

CONSCIOUSNESS, PERCEPTION, AND INTENTIONALITY

INSTRUCTOR: CHRISTIAN COSERU
PHIL 450 – SENIOR SEMINAR



“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”
— Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

PHIL 450 – CONSCIOUSNESS, PERCEPTION, AND INTENTIONALITY

SPRING 2013

MYBK 206

MW 2:20-4:35

Professor Christian Coseru

Office: 4B Glebe Street, Room 205

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1-3 p.m., and by appointment

Office Phone: 943-1935

Email: coseruc@cofc.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Listen to the sound of a Mozart concerto, taste the flavor of a strong espresso, or feel the cool breeze of a spring morning. What is it like to have these experiences? Are these experiences perceptual in character or is there more to them than “meets the eye.” How is perceptual consciousness different from, say, emotion, memory, or imagination? As we examine our experience we immediately realize that that *there is something it is like* to be conscious. Three questions emerge in this process of reflective examination: First, *what might explain why* is there something it is like to be conscious? Second, *how* are we to understand consciousness vis-à-vis more familiar perceptual experiences? Third, *can* some modes of conscious awareness be understood exclusively in terms of their content but not also in terms of their character? This seminar will serve as a forum for exploring these and other “big questions” in the interdisciplinary field of consciousness studies. We will primarily draw from work in phenomenology and philosophy of mind, cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience, and Buddhist philosophy.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the College Bookstore)

Dan Arnold, <i>Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind</i> . New York: Columbia University Press, 2012	BBB
Susan Blackmore, <i>Consciousness: An Introduction</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011	CI
Christian Coseru, <i>Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 2012	PR
William Fish, <i>Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction</i> . London: Routledge, 2010	PP
Max Velmans, & Susan Schneider, <i>The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness</i> . Oxford: Blackwell, 2007	BCC

TENTATIVE READING ASSIGNMENTS

Jan 9	Introduction: Why is Consciousness So Puzzling? I. Consciousness
Jan 14-16	<i>History and Methodology in the study of Consciousness</i> : Frith & Rees (BCC: 9-22); Tye (BCC: 23-34)
Jan 21	MLK Day – no class
Jan 23	<i>Origins of Consciousness</i> : Polger (BCC: 72-86); Blackmore (CI: 206-220); Trevarthen & Reddy, <i>Consciousness in Infants</i> (BCC: 41-57) <i>Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness</i> : Pace-Schott & Allan Hobson (BCC: 141-153); Blackmore (CI: 356-409)
Jan 28-30	<i>Some Theories of Consciousness</i> : Chalmers: Naturalistic Dualism (BCC: 359-367); Carruthers: Higher Order (BCC: 277-286); Seager & Bourget: Representationalism (BCC: 261-273); Velmans: Reflexive Monism (BCC: 346-358)

Jan 30	first short essay due in class
Feb 4-6	<i>Unity and Disunity of Consciousness</i> : Weiskrantz on Blindsight (BCC: 175-180); Covin & Gazzaniga on Split-Brain (BCC: 181-193); Dainton on Unity (BCC: 209-221); Blackmore (CI: 171-180)
	II. Perception
Feb 11-13	Sensation and Perception: Fish (PP: 11-30); Coseru (PR: 57-85)
Feb 18-20	Perception, Conception, and Belief: Fish (51-63); Coseru (PR: 90-97; 102-109)
Feb 25-27	Theories of Perception: Intentional and Disjunctive: Fish (65-82); Fish (PR: 87-109)
Feb 27	second short essay due in class
	III. Intentionality
Mar 10-13	Consciousness, Intentionality, and Self-Consciousness: Graham, Horgan, & Tienson (BCC: 468-482); Bermúdez (BCC: 456-467)
Mar 18-20	Perception, Intentionality, and Self-Awareness: Coseru (PR: 235-273); Arnold (BBB: 158-198)
Mar 25-27	Attention and Inattention: Noë (BCC: 504-510); Lavie (BCC: 489-502)
	IV. Between the Embodied Mind and the Enminded Body
Apr 1-3	Emergentism and Causal Explanation: Coseru (PR: 280-297); The View from Within: Blackmore (CI: 420-472)
April 3	Final paper due in class
Apr 7-9	Student presentations
Apr 14-16	Student presentations
Apr 21-23	Student presentations

You must bring the assigned text(s) to class. You are expected to read on average 50-60 pages a week.

ASSIGNMENTS AND PERCENTAGES: two short essays (15% each), class presentation (15%), final paper (35%), participation (20%).

Short Essays (15% each). I will provide a list of topics for the first two assignments. The essays should be around 2,000 words long.

Class Presentation (15%). The format of the class presentations will be discussed as time approaches. It will include both original and critical components (you will be presenting your own research as well as critically evaluating the research of your colleagues). Your presentation will be evaluated on the basis of a number of different criteria, including preparation, delivery, interest, and depth of research.

Final Essay (35%). Your final essay will be on a topic of your choosing, though that topic should dovetail reasonably closely with that of your class presentation. Think of it as a summary of your research project for an educated audience. We will be talking about these essays on an individual basis. They should be between 3,000 and 4,000 words and comprise a significant amount of independent research.

REQUIREMENTS

1. It is essential that you attend classes! More than three unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade and may result in your dismissal from the class.
2. Please bring the assigned readings to class so you can follow the discussion. You are encouraged to annotate and add marginal comments to all of the material discussed in class.
3. Keep in mind that the reading assignments are tentative. Expect changes throughout the semester. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out how far we have gotten in the current reading assignment or whether any changes have been made to the list of readings assignments.
4. Due dates for all assignments are clearly marked in the syllabus (make sure you add them to your calendar). Dates for the individual student presentations will be negotiated later. *You must complete all assignments in order to pass this class.*
5. Late assignments will only be accepted if you can show that a real emergency prevented you from turning it in on the due date.

EXPECTATIONS

1. How well you do in this seminar will depend in large measure on how well you prepare yourself for each class. Read the entire assignment at least once, and mark any passage, concept, or idea that you have trouble understanding and bring it up in class. Coming to class unprepared, apart from annoying your colleagues, will also adversely affect your participation grade.
2. This is a philosophy seminar on a topic of wide academic and popular interest and you are expected to get involved in the material. It is not enough to identify a particular philosophical claim or report a scientific finding. Rather, you must be prepared to explain it, argue for or against it, point out its strengths and weaknesses, the evidence on which it is based (if any), and its overall merit (or lack thereof) in advancing the discussion in that specific domain. As a rule, make sure you come to class with at least two or three thoughtful questions from your readings.
3. You will continuously learn new and unfamiliar concepts and theories. It is your responsibility to construct a glossary of all the technical terms with appropriate definitions and cross-references.