Consciousness and Experience
PSYC 8000-01

University of West Georgia

Fall 2014
TR 3:30 – 5:20 pm
Melson 104

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Office Hours:
W 12:00 – 5:00 pm
& by appointment

Bring your syllabus to class!

Course Description

The paradoxical nature of consciousness has intrigued and befuddled philosophers for millennia. The recent ascent of neuroscience as the dominant psychological paradigm has resurrected important questions about the nature of consciousness and provided new tools for investigation. At the same time, this approach’s privileging of third-person perspectives arguably limits the scope of its understanding, even as it grapples with the “hard problem” of reconciling third-person with first-person accounts. Other approaches have honored and privileged first-person and second-person perspectives, thereby revealing the nature of consciousness in radically different ways. This course examines both of these basic approaches by considering consciousness from the perspective of three distinct historically- and culturally-situated approaches. Because of the overwhelming complexity of this topic, our treatment will be thematic more than comprehensive.

First we adopt the analytic approach with the critical examination of mainstream cognitive science and analytic philosophy of mind. We will scrutinize this tradition’s various philosophical positions, theoretical models, and empirical results, with ultimate interest in evaluating this perspective’s potential to non-reductively reconcile first- and third-person perspectives. Second we adopt the first-person perspective of philosophical phenomenological as initiated by Edmund Husserl and developed further by a number of continental philosophers. This examination will focus on the phenomenon of self-awareness and will explore issues such pre-reflective awareness, language, time, selfhood, embodiment, and intersubjectivity. Third is the contemplative approach, which emphasizes first-person investigation of the nature and functions of consciousness as illuminated for the mind trained to focus in a disciplined way on its own internal states. For this unit we will draw primarily from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Through our collective efforts in exploring these investigations and by putting them in dialogue with one another, we hope to come to both broad and deep understanding of the nature of consciousness.
Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate understanding of critical questions concerning the nature of consciousness and contemporary approaches to resolving these questions.
- Demonstrate understanding of the “hard problem” of consciousness and how it can be addressed/understood from analytic, phenomenological, and contemplative approaches.
- Demonstrate understanding of the principle assumptions, methods, and conclusions of the analytic, phenomenological, and contemplative approaches to studying consciousness.
- Demonstrate the ability to put these different approaches to consciousness into constructive dialogue with one another.
- Demonstrate ability to write a professional-level book review.

Required Texts


Recommended Text


A variety of additional required readings will be posted on Course Den. See Course Outline below for details.

Class Format

Classes will be conducted primarily in seminar format with occasional brief lectures and video presentations. As such, it is critical that students come to class prepared to discuss the assigned materials in-depth. Treatment of the week’s assigned readings will begin with a student presentation. Details for the presentation and for classroom preparation are given below. In addition, in accordance with the material covered and student interest, we will engage a number of meditative and contemplative practices in class in order to gain a more experiential understanding of the subject matter. Finally, we may during class periods experiment with contemplative discussion methods designed to bring greater awareness and clarity to individual and group process.

Course Requirements and Grading System

Class Participation 20%
Book Review (20%)

Integrative Reflection Paper 20%
Final Paper 40%
Class Participation (100%):

(1) Citizenship:
- Please be on time to our class sessions and stay through to the end. Please turn off all cell phones prior to the class period.
- Regular attendance is essential to the success of the course. An excess of two absences (comprising an entire week of classes) for whatever reason constitutes grounds for lowering your final course grade.

