In this course, we will discuss four inter-related topics of current controversy within the philosophy of mind. They are: (a) **What is the significance of consciousness**: does consciousness matter for decision-making, ethics and belief formation? Is it important at all? (b) **What is the place of consciousness in nature**: is consciousness physical or non-physical? What would it mean to hold that it is “physical”? Might everything be conscious? (c) **What is the structure of consciousness**: are all conscious phenomena intentional or representational phenomena? Is it essential to conscious phenomena that subjects are aware of enjoying them? What are center and periphery within subjective perspectives? (d) **Is cognition dependent upon consciousness**: can cognition be explained as a biological function? Is intentionality dependent on consciousness?

**Assessment**

Students will be assessed on the basis of a “Portfolio Exam” which comprises the following graded requirements:

- **Two 1-2 page summaries of a reading**
  - To be completed in two of the first five weeks of class. The summaries of the text are to be submitted on the day that text is discussed (i.e. not the week after the text is discussed). The last possible submission date for the second summary thus is on the day of session 5 (22/09).
  - Summaries should provide a clear summary of the relevant text: what is the author’s main goal? How does (s)he aim to achieve that goal? What are her/his main argumentative steps? Etc. An ideal summary would be able to be used as an introduction to the relevant session and as the basis for critical discussion.

- **Two 2-3 page critical responses to a reading**
  - To be completed in two of sessions 6 to 10. The critical responses are to be submitted on the day that text is discussed (i.e. not the week after the text is discussed). The last possible submission date for the second critical response thus is on the day of session 10 (03/11).
  - Critical responses should not focus on providing a summary of the relevant text. Instead, they should focus on critical engagement: how might an opponent of the author’s position respond to her/his argumentation? How could the author’s argumentation be extended or improved? What are important considerations the author fails to take into account? An ideal critical response focuses on one important point in the essay that it discusses, and provides a detailed critical analysis or response to that point.

- **One 5-6 page essay**
  - The essay should be on a topic of one of the sessions (students may also focus on one of the supplementary readings). The topic must be different from the topics students wrote their summaries or critical responses for (students who wish to write on a particular topic thus should choose the topics for their summaries critical responses wisely).
Essays cannot just be summaries of texts. They must show critical engagement and self-standing philosophical argumentation. To be submitted 24/11 (the last day of class).

- The essay should have a shape that is similar to the critical responses. Yet it should be longer, more detailed, and more self-standing. It should be a self-standing piece of philosophical argumentation. An ideal essay would be one that could be presented in a short presentation at a professional conference on the relevant topic.

**Schedule**

**Session 1 (25/08): The Significance of Consciousness (I)**

We will start by discussing the significance of consciousness for life’s big practical decisions (e.g. whether to have a child, whether to emigrate, whether to become an artist or a stock broker). We will discuss an argument to the effect that because such big decisions involve *transformative experiences*, that fundamentally affect who we are going to be, these decisions cannot be made rationally.

**Main Reading**


**Supplementary Reading**


**Session 2 (01/09): The Significance of Consciousness (II)**

In this session we will discuss, firstly, whether (some) conscious experiences have non-instrumental value – either positive or negative. If so, consciousness will be of important prudential and ethical significance. Secondly, we will consider the epistemic significance of consciousness for our knowledge of the world around us.

**Main Readings**


**Supplementary Readings**


Session 3 (08/09): Consciousness and its Place in Nature (I): Recent Arguments Against Physicalism

In the next four sessions, we will turn to recent developments regarding the mind-body problem. If consciousness is indeed significant, we want to know: what is its place in the rest of nature? In this session, we will discuss recent versions of conceivability arguments against physicalism, and consider which options for consciousness’ place in nature are left open if these arguments are accepted.

Main Readings


Supplementary Reading


In this session we consider one important type of response to the conceivability arguments that attempts to prove these arguments wrong by means of a reductio ad absurdum. The upshot is that these arguments only suggest something about the nature of our concepts of consciousness, not about the nature of consciousness.

