

PHIL 4410 - Philosophy of Mind - Fall 2016 - syllabus

Charlie Huenemann, Professor

T/Th 1:30-2:45, Main 006

Overview: the most astounding fact about the universe is that some bits of it are able understand and be conscious of other bits of it. Consciousness is at once the *most obvious* thing in the world - there's no thinking without it! - and also the *least obvious*: we don't have any objective evidence that *anything* is conscious. Ask yourself how you might try *proving* that an entity (human or machine) is conscious, and not just acting *as if* it were conscious!

In this class we will be exploring philosophical theories about what consciousness is, whether machines can be conscious, whether humans have free will, and so on.

There is no text you need to buy for this class. Readings will be made available here on Canvas. You will have to write four short papers (three pages), and you will have to read two books and write short reports (five pages) on each of them. You may want to buy these books for yourself, though copies of some of the books are available at USU Library, Course Reserves.

Grades: Four short papers (three pages) will be assigned over the course of the term. These are each worth 25 points; they may be rewritten. Two book reports (six pages) will also be due - they are each worth 50 points. They also may be rewritten. No quizzes or exams. Grades will probably be assigned along a standard measure: 200-186=A; 185-180=A-; 179-174=B+; 173-166=B; 165-160=B-; 159-154=C+; 153-146=C; 145-140=C-; 139-134=D+; 133-126=D.

Contact information for the instructor: Charlie Huenemann, Main 208, phone 797-0254; office hours 10-12 on Wednesdays, but I'm also generally available on T/W/Th, and by appointment, email charlie.huenemann@usu.edu. I'm always happy to meet with you - really, I'm a friendly and encouraging fellow who enjoys talking with students - so please feel welcome to knock on my door. I have a blog if you are interested: huenemanni.wordpress.com (Links to an external site.). Also, on the subject of blogs, you may wish to check out usuphilosophy.com (Links to an external site.) to stay abreast of local philosophical happenings.

Cheating. In class - as in life - never try to pass off someone else's work as your own. I'm completely intolerant of this kind of intellectual theft; it's a cardinal sin of the academy.

Lateness in turning in work: generally there should be none, but life packs surprises, and sometimes work has to be delayed. Be mature about this, and talk to me about it. If you need an alternative exam time, or need some alternative exam arrangement due to disability, please let me know, and we'll work something out.

You have to write two book reports. The first is due on October 25th, and the second on the date of the final exam (there won't be a final exam). The books you read should be selected from the following list. (I've included links to the amazon.com pages, in case you decide to purchase a copy. I am listing them from easiest to most difficult.

I would recommend first reading an easier one - Baggini, Damasio, or Sacks - and then pushing yourself by reading a harder one - Searle or Dennett. If I were doing the assignment, I'd pick Baggini and Dennett.

Julian Baggini, [The Ego Trick \(Links to an external site.\)](#) - "Are you still the person who lived fifteen, ten or five years ago? Fifteen, ten or five minutes ago? Can you plan for your retirement if the you of thirty years hence is in some sense a different person? What and who is the real you? Does it remain constant over time and place, or is it something much more fragmented and fluid? Is it known to you, or are you as much a mystery to yourself as others are to you?"

Antonio Damasio, [Descartes' Error \(Links to an external site.\)](#) - "Since Descartes famously proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am," science has often overlooked emotions as the source of a person's true being. Even modern neuroscience has tended, until recently, to concentrate on the cognitive aspects of brain function, disregarding emotions. In this wondrously engaging book, Damasio takes the reader on a journey of scientific discovery through a series of case studies, demonstrating what many of us have long suspected: emotions are not a luxury - they are essential to rational thinking and to normal social behavior."

Oliver Sacks, [The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat \(Links to an external site.\)](#) - "tells the stories of individuals afflicted with fantastic perceptual and intellectual aberrations: patients who have lost their memories and with them the greater part of their pasts; who are no longer able to recognize people and common objects; who are stricken with violent tics and grimaces or who shout involuntary obscenities; whose limbs have become alien; who have been dismissed as retarded yet are gifted with uncanny artistic or mathematical talents."

John Searle, [Minds, Brains, and Science \(Links to an external site.\)](#) - "Searle explains how we can reconcile an intuitive view of ourselves as conscious, free, rational agents with a universe that

science tells us consists of mindless physical particles. He briskly and lucidly sets out his arguments against the familiar positions in the philosophy of mind, and details the consequences of his ideas for the mind-body problem, artificial intelligence, cognitive science, questions of action and free will, and the philosophy of the social sciences."

Daniel Dennett, [Consciousness Explained \(Links to an external site.\)](#) - "Advances a new theory of consciousness based on insights gleaned from the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and artificial intelligence, and clears away obsolete myths about the process of thinking in conscious beings."

Whichever book you choose, your paper should follow pretty much the same format:

1. Brief introduction (less than a page) which gives the reader an idea of what is coming;
2. A judicious summary of the book (~3 pages). Here don't try to cover everything; select what you take to be two or three key claims or ideas, and explain them.
3. A reflection on the book (~2 pages) - what is true, false, interesting, or confusing. Note that this isn't just how the book makes you feel; I am asking you to engage critically and intellectually with the book.
4. A brief conclusion (less than a page) - what is the main thought the reader should be left with?

We'll talk more about these book reports, and essay writing generally, in class.