(2) Weekly preparation:
- One student will be responsible for a creative presentation of each class’s readings via power point. You will be given up to 15 minutes. Do not simply summarize the readings. Rather, creatively develop what you see to be the most important themes and/or arguments, concluding with opening questions for discussion. Strive to be mindful of your pacing and delivery, and of your audience, so that all can be on board with you.
- In the meantime, all other students will come to class prepared in the following way designed to promote critical reading and fruitful discussion.
  1) For each text for a given class, identify what you regard to be the central sentence or passage and be prepared to justify your choice.
  2) Develop one or two questions for stimulating discussion that pertains specifically to the overall readings for that class. (Your question should not veer into speculation that is removed from the texts; see the materials on “thinking questions” for clearer understanding of what I mean.) I may call upon you in class to read your question and facilitate discussion of it.
- Although this preparatory material usually need not be turned in, you should have it prepared on paper so that you can easily share in class. Your questions should be thoughtfully crafted toward that end. On a given week, I may choose to collect the materials you have prepared; however, I will give you advance notice if I do.
- Importantly, please bring the week’s readings to class with you in the service of our collective analysis of the texts.

(3) Background preparation:
At a minimum, this course requires background knowledge of psychology as would be found in a comprehensive introductory course. It will be helpful to review material on the nervous system (including structure and function of the neuron and the brain), consciousness, memory, and other topics related to our study. This is particularly important for our readings of the Velmans text. Please see me if you have questions.

Book Review (20%):
You are to write a review of Max Velman’s *Understanding Consciousness* (2nd edition). You should strive to write a review that would be suitable for publication in a professional journal. I will provide a set of guidelines for this project later in the semester. Your review should be 4-6 typed, double-spaced pages, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, one-inch margins all around. A paper copy is due at the beginning of class on October 7.

**Integrative Reflection Paper (20%):**
You will write an integrative paper exploring contemporary and phenomenological approaches to consciousness. Details for this assignment will be forthcoming. It will be due at the beginning of class on November 6.

**Final Paper (40%):**
You will submit a final paper that reflects your learning for the entire semester. I will provide more details on this assignment at a later date. Your paper should be 8-12 typed, double-spaced pages, Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins all around. You also will give a 10-minute Power Point presentation of your paper. You will submit your paper and give your presentation during the scheduled exam period, December 11, 2:00 – 4:30 pm.

**Administrative Details**

**Office Hours:**
Office hours are listed on the first page. You are advised to make an appointment as my office hours are often claimed in advance.

**Technological Resources:**
Audio-visual equipment (e.g., computer and overhead projector) will be used for Power Point and other video presentations. Course Den will be used as an electronic learning environment. The syllabus, papers, and other communications will be conducted via this means. Any electronic communication regarding grades can and must be had through Course Den.

**Student Rights and Responsibilities:**
Please carefully review the information provided by the following link: [http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf](http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf).
This file contains important information pertaining to your rights and responsibilities in this class. These statements are updated as federal, state, university and accreditation standards change, so you should review this information anew each semester.

**Academic Honor Code:**
It is essential that you abide by the honor code described in the above document. Academic dishonesty (such as plagiarism) naturally will not be tolerated. Plagiarism is the misrepresentation of another’s words or ideas as your own, whatever the source (e.g., print, electronic, verbal, et al.). All deliberate references to another person’s ideas or
words must be appropriately cited. At a minimum, an instance of plagiarism or other form of academic dishonesty will result in failing the course and will be reported to the administration for further disciplinary action.

Special Needs:
Students with special needs should speak with me as soon as possible in order to make necessary arrangements.

Course Outline

- The following list of readings is subject to revision as the semester progresses; I will try to give ample notice and will post updated versions of the course outline on Course Den.
- When there are multiple readings listed for a given class, it is recommended (though not required) that you read them in the order listed.
- Readings posted on Course Den are italicized while readings from required texts are not.

INTRODUCTION TO CONSCIOUSNESS

WEEK #1
August 26—Introduction to Course
- Syllabus

August 28—Introduction to Course, continued
- In-class discussion—“What is Consciousness?”

