: Daniel Dennett's (1996) 'Seeing is Believing—Or is it?' in Kathleen Akins (ed.) *Perception*, Vancouver Studies in Cognitive Science vol. 5 Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 158-172.
- [Micro-exam 14](#)

Week 15: Extended, Enactive, and Embodied Approaches to Perceptual Consciousness

- Course website: J. J. Gibson's 'A Theory of Direct Visual Perception' in A. Noë and E. Thompson (eds.) *Vision and Mind: Select Readings in the Philosophy of Perception*, Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 77-90.
- Course website: J. Kevin O'Regan's and Alva Noë's (2001) 'A sensorimotor account of vision and visual consciousness', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 24: 939-973
- Course website: Ned Block's (2005) 'Review of Alva Noë, *Action and Perception*' *Journal of Philosophy*, 102: 259-272.
- [Third Essay is due.](#)
- [Micro-exam 15](#)

Week 16: Fall/Spring Break [MOVE TO APPROPRIATE LOCATION]

- No assigned material