



PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS, A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY

Dr. Francisco Pereira
2nd Semester, 2017
Ph.D. in Philosophy
Universidad Alberto Hurtado
Room 219, Tuesdays 15.30-18.00

PROGRAM

DESCRIPTION

This seminar will address some of the most fundamental questions regarding the nature of conscious perceptual experience and its relation to other mental phenomena from a philosophical and empirical standpoint. Leaving aside traditional metaphysical questions regarding mental causation and the relation between mental and physical phenomena (dualism, physicalism, functionalism, etc.), topics which are frequently discussed both at the graduate and undergraduate level, we will focus the discussion on more specific problems that are being recently addressed by philosophers of mind and philosophers of cognitive science. We will start clarifying what are the relevant philosophical notions of “consciousness” at play in the contemporary debate (access consciousness, phenomenal consciousness, transitive/non-transitive, state consciousness, creature consciousness, etc.) and their connection to scientific research on the field (Global Workspace Theory, Neurobiological Theory, Recurrent Processing Theory, etc.). We will consider philosophical arguments and empirical data in order to assess what is the nature of the relation between perceptual consciousness and attention, mainly because some of the most influential theories of perceptual consciousness appeal to the thesis that attention is both necessary and sufficient for consciousness (Prinz 2012). We will discuss, from a representationalist point of view, what actually makes a particular state or mental event a *conscious*

mental phenomenon (first order theories of consciousness, higher order theories of consciousness, etc.) and we will finish considering the problem of animal and machine consciousness (Is it possible to attribute consciousness to nonhuman animals or even to machines?).

OBJETIVES

By the end of the course the students will be able to:

- Understand the philosophical and empirical uses of the notion of “consciousness” in the current debates in the philosophy of mind.
- Understand the nature of the intimate relationship that apparently exists between consciousness and other mental phenomena, such as attention.
- Understand the way in which contemporary representational theories explain one of the most fundamental philosophical questions: What makes a mental state or event a *conscious* phenomenon?
- Assess whether it is actually possible and reasonable to attribute consciousness to non-human animals or even machines.

CONTENTS

Part 1: “Consciousness”

a. Philosophical Theories

- I.1. What-it-is-likeness (Nagel 1974)
- I.2. Creature/State Consciousness (Rosenthal 1995)
- I.3. Access Consciousness/Phenomenal Consciousness (Block 2007)

b. Scientific Theories

- I.4. Global Workspace Theory (Dehaene)
- I.5. Recurrent Processing Theory (Lamme)
- I.6. AIR Theory (Prinz)

Part 2. Consciousness and Attention

- II.1. “Attention”
- II.2. Reductive and Non-Reductive Theories of Attention

II.3. Is attention empirically necessary for perceptual consciousness?

II.4. Is attention empirically sufficient for perceptual consciousness?

Part 3: Representational Theories of Consciousness

III.1. First-Order Theories of Consciousness

III.2. Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness

III.3. The Phenomenological Tradition and Pre-Reflexive Consciousness

Part 4: Animal and Machine Consciousness

IV.1. Animals and The Problem of Other Minds

IV.2. Arguments: Analogy, Evolutionary Parsimony, Inference to the Best Explanation

IV.3. Machine Consciousness? The Turing Test and The Chinese Room

METHODOLOGY

The teacher will use power-point and other media in order to explain the fundamental topics of the seminar to the students. A mandatory reading list will be assigned for each session. Students will have to orally explain the contents of key papers during the seminar and write at least one research essay.

MARKING

- Oral Presentations of key papers during the seminar (35%)
- Active participation during the seminar (15%)
- One research/argumentative essay on a topic linked with the seminar's contents. (50%)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Basic reading list

- Andrews, K. (2015), *The Animal Mind: An introduction to the philosophy of Animal Cognition*, Oxford, Routledge.
- Block, N. (2007), "Consciousness, Accessibility, and the Mesh Between Psychology and Neuroscience", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 30 (5–6): 481–99.
- Block, N. (1995), "On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 18 (2): 227-247.
- Carruthers, P. 2000. *Phenomenal Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dehaene, S. and Naccache, L. 2000. Towards a cognitive neuroscience of consciousness: basic evidence and a workspace framework. *Cognition* 79:1–37.
- Gennaro, R. (2017), *Consciousness*, Oxford, Routledge.
- Irvine, E. (2013), *Consciousness as a Scientific Concept: A Philosophy of Science Perspective*, Springer.
- Platchias, D. (2011). *Phenomenal Consciousness: Understanding the Relation Between Neural Processes and Experience* (Acumen)
- Prinz, J. (2012), *The Conscious Brain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Revonsuo, Antti (2010), *Consciousness, the science of subjectivity*. Psychological Press.
- Rosenthal, D. (1993), "State Consciousness and Transitive Consciousness", *Consciousness and Cognition* 2: 355-63.
- Tye, M. (1995). *Ten Problems of Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wu, W. (2014), *Attention*, Oxford, Routledge.
- Zahavi, D. (2012) *The Phenomenological Mind. 2nd Edition* (with Shaun Gallagher). Routledge 2012

Complementary Reading list

- Dretske, F. 1995. *Naturalizing the Mind*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, Bradford Books.
- Gennaro, R., ed. 2004. *Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Gennaro, R. 2012. *The Consciousness Paradox*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Dretske, F. 1995. *Naturalizing the Mind*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, Bradford Books.

Weisberg, J. (2014) *Consciousness*, Polity Press.

Zahavi, D. (2005) *Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the first-person perspective*. MIT Press