Introduction to Consciousness Studies
Fall 2005
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In this course, we will consider the nature of consciousness. We will enhance our own appreciation of first-person experience of consciousness, and consider both philosophical and scientific theories of its nature. In the course of things, we will learn a good deal of startling facts about the brain. We begin by canvassing the main philosophical problems of consciousness. Then, we will cover some major philosophical and scientific theories of consciousness, most of which try to solve what is called the “hard problem of consciousness.” We will then read an important new textbook on the neuroscience of consciousness, and we will have virtual lectures from the author of the book.

Bearing in mind that the class is both a philosophy and psychology course, we will often pause to take “breaks” from dense philosophical or scientific literature, into special topics that involve in class debates, trips, etc. In these special topics, we will learn meditation, dissect a brain, learn about split brain cases as a window into the two hemispheres, and consider animal consciousness.

Be prepared to read some difficult material that involves terminology that is entirely new. E.g., philosophers – you will read neuroscience; psychologists – you will read some jargon heavy philosophy. Don’t be worried about this; we will decipher the material in class. I believe that you will find the Blackmore text to be a useful introductory guide to many of the topics covered.
Goals: by the end of the term, you will be fluent in the main theories about the nature of consciousness. You will know what the important problems of consciousness are, and you will have some scientific knowledge of the workings of consciousness in the brain. You will have developed a focus in one or more research areas in Consciousness Studies.

Grading:

(1) There will be a final exam worth 1/4 of the grade (take home essay).
(2) Participation: in each class, there will be student presentations on the topic listed in the syllabus. All of your in class presentations, together with your class participation, is 1/4 of your grade.
(3) There will be a mid-term paper that is on a topic of the student’s choice, although it must involve the course material directly (1/4). This paper will be presented to the class when in draft form, with any suggestions/comments being considered for the ultimate draft (6 double spaced pages).
(4) Journal: for each assigned reading, students are asked to record a detailed outline in the journal, together with critical/creative remarks. (1/4) This is due at the end of the term, will journals being “checked” throughout the term, to make sure the outlines are on the right track. The outlines are all pass/not pass/plus. This will help students deal with the tough reading, and give them a set of notes to use for the exam and presentations.

Texts

Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: an Introduction.* (Bookstore)
Selected chs. from Max Velmans and Susan Schneider, *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness.* (xeroxes)
Cristof Koch, *The Quest for Consciousness: A Neurobiological Approach.* (Bookstore)
Please visit the P-drive site for our course. Many of the course materials are on this internal drive.

First class: Introductions and sign up for presentations. Please read sections one and two of Blackmore for the first few classes. Instructions on locating course materials on P-drive.

1. **Introduction: Philosophical Problems and Concepts of Consciousness**
Section one and two of Blackmore.

*Some Philosophical Problems of Consciousness.*
Read:
Nagel’s “What its Like to be a Bat” (Xerox)
Read “On a Confusion About a Function of Consciousness” at Ned Block’s website (google his name and the paper title).

2. **The Cartesian Theater and the Timing of Conscious Experience**
Section two in Blackmore (chs. 4-6).
Bernie Baars, *in Velmans/Schneider (Xerox)*
Milner and Goodale, *The Visual Brain in Action, Psyche* website (please google)

3. **Some Major Theories of Consciousness, many of which aim to answer the “hard problem” (and some which do not aim to do so).** This list is by no means exhaustive. Also, please see pieces by Baars above and Crick and Koch below.

Neural Theories: see below.

Mysterianism/cognitive closure: Colin McGinn (xerox)

Biological Naturalism: John Searle (in Velmans and Schneider, xerox)

Deflationism: Dennett and Churchlands (Xerox)

Global Workspace (Baars, above)

HOT Theories (piece by Carruthers, in Velmans and Schneider, xerox)

Reflexive Monism: Max Velmans (xerox)

Dualistic Naturalism: David Chalmers (already assigned above)

4. **Topics in Koch’s new book on the neuroscience of consciousness.**

   Introduction. (Ch 1, Koch, sections 1.2-1.5)
   What are the Neural Correlates of Consciousness? (Koch, Ch. 5)
   Consciousness and Attention. (Koch, ch. 9)
   Consciousness and Memory. (Koch, ch. 11)
   Zombies in real life. (Koch, ch. 12)
   Split brains. (Koch, ch. 17). (Also recommended, ch. on split brains in Gazzaniga, Ivry and Mangun, *Cognitive Neuroscience*).
   Further thoughts (intermediate theory of consciousness, etc.). (Koch, ch. 18)

   Virtual lectures by Cristof Koch

5. **Special Topics**

   At various points in the term, we will take “interludes” into other research areas:

   Interlude: Altered States of Consciousness, including synesthesia and dreaming.

   Interlude: Meditation and Altered States: trip to the NJ Buddhist center. (Feb. 21) Please read David Fontana piece in Velmans and Schneider (Xerox)
Interlude: Animal Consciousness Allen and Bekoff (in Velmans and Schneider). Also, listen to radio interview on animal consciousness (Churchland) at http://tinyurl.com/2fscn.