WEEK #2
September 2—Seminal Thoughts & Thinkers
- Strange, “A Search for the Sources of the Stream of Consciousness”
- Descartes, Selected Readings

September 4—Seminal Thoughts & Thinkers, continued
- William James, “The Stream of Consciousness”
- Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
- Chalmers, “The Hard Problem of Consciousness”
- Chapter 1, Velmans

UNIT I – ANALYTIC VIEW

WEEK #3
September 9—Dualism & Reductionism
- Velmans, chapter 2
- Crick & Kock, “A Neurobiological Framework for Consciousness”
• Sperry (1969), “A Modified Concept of Consciousness”

September 11—Functionalism & Reductionism, continued
• Velmans, chapters 3, 4
• Chomsky, “The Case Against B. F. Skinner”

WEEK #4
September 16—Computational Functionalism
• Searle, “Can Computers Think?”
• Velmans, chapter 5

September 18—Expanded Notions of Consciousness
• James, “Does Consciousness Exist?”
• Velmans, ch. 6

WEEK #5
September 23—The Marriage of Science and Experience
• Velmans, chapters 7-9

September 25—Guest Speaker

Guest Speaker: Phakchok Rinpoche, Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery, Boudha, Nepal

WEEK #6
September 30—Reflexive Monism
• Velmans, ch. 12-14

October 2—Panpsychism, and Morphic Resonance
• Skrbina, “Panpsychism and the Ontology of Mind”
• Sheldrake, “Mind, Memory, and Archetype: Morphic Resonance and the Collective Unconscious”

WEEK #7
October 7—Stop and Reflect

DUE: Book review assignment (beginning of class)
• In-class discussion of book review assignment & reflection on course so far

UNIT II – PHENOMENOLOGICAL VIEW

October 9—Introduction to Analytic Meditation & Phenomenology
• Moss & Keen, “The Nature of Consciousness: The Existential-Phenomenological Approach”
• McDonald, Introduction, How to Meditate
WEEK #8
October 14—Self-Awareness and Phenomenal Consciousness
  • Zahavi, Chapter 1

October 16—Consciousness in Early Phenomenology
  • Zahavi, Chapter 2

WEEK #9
October 21—The Structure of Time Consciousness
  • Zahavi, Chapter 3

October 23—Guest Lecture
  • Guest lecturer: Dr. Stanley Krippner, Saybrook University, San Francisco, California
  • Readings TBA

WEEK #10
October 28—Reflection and Attention
  • Zahavi, Chapter 4

October 30—Consciousness and Self
  • Zahavi, Chapter 5

WEEK #11
November 4—Self and Other (Intersubjectivity)
  • Zahavi, Chapter 6

UNIT III – CONTEMPLATIVE VIEW

WEEK #11 (continued)
November 6—East-West Views on the Science of Consciousness

DUE: Integrative-reflection paper
  • MOVIE—H. H. the Dalai Lama in Conversation with Neuroscientists
  • No Required Readings
  • Optional Readings
    o H.H. Dalai Lama, “The Question of Consciousness”
    o H.H. Dalai Lama, “Toward a Science of Consciousness”

WEEK #12
November 11—Introduction to Contemplative Science
  • Walsh & Shapiro, “The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology”
• Begley, “Transforming the Emotional Mind”

November 13—Principles of Contemplative Science
  • Wallace, ch. 1

WEEK #13
November 18—Science, Religion, and Consciousness
  • Wallace, chs. 2, 3
  • Ricard & Thuan, “The Virtual Frontier”

November 20—Epistemology, Buddhism, and Consciousness
  • Wallace, chs. 4, 5

November 25, 27
{Thanksgiving Break—No Classes}

WEEK #14
December 2—Intersubjectivity & Contemplative Science
  • Wallace, chs. 6-8

December 4—Transpersonal Views of the Unconscious and Human Development
  • Welwood, “Meditation and the Unconscious”
  • Wade, “A Holonomic Approach to Developmental Theory”

FINAL EXAM PERIOD

December 11—Final Reflections on Course
2:00 pm – 4:30 pm

DUE: Final paper with presentation
  • Discussion of student’s papers and the semester’s learning