Main Reading


Supplementary Reading


Session 5 (22/09): Consciousness and its Place in Nature (III): Pan-Psychism

[last date to submit 2nd summary]

We will consider the prospects of pan-psychism, the view that every fundamental entity – including elementary particles like electrons – have conscious experiences. Many think that this view is outlandish. Might it nevertheless be both the best solution to the mind-body problem, and the best account of what underlies the laws of nature? [with guest presenter and discussant Hedda Hassel Mørch]
Main Reading

Supplementary Readings

Chalmers, D. (manuscript). The Combination Problem for Panpsychism

Session 6 (29/09): Consciousness and its Place in Nature (IV): What actually is the Mind-Body Problem?
The mind-body problem is often thought to concern the question whether the mental is physical or not (where physicalists say yes, and others say no). But what does it mean to be “physical”? We will consider whether any good sense can be made of this notion in the context of the mind-body problem. In particular, we consider the idea that to be a physicalist does not consist in a holding truth-evaluable belief, but in a stance or attitude concerning how to go about forming beliefs, and the idea that the mind-body problem is not about physicalism, but about whether the mental is fundamentally non-mental.

Main Readings

Supplementary Readings

Session 7 (06/10): The Significance of Consciousness (III)
We will discuss an argument to the effect that if consciousness is not fundamental then it is not significant either. According to this argument the ethical, practical and epistemic significance of consciousness depends on what the correct response to the mind-body problem (in Montero’s sense) is.
Main Reading

Supplementary Readings

Session 8 (13/10): The Structure of Consciousness (I): Intentionalism
In the next four sessions we turn from questions about the significance of consciousness, and questions about the place of consciousness in nature to questions about the internal structure of consciousness. In the present session, we will discuss arguments for the view that all conscious phenomena are intentional or representational phenomena (they are characterized by some form of “aboutness”).

Main Readings

Supplementary Readings

Session 9 (20/10): The Structure of Consciousness (II): Moods
In this session we will consider whether intentionalism can account for mood experiences such as depression, anxiety, elation or fearfulness. While it is intuitively attractive to think that perceptual forms of consciousness are “about” something (a red experience represents, or is about, a certain color), it is intuitively much less clear what mood experiences could be about. So, is intentionality really essential to all conscious phenomena?

Main Readings

Supplementary Reading
Session 10 (27/10): The Structure of Consciousness (III): Subjectivity

Conscious phenomena do not just seem to be characterized by intentionality. Maybe even more importantly, they seem to be characterized by subjectivity: there is something it is like for the subject to enjoy them. Today we will consider the idea that this subjectivity consists in the subject’s awareness of being in her conscious states. Conscious phenomena on this view are phenomena we are (in a specific sense) conscious of.

Main Reading


Supplementary Reading


Session 11 (03/11): The Structure of Consciousness (IV): Center and Periphery

Consciousness is often described as providing subject’s with a unique subjective perspective on the world. In this session, we will consider the structure of that perspective, in particular how it is structured by attention into what is more central and what is more peripheral (or foreground and background, more or less salience, etc.). How should we think about that structure of consciousness? Is the attention structure of consciousness also an intentional characteristic? Is it essential to consciousness?

Main Readings

Watzl, S. (under review). How Attention Structures Consciousness


Supplementary Readings


Session 12 (10/11): Naturalistic Explanations of Intentionality (I)

In the last three sessions we take a different look at the relationship between consciousness and intentionality by starting with intentionality instead of starting with consciousness (with a two session build-up). Can we explain intentionality without explaining consciousness? In this and the next session, we will consider the prospects of two prominent naturalistic accounts of intentionality. In this session we will start with Jerry Fodor’s view on which intentionality has to do with asymmetric causal dependency.

Main Reading

Supplementary Readings

Session 13 (17/11): Naturalistic Explanations of Intentionality (II): Teleological Theories

In this session we will consider a different type of naturalistic account of intentionality. On this class of views, intentionality has to do with having a certain (biological) use or function.

Main Reading

Supplementary Readings

Session 14 (24/11): Phenomenal Explanations of Intentionality

In this final session, we will consider the view that intentionality cannot be explained without consciousness. On this view, creatures without consciousness (“zombies”) would also not think or have any other intentional states. All mentality and meaning fundamentally depends on consciousness.
Main Readings


Supplementary Readings
