

DEBATES ABOUT CONSCIOUSNESS

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 – SENIOR SEMINAR: DEBATES ABOUT CONSCIOUSNESS

SPRING 2016
MYBK 206
TR 5:30-6:45

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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 it is like to have these experiences? What are the many varieties of conscious experience? How does perceptual awareness differ from emotion, memory, or imagination? Are conscious mental states first-personally given or is consciousness a relational property of mental states? How do conscious mental states relate or correlate with brain activity, and what are some of the theories and problems associated with attempts to explain consciousness in physical and biological terms? This seminar will focus on the “big questions” in the interdisciplinary field of consciousness studies. We will primarily draw on work in philosophy of mind, phenomenology, cognitive neuroscience, and Buddhist philosophy.

TENTATIVE READING ASSIGNMENTS

Jan 7	Why is Consciousness So Puzzling? I. History, Science, and Problems
Jan 12-14	Frith & Rees , “A brief history of the scientific approach to the study of consciousness”; Tye , “Philosophical Problems of Consciousness”;
Jan 19-21	Polger , “Rethinking the evolution of consciousness”; Trevarthen & Reddy , “Consciousness in Infants”;
Jan 26-28	Hobson , “Normal and abnormal states of consciousness”; Pace-Schott & Hobson , “Altered States of Consciousness: Drug Induced States”;
Feb 2-4	Gallagher & Zahavi , “Methodologies: Fantasies in the Science of Consciousness”; Stephens & Graham , “Philosophical Psychopathology and Self-consciousness”;
	II. Theories & Debates
Feb 9-11	Chalmers , “The Hard Problem of Consciousness” & “Naturalistic Dualism”; Carruthers : “Higher-order theories of consciousness”; Tononi , “The information integration theory of consciousness”; Velmans , “Dualism, reductionism, and reflexive monism”;
Feb 16-18	Ganeri , “Emergentism: Ancient and Modern”; Howell , “Emergentism and Supervenience Physicalism,”
Feb 23	First paper due in class
Feb 23-25	Montero , Post-Physicalism; Stoljar , “Physicalism” (SEP)
Mar 1	Coseru , “Consciousness and Causal Emergence”; Zahavi & Kriegel , “For-me-ness: What it is and what it
Mar 3	No class: Central APA
	III. Consciousness: Between Perception, Attention, Thought, and Affect
Mar 15-17	Lavie , “Attention and consciousness”; Hurley , “Consciousness in Action”;
Mar 22-24	Noë , “Inattentional blindness, change blindness, and consciousness”; Siewert , “Phenomenal Thought”;
Mar 29-31	Thompson , “Empathy and Consciousness”; Bayne , “The reach of phenomenal consciousness”;
April 5	Final paper due in class
Apr 5-7	Student presentations
Apr 12-14	Student presentations
Apr 19-21	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: short essay (20%), class presentation (15%), peer commentary (10%), research paper (35%), participation (20%).

Short Essay (20%). I will provide a list of topics for the first assignment. The essay should be around 2,000 words long (6-7 pages).

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

Peer Commentary (10%). You will have to prepare a short (1-2 pages) peer commentary on another research paper. You will be assigned a paper to comment on before the class presentation for the respective paper.

Research Paper (35%). Your final essay will be on a topic of your choosing, but it should draw from material we have covered in class, supplemented, when appropriate, with additional sources. We will be talking about these essays on an individual basis. They should be between 3,500 and 4,000 words and comprise a significant amount of independent research.

Participation (20%). You are expected to actively participate in the seminar discussion by raising questions, critically engaging the material, and debating with your colleagues.

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.

General Education Student Learning Outcomes. This course counts toward the General Education Humanities requirement. All humanities course must address the following (general) learning outcomes:

1. Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture,
and
2. Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

These outcomes will be assessed in the research paper assignment.